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No-confidence motion filed against defense minister

Sheikh Hamad denies allegations over Eurofighter deal, women's conscription



KUWAIT: Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah speaks with Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other ministers during a grilling session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Ten opposition lawmakers yesterday filed a no-confidence motion against Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah following a grilling in which he denied allegations of not acting on a series of violations and for taking a decision to admit women in the military. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said after the grilling debate that he received the no-confidence motion and that voting on the motion will take place on Jan 26.

To vote him out of office, the opposition needs the support of 24 MPs, which is the simple majority of elected lawmakers excluding ministers who cannot vote on no-confidence motions. If 24 MPs support the motion, the minister will be automatically dismissed.

The griller, opposition MP Hamdan Al-Azemi, accused the minister of ignoring legal and religious considerations when he took a decision a few months ago to allow Kuwaiti women to join military.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Oil hits 7-year highs

LONDON: Oil prices traded at the highest levels in more than seven years yesterday, in part on hopes of a global economic recovery ramping up demand. European crude benchmark Brent North Sea reached \$88.13 per barrel, while US contract WTI hit \$85.74 - the highest levels since Oct 2014. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries said yesterday global demand for oil is expected to remain "robust" in 2022 and overcome short-term disruption caused by the Omicron coronavirus variant. — AFP (See Page 8)

Erdogan warns Russia

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday warned Russia against invading Ukraine, calling the former Soviet republic a "powerful" country with international friends. Speaking to Turkish reporters in Albania, Erdogan said he intended to discuss the rising tensions with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In December, Putin criticized Ukraine for deploying Turkish attack drones, urging Ankara to put pressure on Kyiv not to use the military hardware. — AFP

UNRWA seeks \$1.6bn

JERUSALEM: The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, announced a \$1.6 billion funding appeal yesterday. "Chronic agency budget shortfalls threaten the livelihoods and well-being of the Palestine refugees that UNRWA serves and pose a serious threat to the agency's ability to maintain services," agency head Philippe Lazzarini said in a statement. — AFP

Hong Kong to cull hamsters

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will cull hundreds of hamsters after some tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said yesterday, as the city pushes to maintain its strict "zero-COVID" strategy. The decision to cull about 2,000 hamsters and other small animals comes after health officials recorded COVID cases at a Hong Kong pet shop. Health secretary Sophia Chan said the move will protect public health after a pet shop employee and a customer handling hamsters tested positive. — AFP

Coalition hits Yemen after UAE attack

SANAA: The Saudi-led coalition killed 14 people in air strikes on Yemen's rebel-held capital, a medical source said yesterday, after an attack by Houthi insurgents on the United Arab Emirates sent regional tensions soaring. Sanaa residents were combing the rubble for survivors of the strikes that levelled two houses, hours after the Houthis had killed three people Monday in a drone and missile attack on the UAE capital Abu Dhabi. Houthi Brigadier General Abdullah Qassem Al-Junaid, director of the

rebels' air force academy, was killed along with family members, the rebels' Saba news agency said. Coalition forces launched further strikes on Sanaa yesterday. "The search is still going on for survivors in the rubble," said Akram Al-Ahdal, a relative of several of the victims.

The UAE, part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-backed rebels, had vowed a tough response to Monday's attack, the first deadly assault acknowledged inside its borders and claimed by the Yemeni insurgents. The attack on the renowned Middle East safe haven of UAE, which opened a new front in the seven-year war, followed a surge in fighting in Yemen including battles between the rebels and UAE-trained troops.

Continued on Page 2



SANAA: Yemenis inspect the damage following overnight air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition targeting the Houthi rebel-held capital yesterday. — AFP

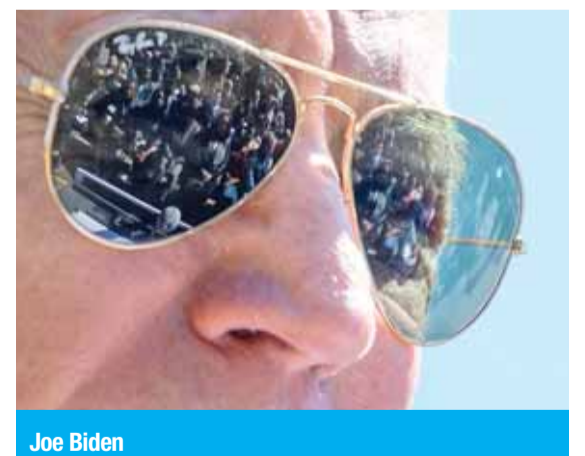
Frustrated Biden enters second year looking to fight

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden 1.0 was a calming, grandfatherly figure, a low-key veteran coming out of retirement in 2020 to heal a nation deeply divided by Donald Trump. A year later, meet Biden 2.0 - the frustrated, angry fighter. "I'm tired of being quiet," he said last week in a blistering speech. Biden was referring specifically to his many fruitless "quiet conversations" behind the scenes with senators in a

doomed effort to get his signature legislation on voting rights passed. He could just as well have been summing up the exasperation of his first 12 months in the Oval Office.

And if 2021 saw mild Biden, 2022 looks set to feature a louder, more pugnaic version - a president running out of time, patience and allies to save what remain of his ambitions. Biden took office January 20, 2021 - at 78, the oldest man to ever become US president - facing incredible challenges. COVID-19 was out of control, Trump's supporters had just two weeks earlier tried overturning the presidential election, the economy was comatose, and around the world US allies were reeling in Trump shock of their own.

Continued on Page 2



Joe Biden

Winter storm blankets US and Canada

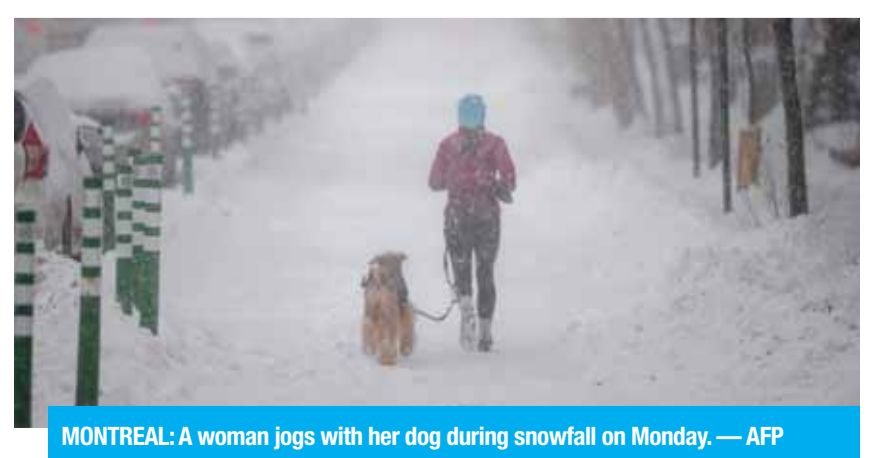
MONTREAL: A major winter storm blanketed a swathe of North America in snow stretching up the east coast from Georgia to Canada, disrupting travel and cutting power to thousands of homes. The Canadian capital Ottawa, which was under a blizzard warning Monday, saw nearly 48 cm of

snow, Environment Canada said.

Ottawa paramedics thanked an eight-year-old boy for helping save an elderly man he found nearly buried in snow on Monday. "The gentleman was almost all covered due to the huge snowfall when Clayton spotted him & notified his parents who activated 9-1-1," the paramedic service tweeted with a photo of the boy.

Across the border, the Ohio city of Ashtabula, on the shores of Lake Erie, saw 27 inches of snow, while down south even parts of Georgia and South Carolina received about 10 inches, the

Continued on Page 2



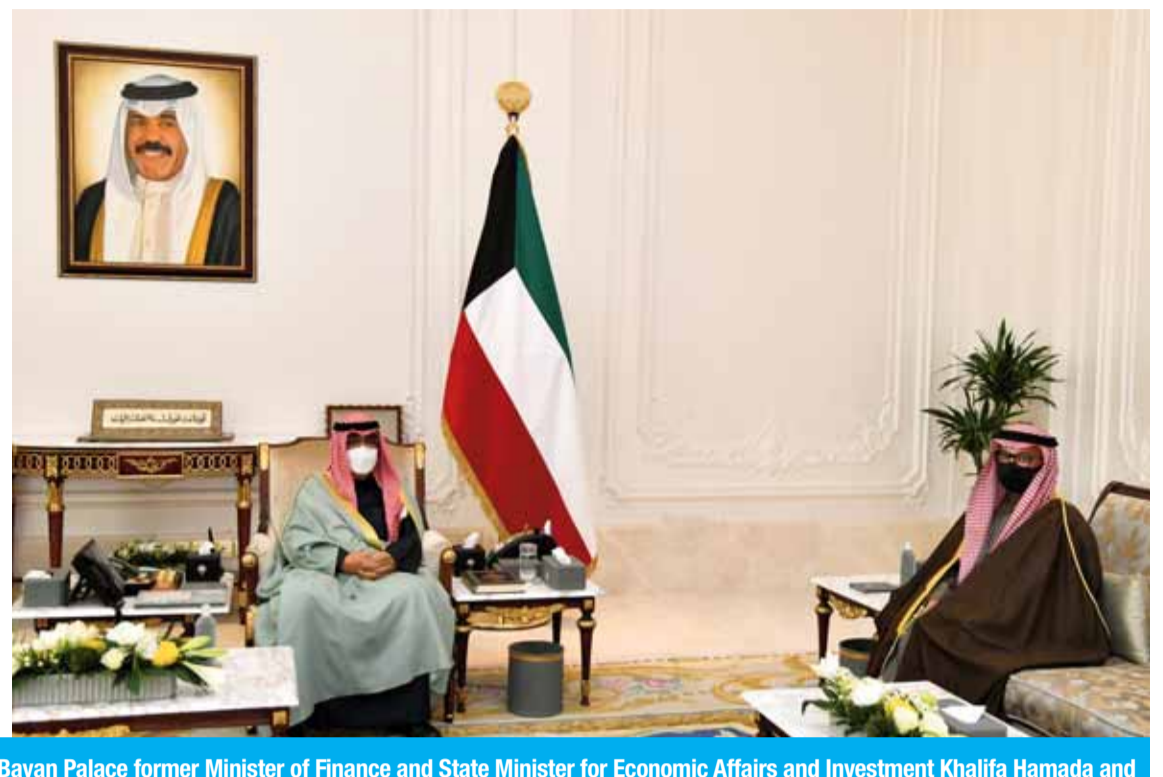
MONTREAL: A woman jogs with her dog during snowfall on Monday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Crown Prince meets former ministers



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace former Minister of Finance and State Minister for Economic Affairs and Investment Khalifa Hamada and former Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Shaya Abdulrahman Al-Shaya. His Highness the Crown Prince praised and appreciated the former ministers' sincere efforts during their tenure, wishing them further success and accomplishments. — KUNA



Women's military enrolment delayed for Fatwa Authority's views: Defense Minister

KUWAIT: Recruitment of Kuwaiti women in the army is not mandatory and for the sake of performing non-combat tasks, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Defense affirmed yesterday while being grilled at the National Assembly. Work of the women in the army will be restricted to technical, medical and engineering services and other non-combat tasks, said Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah at Abdullah Al-Salem Hall where he took to the podium for interpellation by MP Hamad Al-Azmi who cast skepticism over regularity of the minister performance at the defense post.

Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber said that he affirmed several times that the enrolment of the women in the Kuwaiti Army would be confined to medical and back-up services. "These are the tasks currently undertaken by the women at the ministry of defense thus we have not come up with anything new and we have not mentioned carrying arms," he stressed after the parliament member ended his address of interpellation against the minister. However, the minister pointed out that he delayed the women enrolment issue to sound out views of the Fatwa Authority at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Up to 34 Islamic states have allowed the female citizens to join the military, he argued,

noting that some of these countries are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in which Kuwait is also a member state.

Rebuffing the argument that the people in Kuwait were shocked at the planned women military recruitment, he noted that the female nationals would reap financial benefits and allowances by joining the military ranks. He questioned MPs' silence when Law 283/2018 was enacted stipulating the employment of the women in the military. Reacting to charges regarding funds' misappropriation, the minister noted that a committee under his jurisdictions settled a number of financial issues, affirming that he had responded to queries by the Audit Bureau.

On the issue of the Eurofighters aircraft, Sheikh Hamad said he submitted the final report of the relevant probe panel to the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) on June 16th and sent another one on September second. MP Al-Azmi denied the minister's remarks saying that the army had called on the women to join the ranks as combatants, accused him of neglecting the Dysyr Audit Bureau remarks on the Eurofighters deal, also questioned its high cost, amounting to a total of \$8.9 billion. Moreover, he accused him of being complacent with respect of

€450 million, adding that the minister authorized the sale of fighter jets to Malaysia. The lawmaker said the ministry has failed to respond to 95 percent of remarks made by the Audit Bureau regarding violations.

He also said the Assembly does not know much about the arms budget of KD 6.2 billion approved by the house that later agreed to add KD 3 billion to it, claiming that violations in the budget could be greater than suspected violations in the army fund, the Caracal deal and the Malaysian fund issue. Azemi accused the minister of failing to replace expatriate employees, saying there are close to 4,000 expat employees against just 2,600 Kuwaitis in the ministry.

The defense minister said the grilling contains several constitutional violations, and insisted that he continued to fight corruption and has sent all issues related to the Eurofighter issue to the public prosecution, the anti-Corruption agency and to an investigation committee. He said he had sent the arms budget statement to the Assembly in September and the delay happened before he took office. The minister said the Cabinet did not approve the reported commissions of €485 million in the Eurofighter deal. The Assembly is scheduled to meet today to discuss regular issues.

National Weather Service said earlier it expected the storm to "slowly wind down" but that snow would continue to fall through the evening in upper New York and New England. "Significant impacts due to snow, ice, wind, and coastal flooding will persist across a large area," the NWS said in a tweet.

The storm spawned damaging tornadoes in Florida, while in the Carolinas and up through the Appalachian mountain region, icy conditions and blustery winds raised concerns. Powerful winds downed trees and caused coastal flooding, with a 12-foot storm surge reported in Boston. According to scientists, climate change could be an aggravating factor for extreme weather events such as snowstorms, as well as deadly floods, typhoons and heat waves.

Transport was also seriously disrupted, with drivers warned of hazardous road conditions and major travel headaches from the southern US state of Arkansas to Quebec. In Toronto, police tweeted that they had closed two sections of highway due to extreme weather, and asked drivers to stay home, "unless it's absolutely necessary". "We're seeing a number of cars having to stop and de-ice their windshield," the Quebec transportation ministry tweeted Monday morning. "Heavy precipitation and gusts allow ice to form, despite windshield wipers - all the more reason to stay home!"

US officials also discouraged driving, and many states prepositioned teams to deal with the emergency, especially in the south, where snow is much less common. The northeastern United States already experienced snow chaos earlier this month. When a storm blanketed the northeast, hundreds of motorists were stuck for more than 24 hours on the I-95, a major highway linking to Washington. — AFP

No-confidence motion filed...

Continued from Page 1

service, highlighting several fatwas or Islamic edicts that ban women from joining armed forces.

Azemi said based on a poll by an institution accredited by the government and Kuwait University, around 81 percent of Kuwaiti women refused to join the military and as many as 89 percent of women in Jahra, a tribal area, rejected the decision.

The minister said 34 Islamic countries are accepting women in the military and some of them allow women to carry arms. He however said he has decided to suspend the decision until the ministry of Islamic affairs issues a fatwa regarding the issue. He said based on the fatwa, he will take the decision whether to go ahead or scrap the decision.

MP Azemi also charged that the minister has failed to handle the issue of the multibillion-dollar deal to purchase 28 Eurofighter warplanes, alleging that commissions in the deal were reported at over

Winter storm blankets US...

Continued from Page 1

US National Weather Service tweeted. There was relief however for many Americans who had been without electricity as supplies were gradually restored, with fewer than 40,000 customers still without power early yesterday, compared with about 120,000 Monday afternoon, according to the website PowerOutage.us.

More than 1,700 flights within, into or out of the United States were canceled Monday, in addition to 3,000 the day before, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware. With the storm conditions abating, just 175 flights were canceled yesterday. As snow accumulation slowed by late Monday, blizzard and winter storm warnings for much of the Canadian province of Ontario were lifted, although snow squall and extreme cold warnings remained in place.

Toronto, which saw nearly 29 cm of snow, and Ottawa banned cars from parking on the streets under winter rules to allow snowplows to clear the cities. Many schools were closed and school buses were not operating in Quebec and the south of Ontario, including the Toronto area. Students had been due to return to classrooms on Monday in both provinces after the holiday break.

Monday was a national holiday in the United States, so most schools and businesses were already closed, though many people usually take the opportunity to travel during the long weekend. The



KUWAIT: Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah speaks during the debate of his interpellation motion at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

the state policy of 'Kuwaitization', noting that the whole number of staff at the ministry is 3,976 including 2,600 Kuwaitis.

Grilling clarification
National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-

Coalition hits Yemen after...

Continued from Page 1

Crude prices soared to seven-year highs partly because of the Abu Dhabi attacks, which exploded fuel tanks near storage facilities of oil giant ADNOC. The Houthis later warned UAE residents to avoid "vital installations". Yemen, whose nearly seven-year-old war has killed hundreds of thousands, occupies a strategic position on the Red Sea, a vital conduit for oil from the resource-rich Gulf.

After the attacks, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed agreed in a phone call to "jointly stand up to these acts of aggression", UAE state media said. The Abu Dhabi attack marked a new phase in the Yemen war and further reduced hopes of any resolution to the conflict, which has displaced millions in what was already

Frustrated Biden enters second year...

Continued from Page 1

Biden's answer to all that - not to mention to the explosive tensions over racism after a series of black Americans were killed during botched arrests - was to promise competency, old-fashioned decency and unity. "My whole soul is in this. Bringing America together, uniting our people," Biden pledged in his inaugural address. And he even seemed to have a chance of pulling it off. Democrats narrowly controlled both houses of Congress, Trump had been banished from Twitter, and COVID vaccines were ready.

"There were high expectations that Biden, given his experience and his knowledge of Washington, would be able... to make the trains run on time again," said Lara Brown, director of the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University. "It was all about a return to normalcy."

Fast forward to the start of Biden's second year. Beset by the Delta and Omicron COVID variants, an ever-more divided America, and the likely loss of Congress to the Republicans in November's midterm elections, Biden's luck at the age of 79 seems to have run short. With a majority of just one in the Senate and barely more than that in the House, his huge social spending plan - called Build Back Better - is dead in the water. Ditto the voting rights package he says is needed to save US democracy from Trump's supporters.

A centrist at heart, Biden has failed to connect

Ghanem had said in a statement after the parliament moved to discuss the interpellation item that MP Azmi submitted the grilling motion on January 4. Ghanem explained that in accordance with the text of Article 135, the minister was informed of the interrogation as soon as it was presented, as it was included on the agenda of the session.

The defense minister submitted a request for clarification on Sunday, adding that it was answered on Monday, he indicated. He stated that according to the text of the aforementioned article, the interrogation may be discussed only after eight days from the day of its submission, except in the case of urgency and the approval of the minister, indicating that the person to whom the interrogation is directed may request an extension of this period to two weeks at most, and his request will be granted. It is permissible by the National Assembly's decision to postpone for a similar period, and it is not permissible to postpone for more than this period except after the approval of the majority of MPs, he pointed out.

Ghanem addressed the defense minister by asking him if he wanted to discuss the interrogation in yesterday's session, or request a delay, and he replied that he was ready. Article 135 stipulates that the speaker shall notify the interrogation to the prime minister or the competent minister immediately upon its submission, and it shall be included in the agenda of the first following session to set a date for discussion after hearing the statements of the person to whom the interrogation was directed. — KUNA

the Arabian peninsula's poorest country. The United States pledged to hold the Houthis accountable, while Britain, France and the European Union also condemned the assault.

The targeting of Abu Dhabi followed intense clashes in Yemen, including advances by the UAE-trained Giants Brigade, who drove the rebels out of Shabwa province. The defeat dealt a blow to the Houthis' months-long campaign to capture neighboring Marib, the government's last stronghold in the north. Earlier this month, the Houthis hijacked the UAE-flagged Rwabee in the Red Sea, charging that it was carrying military equipment - a claim disputed by the coalition and the UAE. The ship's 11 international crew are being held captive.

Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa, prompting Saudi-led forces to intervene to end the government the following year. The conflict has been a catastrophe for millions of its citizens who have fled their homes, with many on the brink of famine in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The UN has estimated the war killed 377,000 people by the end of 2021, both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease. — AFP

with the right or satisfy his own party's left. As he's discovering, the center today is hard to find. Average approval polls on fivethirtyeight.com are at a lowly 42 percent, down from 53. A recent Quinnipiac poll, while an outlier, posted a disturbing 33 percent approval. Abroad, the picture is similar.

While world allies do like having a United States not governed by Trump back, the country's humiliating military exit from Afghanistan torpedoed the Biden administration's aura of professionalism. Certainly Russia seems unconcerned, as it masses troops on Ukraine's border. It all adds up to a bitter awakening from the days when the White House buzzed with idealism and talk of Biden emulating his hero Franklin Roosevelt, who led America through the Great Depression in the 1930s. "Their optimism, combined with the public expectation that all of this would be solved, led them down a path of hubris," Brown said.

There's still a scenario where Biden comes out on top: The pandemic burns out, the economy stabilizes, inflation recedes, and with the subsequent feel-good factor Biden gets his party to reverse those legislative defeats just in time for the midterms. Biden's aides also point out they got Congress to pass the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, juicing a COVID-ravaged economy and preventing more widespread misery. Remarkably, Democrats also got strong Republican support in passing a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package. All that with a razor-thin majority in Congress.

The more likely outcome for 2022, though, is continued Democratic infighting, followed by Republicans winning one or both chambers of Congress in November. At that point, Biden can expect aggressive House investigations, and even possibly impeachment, as Republicans seek to further undermine their opponents' ability to govern. — AFP

Local

Kuwait tasks EPA with completing measures to cut carbon emissions

Cabinet approves bill to establish national center for cyber security



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center) chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA



Ministers attend the Cabinet meeting.

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti government on Monday reviewed recommendations to help cut carbon emissions in the country, and endorsed a number of bills on the Capital Markets Authority's budget, establishing the national center for cyber security, amending the law regarding the Kuwait diplomatic institute and others. This came during the Cabinet meeting led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Saif Palace.

The Cabinet reviewed the public services committee's recommendations on the two monthly reports submitted by the Environment Public Authority (EPA) on the latest developments and measures taken by government agencies to implement Kuwait's commitment towards the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, especially those related to reducing carbon emissions. The Cabinet extolled the efforts of government agencies to implement the projects in accordance with the highest environmental standards that are compatible with the vision of the State of Kuwait and its international commitments. The Cabinet asked the EPA to complete measures regarding reducing carbon emissions. The Cabinet also decided to ask the Ministry of Public Works to find urgent and permanent solutions to avoid damage and accidents caused by heavy rains and floods.

During the meeting, the Cabinet discussed the Economic Affairs Committee's recommendation on a draft law on the Capital Markets Authority's budget for the fiscal year 2022-2023 and approved the bill, and submitted it to His Highness the Amir, in preparation to refer it to the National Assembly,

Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said after the meeting.

Furthermore, the Cabinet discussed the recommendations of the Legal Affairs Committee on draft decrees establishing the national center for cyber security, and amending some provisions of the Decree No. 390 of 2004 on Box Hill College Kuwait for Girls, amending some provisions of Decree No. 156 of 2002 on Gulf University for Science and Technology. The Cabinet decided to endorse all the

Desert Storm to liberate the State of Kuwait from the brutal Iraqi Invasion, the Cabinet expressed its appreciation and gratitude for the efforts made by Saudi Arabia and the United States as well as the countries of the international coalition to liberate the State of Kuwait after the issuance of the relevant UN resolutions. It further recalled the prominent role of the Kuwaiti Air Force in the war of liberating Kuwait, the steadfastness of Kuwaitis and their great sacrifices to defeat the brutal aggression and restore national legitimacy.

Moreover, the Cabinet was briefed by Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on the results of his official visit to the Cypriot capital, Nicosia, last week, and the outcome of his meeting with Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades. He pointed out that he had discussed with President Anastasiades bilateral relations and ways of developing them in various fields and at all levels for the benefit of the two countries and their friendly peoples. The ministers also were informed about the gist of the talks Sheikh Ahmad Nasser held with Cypriot counterpart Nikos Christodoulides that culminated in signing a memorandum of understanding on preventing theft, secret excavation, illegal importation and transferring ownership of cultural property.

In addition, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser apprised the Cabinet of the results of his recent official visit to Wuxi City, China, and his talks with State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi and senior Chinese officials. The talk reviewed the close historical relations between the two friendly

countries and means of opening new horizons and boosting joint cooperation in various sectors to back the common interests of the two sides, especially those related to the Belt and Road Initiative launched by China in 2013. In addition, they discussed several areas of cooperation within the framework of facing the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic, and the latest developments on the regional and international arenas as well as other issues of common interest.

Energy production

Afterwards, the Cabinet was informed about the public service committee's recommendations to brief the Minister of Electricity and Water on the state needs and production of electricity and plans to execute relevant projects, in collaboration with the government bodies. The Cabinet decided to task the Ministry of Electricity and Water, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, the Central Agency for Public Tenders, Kuwait Investment Authority, the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects and others, with taking required measures to secure the country's current and future needs of electricity.

The ministers discussed the committee's recommendations on the report regarding measures taken by the EPA to resolve the accumulated waters in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential city, and assigned the authority in cooperation with some concerned bodies to complete the executive measures made by the concerned bodies to address the current situation and ending the problem of water in the city as soon as possible. — KUNA

Govt mulls sports' strategy for 2022-2028

draft decrees and referred them to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser, also Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, added.

Sports strategy

The Cabinet was briefed on the recommendation regarding the strategy of the Public Authority for Sports for 2022-2028, which aims to improve and develop sports, and overcome all obstacles facing the future of sports and athletes in Kuwait. In addition, marking the 31st anniversary of the Operation

yesterday, immunized arrivals could avoid the seven-day quarantine if they conducted a PCR test upon entering the country and the result was negative, the minister said. The Cabinet also urged citizens and residents to abide by all coronavirus preventive measures and not to hesitate to take the booster dose of the vaccine to help stop the spread of the virus.

Kuwait condemns Houthi attack

In the meantime, The Kuwaiti government has strongly denounced the Houthi militia Monday's drone attack on civilian areas in the United Arab Emirates which left many casualties among innocent people. In a press statement following its regular meeting, the Cabinet indicated that the Houthi militia's continued attacks, violation of international humanitarian law, and threatening of the regional countries' security and stability had exposed the group's dangerous behavior which necessitates a swift action from the international community, especially the UN Security Council, to stop its hostile actions and safeguard international peace and security. The Cabinet also expressed Kuwait's full solidarity with the UAE and support to all the measures it will take to maintain its security and stability. —KUNA

Kuwait resumes flights with nine African countries

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet on Monday agreed on resuming commercial flights with nine African countries after a hiatus over the emergence of the coronavirus Omicron variant. In a statement following the Cabinet regular meeting today, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said the government has instructed relevant state bodies to resume commercial flights with South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zambia, and Malawi. The Cabinet stressed that all relevant preventive measures set by the coronavirus emergency committee have to be strictly observed, the minister added. On November 28, Kuwait suspended flights to the nine African countries, where the Omicron variant were detected. Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser revealed that the government has ease quarantine measures to vaccinated arrivals to Kuwait. As of

Kuwait reports 4,825 new COVID cases, two deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait reported 4,825 new COVID-19 cases yesterday in addition to two deaths and 4,021 recoveries. Kuwait's new daily cases dropped against after breaking the 5,000 mark for the first time on Monday following three days of decline. Meanwhile, the number of patients in ICUs increased from 33 as of Monday to 37 yesterday. The number of patients hospitalized also increased from 266 to 296, while total active cases rose from 43,356 to 44,158. The percentage of daily new cases to new tests dropped from 16.2 percent to 15 percent, while the percentage of recovery remained almost unchanged at 90.2 percent, according to the health ministry's bulletin. With yesterday's numbers, total infections and recoveries reached 475,303 and 428,666 respectively, while total deaths went up to 2,479, Health



Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. He added that total swabs hit 6,509,269 with 32,203 new tests carried out in the same period.

Two dead in Sixth Ring Road crash

KUWAIT: Two people died in an accident reported on Sixth Ring Road yesterday. The victims, a man and a woman, were pronounced dead on the scene, Kuwait Fire Force said. Firemen were called to remove the victims' bodies from their wrecked vehicle following the accident. The bodies were taken to the coroner for an autopsy. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the accident, KFF said in a statement to the press.



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News in brief

Speaker extends
condolences to UAE

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent Monday a cable of condolences to UAE's Federal National Council Speaker Saqer Ghobash. The cable enclosed heartfelt sentiments over victims of a fuel truck explosion in Abu Dhabi; an attack claimed by Yemen's Houthi militia. Voicing utmost condemnation of the aggression, the cable underlined Kuwaiti people's full solidarity with the UAE, as well as unwavering support for all measures taken by the fellow Gulf state to protect its security and stability.

FM calls UAE
counterparts

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Monday telephoned UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. Minister Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser stressed during the call on the State of Kuwait's condemnation in strongest terms the cowardly terrorist attack launched by the Houthi militias on Abu Dhabi International Airport. Moreover, he affirmed the State of Kuwait full stand on the side of the UAE.

GCC chief deplores
terrorist attack

RIYADH: Secretary General of the GCC Dr. Nayef Al-Hajraf condemned on Monday the terrorist attack, which targeted Abu Dhabi international airport and led to several casualties. In a statement, Hajraf stressed that the attack, perpetrated by the Houthi militias, was a cowardly terror attack and a war crime against innocent civilians that required a stern stance from the international community. He affirmed the GCC firm stance with the people and leadership of the UAE, expressing full support towards the Emiratis defensive measures to protect their land and loved ones. He offered his condolences to the victims of the terror attack and wished for the swift recovery of those wounded.

Kuwait crude
gains \$1.16 to
\$87.72 pb: KPC

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil gained \$1.16 during Monday's trading sessions to reach \$87.72 per barrel (pb) compared with \$86.56 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent crude edged 42 cents higher to \$86.48 pb and West Texas Intermediate rose 53 cents to \$84.35 pb. The price for OPEC's daily basket of crude rose by a dollar and eight cents to \$86.54 per barrel (pb) on Monday, compared with \$85.46 pb three days earlier, said the cartel yesterday. The annual average of the OPEC's basket price amounted to \$69.89 pb last year, the organization said in its bulletin. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, decided this month to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd), keeping their current policy of slight monthly increases in output.

OPEC said that the monthly increase of 400,000 bpd would begin in February as previously agreed on, describing it as a measure aiming to keep the global oil market stable. The conferees had also underlined the paramount significance of utter compliance and compensation mechanism for the alliance's member states. The OPEC+ alliance also agreed to follow up on the developments of the epidemiological situation, monitor its repercussions on the market, and make immediate adjustments if necessary. The oil-producing countries of OPEC+ are expected to continue changing the production until amending the current level of 5.8 million bpd. They will re-examine market conditions and performance of the stakeholders at the 25th ministerial meeting, due to be held virtually on February 2. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The sun sets behind the clouds in Kuwait on Monday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Temperature to drop further
as cold front affects Kuwait

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The temperature in Kuwait will drop further over the weekend, according to meteorologist Adel Saadoun. Speaking to Kuwait Times yesterday, the head of Al-Fintas Observatory said the cold snap caused by a cold front could extend for more days depending on the weather affecting Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

"We are in the middle of the cold front now. A cold front forms when a mass of cold air pushes into a warmer airmass. A cold front can produce changes in the weather and could be unpredictable as well. The cold weather we are experiencing right now is from the cold front meeting warmer weather from the Gulf and cold weather from Siberia and areas of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq," he said.

"This phenomenon is sometimes characterized



Adel Saadoun

by strong wind, hailstorms and colder, heavy rain, thunder and lightning." Saadoun said. According to him, the temperature in desert areas can reach 2 degrees centigrade or even zero.

Today's weather is expected to be cold and with scattered clouds. The maximum temperature is expected to be 14 degrees Celsius, and the minimum 4 degrees C. The weather forecast also predicts chances of frost forming over agriculture and desert areas, which will continue through the weekend. Temperatures are also expected to

remain low, ranging between a maximum of 13 and minimum of 2 degrees Celsius.

Amid the frigid temperatures, some locals and residents like to spend time with their families in the desert. "I want to caution everyone against using coal for heating. The problem is when they are in the desert, they do not know the danger it poses to the environment and individuals' wellbeing. If they light the charcoal and go to sleep, the carbon monoxide produced by the coal can kill them, so I advise campers to avoid using charcoal for heating," Saadoun said. "Always wear comfortable jackets and head covers to protect your body," he added.

Saadoun also told Kuwait Times that Ramadan will have pleasant weather, as it will fall in April. "Ramadan's weather will be the finest. April is normally not too cold or hot, so I think we'll have a wonderful month of Ramadan this year," he said.



Ali Al-Bloushi and Nazem Al-Ghabra.



A tour in the store.

Ooredoo takes
strides to ensure of
youth motivation

KUWAIT: Stemming from its continuous support and constant keenness to support, motivate and inspire the local community and its unique creative talents in various sectors including art in all its spectrums, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, sponsored the soft opening of the Figuristi store at 360 Mall. Figuristi is a virtual and physical store opened in 2022, and dedicated to all figurine art collectors all over the world. Figuristi acquires exclusive distributorship and has partnered with many different world-class brands and companies such as Iron Studios, Soap Studios, Queen Studios, Elite Creature Collectibles,



The opening ceremony.

Blitzway, Cinemaquette and Figurama Collectibles, a leading scale anime figures design and manufacturing company producing collectible pieces. Today,

the store has become the ideal destination for figurine art collectors of ancient and modern theatrical, television and cinematic figures.

CAN trains
doctors,
nurses to detect
oral cancers

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh said 1,262 dentists in Kuwait were trained on discovering oral cancers by the end of 2021 in cooperation with the dental department of the Ministry of Health.

This comes within the framework of continuing CAN's efforts to spread cancer awareness, Saleh said in a press statement. As part of this campaign, specialized courses are held for doctors about the visual detection of oral tumors, he added.

He said the campaign seek the help

of experienced specialists in this field, adding that CAN completed a specialized course for nurses. He further noted that the number of nurses who were trained was 2,116, adding that nurses are trained on communications skills with patients and their families.

Dr. Saleh said oncologists prepared a program for trainees that includes cancer description, its stages, its occurrence in Kuwait, means of diagnosis, treatment, prevention, early detection and recovery percentages. He said it is important to train nurses because they are close to patients and their relatives, and they are trained on the correct information about cancerous diseases to enable them to answer questions correctly.

Thyroid Cancer

Meanwhile, Executive Committee Member at CAN Dr. Iman Al-Shimmari said the world celebrates the thyroid cancer month in January of each year. She said that despite the pandemic's



From the training course.

circumstances "we still hold many activities, seminars, courses, and medical exhibitions in addition to scientific conferences." Shimmari said although the thyroid cancer is more widespread, it has better recovery rate and less chances for it to spread in the body. Furthermore, it does not require

chemotherapy, rather it is treated with radioactive iodine which does not cause hair loss or the known treatment side effects. She said the number of cancer cases according to the latest cancer statistics registered in Kuwait in 2016 was 2,873 of various cancers, 231 of them are thyroid.



Anti-abortion lawmaker
Metsola elected as
EU parliament chief

Wife of S Korea presidential candidate in hot water over rape comments

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MOSCOW: This handout photograph taken and released yesterday by Russian Foreign Ministry, shows Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (R) welcoming German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock during their meeting in Moscow. — AFP

Russia reject talks on Ukraine until West responds to demands

Blinken to visit Ukraine amid invasion fears

MOSCOW: Moscow yesterday rejected new talks on Ukraine unless the West responds to its demands, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepared to fly to Kyiv in a show of support amid fears of a Russian invasion.

Tens of thousands of Russian troops are massed on the border with Ukraine, with Kyiv and the West accusing Moscow of preparing a potential military attack on its pro-Western neighbour.

A week of talks in Geneva, Brussels and Vienna last week failed to ease tensions, with Russia insisting its demands for sweeping security guarantees — including a permanent ban on Ukraine joining NATO — be taken seriously.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that there would be no further negotiations until the West gives it proper answers. “We are now awaiting responses to these proposals — as we were promised — in order to continue negotiations,” he said at a joint press conference with visiting German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock.

“Let’s hope these talks will continue,” Lavrov said. Washington has outright rejected the

demands, which also include limits on allied deployments in former Warsaw Pact allies like Poland and the ex-Soviet Baltic states that joined NATO after the Cold War.

The State Department announced that Blinken would fly to Ukraine and meet today with President Volodymyr Zelensky, to “reinforce the United States’ commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

Blinken will then head tomorrow to Berlin for four-way talks with Britain, France and Germany on the Ukraine crisis, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Belarus military drills

The four countries will discuss “joint efforts to deter further Russian aggression against Ukraine, including allies’ and partners’ readiness to impose

massive consequences and severe economic costs on Russia,” Price said in a statement.

Ukraine, the United States and the European Union have all raised deep concerns over the Russian troop build-up, despite repeated denials from Moscow that an invasion is planned.

Kyiv has been at war with pro-Moscow separatists in the east of the country since 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine after demonstrations ousted a Kremlin-aligned leader.

Adding to the tensions, Russia and Ukraine’s neighbour Belarus yesterday launched snap military exercises. The Belarusian defence ministry said it was hosting the combat readiness drills because of the continuing “aggravation” of military tensions “including at the western and southern

borders of the Republic of Belarus.” Ukraine borders Belarus to the south and NATO member Poland to the west.

Neither Moscow nor Minsk has disclosed the number of troops involved, but a video published by the Belarusian defence ministry showed columns of military vehicles including tanks being unloaded from trains blanketed in snow. Baerbock came to Moscow fresh from meetings in Kyiv and said at the press conference with Lavrov that it was difficult for the West to believe Russia’s claims it had nothing planned. “Over the past few weeks, more than 100,000 Russian troops, equipment and tanks have been deployed near Ukraine for no reason. It’s hard not to see that as a threat,” she said.

NATO member Turkey also warned Moscow against invading Ukraine yesterday, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan saying he intended to discuss rising tensions with Russian President Vladimir Putin. “I don’t see Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a realistic option because it is not an ordinary country. Ukraine is a powerful country,” Erdogan told reporters in Albania. — AFP

“ Let’s hope these talks will continue ”

Putin to host Iran’s Raisi in Moscow

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin will host his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi in Moscow today, the Kremlin said, amid talks aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal. The meeting will be Raisi’s most important official visit abroad since he took office, and the first visit by an Iranian president to Russia since 2017.

The leaders will discuss the “whole range of issues of bilateral cooperation”, including the 2015 deal that offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, the Kremlin said in a statement.

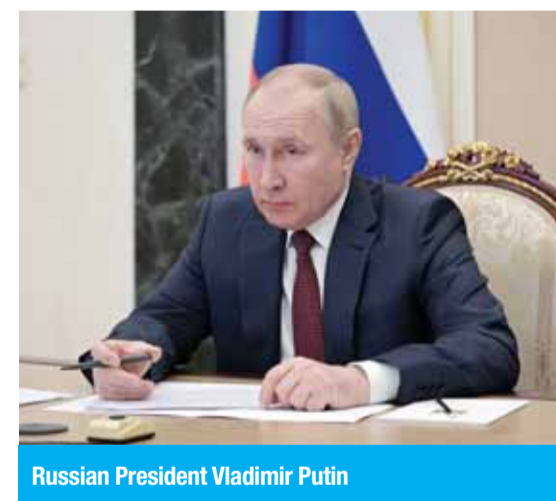
In 2018, Washington announced its unilateral withdrawal from the agreement under former president Donald Trump, prompting Iran to walk back on its commitments. Since last year, Iran has been in

talks with the signatories of the accord—the United States, France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany—to restore the deal, but negotiations stopped in June after Raisi’s election.

They resumed in November. Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov earlier this month noted “real progress” in the talks. Moscow and Tehran have strong political, economic and military ties, shared interests in Afghanistan, and are key allies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his country’s decade-long civil war.

This will be Raisi’s third visit outside Iran—after Tajikistan and neighbouring Turkmenistan—since he took over the presidency in August from moderate Hassan Rouhani. The Iranian side confirmed the visit, saying Raisi would leave Wednesday for a two-day trip to Russia together with the country’s oil, foreign and economy ministers.

A Russian lawmaker told reporters that Raisi would speak at the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, on Thursday, while TASS news



Russian President Vladimir Putin

agency cited a source as saying he would meet with religious leaders at Moscow’s main mosque. — AFP

US court awards Warmbier family \$240,000 seized from North Korea

SEOUL: A United States court has awarded the family of Otto Warmbier, the American student who died after being jailed by Pyongyang, \$240,000 seized from a North Korean bank, court records showed. The 22-year-old Warmbier, who was detained in North Korea for allegedly removing a propaganda poster from his hotel, died days after being sent back to the United States in a coma in 2017.

His parents, Cynthia and Frederick Warmbier, sued North Korea for the alleged torture and murder of their son, with a US judge ordering Pyongyang to pay them \$501 million in 2018. Impoverished North Korea, struggling under biting international sanctions over its nuclear weapons programme, is believed to have few assets in the United States and has ignored the 2018 ruling.

Last week, Judge Lawrence Kahn of the Northern District Court of New York approved the seizure of the funds from North Korea’s Korea Kwangson Banking Corporation after they failed to respond to a forfeiture order.

“Judgement is hereby entered in favor of the Plaintiffs/Judgement Creditors Cynthia Warmbier and Frederick Warmbier with respect to the Subject Funds in the sum of \$240,336.41, plus any accrued interest thereon,” said the order, seen by AFP.

Otto Warmbier, an Ohio native who studied at the University of Virginia, travelled to North Korea on a tour in 2016. He was pulled away from his group at Pyongyang airport and charged with crimes against the state for allegedly taking down a propaganda poster.

According to the 2018 ruling, when he finally returned home after 17 months, Warmbier was attached to a feeding tube and was howling incomprehensible noises. Warmbier had gone blind and deaf, his once straight teeth were misaligned and his eyes bulged out, the ruling said. He died six days later. — AFP

Images reveal devastation in Tonga

WELLINGTON: A volcano that exploded on the Pacific island nation of Tonga has almost disappeared from view, new images revealed yesterday, with swathes of the island nation smothered in grey ash and dust or damaged by a tsunami.

Tonga has been virtually cut off from the rest of the world since Saturday’s volcanic blast—one of the largest recorded in decades. The volcano erupted 30 kilometres (about 19 miles) into the air and deposited ash, gas and acid rain across a large area of the Pacific.

Three days after the eruption, the outside world is still scrambling to understand the scale of the disaster, using patchy satellite phone connections, surveillance flights and satellite images. New Zealand said two people have been confirmed killed, citing

Tonga police on the island. One of them is a British woman. Her family say the body was found after she was swept away by the tsunami.

Satellite images released by Maxar Technologies yesterday showed that where most of the volcanic structure stood above sea level a few days ago, there is now just open sea. Only two relatively small volcanic islands were still visible above sea level after the eruption.

In fact, “what we saw above the water—that has now been destroyed—was only the tip of a volcano that had grown on the rim of the massive underwater volcano,” said Monash University volcanologist Heather Handley.

New Zealand released aerial images taken from a surveillance flight the previous day, revealing a tree-lined coast transformed from green to grey by the volcanic fallout.

‘Distress beacon’

Wrecked buildings were visible on the foreshore alongside others that appeared intact. Volcanic ash blanketed island fields, images from an Australian Defence Force P-8A



NOMUKA, Tonga: Photo taken from the New Zealand Defence Force P-3K2 Orion aircraft flying over Nomuka in Tonga shows ash on the roofs of homes and surrounding vegetation, after the eruption of the Hunga-Tonga - Hunga-Haa’apai volcano on January 15. — AFP

Poseidon patrol aircraft showed. Shipping containers had been knocked over like dominoes at a port on the main island. Australia’s HMAS Adelaide and New Zealand’s HMNZS Wellington and HMNZS Aotearoa were ordered to be ready for a possible aid request from Tonga, which lies

three-five days’ sailing away. With water sources feared to be poisoned by volcanic fallout, the Red Cross said it was sending 2,516 water containers. France, which has territories in the South Pacific, pledged to help the people of Tonga’s “most urgent needs”. — AFP

International

Anti-abortion lawmaker Metsola elected as EU parliament chief

Third and youngest woman to head this noble house

STRASBOURG, France: EU lawmakers yesterday chose centre-right Maltese politician Roberta Metsola the new head of the European Parliament, despite controversy over her anti-abortion stance. Metsola—a member of the largest bloc, the European People's Party—won a large majority with 458 votes to become the third woman to head the chamber after a deal between the leading political groupings.

Her election comes a week after the shock death of outgoing centre-left parliament president David Sassoli, who was due to step down as part of the power-sharing pact. MEPs applauded and sang "Happy Birthday" as Metsola scooped the top job on the day she turned 43 — becoming the youngest ever head of the legislature.

"In the next years, people across Europe will look to our institution for leadership and direction, while others will continue to test the limits of our democratic values and European principles," Metsola said in her acceptance speech. "We must fight back against the anti-EU narrative that takes hold so easily and so quickly."



Wins a large majority with 458 votes

The mother-of-four styles herself as a pro-LGBTQ progressive and champion of women's rights—but her tough stance over abortion has drawn criticism from opponents. Abortion is illegal in largely Catholic Malta—the EU's smallest nation—and Metsola in June voted against a report urging all member states to offer safe access to terminations.

That stance saw the Left and Green groups in parliament field two staunchly pro-choice feminists as their challengers. But a backroom deal between the major political forces meant that Metsola's election to head the parliament until mid-2024 was in the bag.

The presidency of the European Parliament is one of the top jobs in the EU's hierarchy—but the chamber is often accused by its critics of lacking real power. EU executive chief Ursula von der Leyen offered her "warmest congrats" to Metsola.

"As the 3rd woman to head this noble house, your hard work and determination are an inspiration to us all," the European Commission chief wrote on Twitter. "We'll work closely together for



STRASBOURG, France: Roberta Metsola reacts after being elected as the new president of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg, eastern France yesterday. —AFP

the EU's recovery and a green, digital and bright European future."

Metsola insisted the fight against climate change

would remain a priority for the European Parliament and urged lawmakers to embrace reforms to make the legislature more relevant. — AFP

UK intelligence investigated Texas hostage taker

LONDON: British security services recently investigated the man behind a hostage taking at a synagogue in Texas but deemed he posed no threat, media reports said yesterday. US authorities identified the captor as British citizen Malik Faisal Akram, 44, who was shot dead in a 10-hour siege in the small town of Colleyville on Saturday.

Britain's MI5 domestic intelligence agency received information about Akram, who came from Blackburn in northwest England, in 2020, prompting an investigation, several news outlets said, citing unnamed government sources.

But it was shut down again after a little over a month due to lack of evidence that he was a threat, the report added. The agency is now expected to review the investigation. MI5 keeps tabs on around 3,000 jihadist suspects at any one time, and has investigated up to 40,000 individuals in total.

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.

Biden declined to speculate on the motive but appeared to confirm reports that the hostage-taker was seeking the release of Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist known as "Lady Al-Qaeda," whose detention has been a cause celebre for jihadists. At one point the standoff involved 200 local, state and federal law enforcement officers massed around Colleyville. —AFP

Sudanese barricade streets, close shops after seven killed

KHARTOUM: Sudanese shuttered shops and barricaded Khartoum streets yesterday in a civil disobedience campaign to protest one of the bloodiest days since an October coup derailed the country's democratic transition. Security forces on Monday killed at least seven people during anti-coup protests by thousands, bringing the total fatalities from the crackdown on anti-coup demonstrations to 71, according to medics. Sudan's main civilian bloc, the Forces for Freedom and Change, called for two days of civil disobedience to begin on Tuesday.

"Shop closed for mourning," said a series of small signs posted on the closed outlets at the sprawling Sajane construction supplies market in Khartoum. One of the merchants, Othman el-Sherif, was among those shot dead on Monday. In several other parts of Khartoum, too, many pharmacies and other shops were shuttered, according to an AFP correspondent. Sudan's University for Science and Technology suspended all activities as part of the civil disobedience, according to an official statement.

As they do regularly, police yesterday fired tear gas at dozens of protesters setting up roadblocks, this time on the streets of east Khartoum, according to an AFP correspondent. After Monday's deaths the United Nations special representative Volker Perthes condemned the use of live ammunition and the US embassy criticised "violent tactics of Sudanese security forces," the latest such appeals by world powers, which have not curbed a rising death toll. Washington's Assistant Secretary of State Molly Phee and special envoy for the Horn of Africa, David Satterfield, were expected in Khartoum where they would "reiterate our call for security forces to end violence and respect freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," spokesman Ned Price said. —AFP

Breivik seeks parole decade after Norway massacre

OSLO: Just 10 years after carrying out the deadliest peacetime attack in Norway, right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik yesterday asked a court for parole, a request widely expected to be denied. Wearing a black suit, white shirt and beige tie, Breivik, 42, appeared before the district court in the southern region of Telemark, convened for security reasons in the gymnasium of the Skien prison where he is incarcerated.

He lifted his arm in a Nazi salute to the three judges as they entered the room. The families of his victims have expressed fears Breivik would use the three-day hearing, which is being broadcast live, as a stage to air his political views, and have called for him to be deprived of the attention he is seeking.

Breivik also wore a note on his lapel and held up signs bearing political messages during the prosecutor's

opening remarks, which head judge Dag Bjarvik asked him to put away. In 2012 Breivik, who killed 77 people during the massacre, got 21 years in prison, which can be extended indefinitely as long as he is considered a threat to society.

At the time, that was Norway's harshest sentence, though the law has since been changed to allow for the possibility of handing down longer jail terms. He had to serve at least 10 years before he could make his first request for conditional release.

A 'test'

On July 22, 2011, Breivik killed eight people when he set off a truck bomb near the government offices in Oslo, then gunned down 69 others, most of them teenagers, at a summer camp for the Labour party youth wing on the island of Utoya. He said he killed his victims because they embraced multiculturalism. "As in any other state governed by the rule of law, a convict has the right to request conditional release and Breivik has decided to exercise this right", his lawyer Oystein Storvik told AFP.

Breivik's attacks were Norway's deadliest since World War II, and his request is widely expected to be rejected. But the hearing is seen as a



SKIEN, Norway: Anders Behring Breivik raises his arm to make a Nazi salute as he arrives on the first day of the trial where he is requesting release on parole, yesterday at a makeshift courtroom in Skien prison, Norway. —AFP

test of Norway's rule of law. "It is a test for all of us that a person who murdered children, who hunted down fleeing youths with the aim of killing them and who shot people who begged for their lives, should also benefit from the liberal aspects of our criminal justice system", daily VG wrote in an editorial yesterday.

"He shall have the rights conferred on him by the rule of law. Not for his sake. But for ours. No terrorist should

be allowed to change the way we are governed and the rule of law that applies to all Norwegian citizens."

In 2016, Breivik—who has three cells at his disposal in prison, with a television and DVD player, a game console and a typewriter—got the Norwegian state convicted of "inhuman" and "degrading" treatment because of his isolation from other inmates. The verdict was overturned on appeal. — AFP

As rivals jostle in Iraq, other parties targeted

BAGHDAD: As Iraq's Shiite leaders jostle to secure a majority in the newly-elected parliament, Sunni and Kurdish minorities have been caught up in a spate of warning grenade attacks, analysts say. In recent days, unknown attackers have hurled grenades at Kurdish and Sunni targets including political party offices and a lawmaker's home-groups that could help Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr win the critical parliamentary majority needed to make his choice of prime minister.

"It is a way of punishing the forces that have allied with Moqtada Sadr to form a parliamentary majority," said political scientist Ihsan al-Shammari. "Their message is political," he added, calling the attacks "part of the mode of political pressure" adopted by some groups. In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

Horse trading for power

No single party holds an outright

majority, so the next leader will be voted in by whichever coalition can negotiate allies to become the biggest bloc—which then elects Iraq's president, who then appoints a prime minister.

In previous parliaments, parties from Iraq's Shiite majority have struck compromise deals to work together and form a government, with an unofficial system whereby the prime minister is Shiite, the president is a Kurd and the speaker of parliament is Sunni.

But Sadr, who once led an anti-US militia and who opposes all foreign interference, has repeatedly said the next prime minister will be chosen by his movement. So rather than strike an alliance with the powerful Shiite Coordination Framework—which includes the pro-Iran Fatah alliance, the political arm of the former paramilitary Hashed al-Shaabi—Sadr has forged a new coalition. That includes two Sunni parties, Taqadam and Azm, as well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

It has infuriated the Coordination Framework—who insist their grouping is bigger. In recent days, grenades



BAGHDAD: Iraqi onlookers gather at the scene of an explosion outside the Kurdish Cihan Bank. Iraq's Sunni and Kurdish parties have become the latest targets of attacks in what experts have dubbed a maximum pressure campaign adopted by Shiite groups seeking political gains. — AFP

have been lobbed at the home of a Taqadam lawmaker, as well as at the party offices of Azm, Taqadam and the KDP in Baghdad.

On Sunday, flashbang stun grenades were hurled into the branches of two Kurdish banks in the capital Baghdad—wounding two people. The heads of both banks are said to be close to political leaders in

Iraq's autonomous northern Kurdistan region.

There has already been unrest following the election, with Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi escaping unhurt when an explosive-packed drone hit his residence in November during what his office called an "assassination attempt." No group has claimed the attack. — AFP

Kenya's court reviews disputed bid to change constitution

NAIROBI: Kenya's highest court began yesterday weighing a legal bid to revive government plans to shake up the country's political system, just months ahead of crucial elections. The Supreme Court ruling on the proposed constitutional changes, expected after three days of hearings this week, may have major consequences for the August 9 presidential and parliamentary polls.

The government is seeking to overturn court rulings that had dealt a blow to President Uhuru Kenyatta and his allies by rejecting the reforms and

the way they were introduced as unconstitutional. The so-called Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) aims to expand the executive and overturn the winner-takes-all electoral system blamed for frequent explosions of poll-related violence in the East African nation.

But Kenyatta's detractors see it as little more than a naked grab for power by a two-term president who cannot run a third time, with the BBI potentially allowing him to assume a new post of prime minister.

'Freedom to make decisions'

The BBI was drawn up following a rapprochement between Kenyatta and his erstwhile opponent Raila Odinga and a famous handshake between the two men after post-election fighting in 2017 left dozens of people dead.

The proposed amendments to the 2010 constitu-

tion were approved by parliament in May last year and were then due to be put to a referendum. But just two days later, the Nairobi High Court ruled they were illegal as the president did not have the right to initiate the process.

Kenya's Court of Appeal in August upheld that view and said Kenyatta could even be sued in a civil court for launching the process. Kenyatta's lawyer Karori Kamau insisted at yesterday's hearing that the law gives the president immunity from prosecution or civil action while he is in office.

"It is necessary that the president has decisional freedom, to make decisions that are key and important to safeguard the interest of the country," he added. Some analysts say that even if the Supreme Court's seven-member panel sides with government and allows the proposals to be put to a public vote, there will probably not be time to hold a referendum before the August election. — AFP

International

Wife of S Korea presidential candidate in hot water over rape comments

South Koreans will elect new president in March



SEOUL: File photo shows Kim Keon-hee, wife of South Korean main opposition People Power Party's presidential candidate Yoon Suk-yeol, speaking during a press conference at the headquarters of the party in Seoul. — AFP

SEOUL: A South Korean opposition party distanced itself yesterday from comments made by its presidential candidate's wife, in which she expressed strong support for a former politician currently in prison for rape. The socially conservative country has been rocked in recent years by a #MeToo movement in which women working for prominent politicians made multiple sexual assault allegations.

The movement has met an at-times misogynistic backlash, with widespread vilification of feminist campaigners and some high-profile women. South Koreans will elect a new president in March, with the two leading candidates currently neck and neck in the polls.

People Power Party candidate Yoon Suk-yeol's wife made her controversial comments in a phone conversation with a reporter, which was recorded and released this weekend after a court battle. In the conversation, Kim Keon-hee came to the defence of Ahn Hee-jung, a former presidential contender convicted of raping his secretary on multiple occasions. Ahn was jailed for



Yoon's wife made her comments in a phone conversation

three-and-a-half years.

"I feel really sorry for Ahn. My husband and I are strongly on Ahn's side," the potential first lady said in the phone call. Noting allegations against Democratic Party members, she also suggested sexual assault survivors only speak out if they are not paid enough.

"Conservatives make sure to pay," she said. "That's why we don't see #MeToo happening here... #MeToo cases happen when you don't pay your dues." The secretary who came forward with allegations against Ahn in 2018, and whose testimony helped send him to jail,

demanding "a sincere apology" for the comments. "Your thoughtless remarks have become the seed of second victimisation," Kim Ji-eun said in a statement released Monday. The People Power Party, for which Yoon is the nominee, had sought to block the airing of the phone conversations with a court injunction, which was thrown out Friday.

A local television channel broadcast the comments over the weekend. The party downplayed the comments yesterday, with party chairman Lee Jun-seok saying in a radio interview that they were "an expression of personal views". While South Korea is the world's 10th-largest economy and a leading technological power, it remains a patriarchal society with predominantly conservative social mores. Yoon, a former top prosecutor, is locked in a tight race with ruling-party candidate Lee Jae-myung with the polling gap between the candidates often falling within the margin for error. Incumbent President Moon Jae-in is legally barred from seeking a second term and is scheduled to step down in May. — AFP

Rescuers search for survivors after deadly Afghan quake

HERAT, Afghanistan: Rescuers searched yesterday for survivors of a powerful earthquake in a remote western region of Afghanistan that killed at least 22 people and caused "massive" damage to buildings, officials said. Monday afternoon's shallow 5.3-magnitude quake jolted Qadis district in Badghis province, a rural area not easily accessible by road.

"The earthquake caused massive damage to houses, about 700 to 1,000 have been damaged," Badghis provincial spokesman Baz Mohammad Sarwary said in a video message. Afghanistan is already in the grip of a humanitarian disaster, worsened by the Taliban

takeover of the country in August when Western countries froze international aid and access to assets held abroad. Sarwary said 22 people were killed and four were injured, revising the death toll from the previous figure of 26 he gave to AFP late Monday. "There is the possibility that the casualties could increase," he said in his latest video message.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the toll. Images circulating on social media showed residents, including children, searching through the rubble of collapsed homes. Government officials said rescue workers were helping search for survivors and transferring the injured to local hospitals. A Taliban team was in the area assisting in the relief work. Mujahid said that all government agencies had been instructed to provide the food, medical aid and shelter to those affected. "We also call on international aid agencies and humanitarian agencies to assist the victims of the disaster," he said in a statement posted on Twitter.

The epicentre of the quake was near the city of

Qala-i-Naw, the capital of Badghis, less than 100 kilometres (60 miles) from the Turkmenistan border, according to the United States Geological Survey. The United Nations has said it needs \$5 billion in 2022 to avert the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan.

A devastating drought has compounded the crisis, with earthquake-hit Qadis one of the worst affected areas. Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Even weak earthquakes can cause significant damage to poorly built homes and buildings in the impoverished country. In 2015, more than 380 people were killed in Pakistan and Afghanistan when a powerful 7.5-magnitude earthquake ripped across the two countries, with the bulk of the deaths in Pakistan.

In that disaster, 12 young Afghan girls were crushed to death in a stampede as they tried to flee their shaking school building. — AFP



COLOMBO: Handout photograph shows Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa addressing the assembly after opening a new session of the house in Colombo. Sri Lanka's president vowed yesterday 18 to change "misconceptions" of his country's human rights record. — AFP

Sri Lanka vows to fix 'misconceptions' over rights record

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's president vowed yesterday to change "misconceptions" of his country's human rights record, following years of international criticism over wartime atrocities and extrajudicial killings. Government troops were accused of systematic abuses during the island's decades-long separatist war against the Tamil Tigers insurgent group, including the killing of at least 40,000 civilians at the end of the conflict in 2009.

Sri Lanka has consistently denied the allegations. Authorities have also been blamed for the murder of journalists and activists over the years, and there have been several recent reports of criminal suspects being killed in police custody. But President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who took office in 2019, said his government's slate was clean and suggested it had been the victim of unwarranted criticism from abroad.

"We need to correct the misconceptions that have been taken to the international community in the past regarding our human rights," Rajapaksa said during an address to parliament. "During my tenure, the government did not support any form of human rights violations. We will also not leave room for any such act in the future."

Since Rajapaksa was elected, several high-profile underworld figures have been shot dead in police custody, while other suspects have been detained for long periods without trial. Rajapaksa was also the island's top defence official at the end of the war, under the presidency of his elder brother Mahinda.

Sri Lanka was censured by the UN Human Rights Council for failing to properly investigate grave human rights abuses at the end of the conflict. Last month, Rajapaksa appointed as provincial governor an ex-Navy chief accused of participating in the abduction and murder of a dozen children, in a scheme to extort their wealthy families.

Sri Lanka is currently in the grips of a slow-burning economic crisis that has triggered food rationing and rolling electricity cuts. The island was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the government has struggled to finance critical imports as a result of dwindling foreign exchange reserves. Rajapaksa told parliament that the country needed to again attract tourists for the economy's sake, but did not announce any new measures to address Sri Lanka's predicament. — AFP



JAKARTA: This undated handout showing computer-generated imagery released by Nyoman Nuarta on January 18, 2022 shows a design illustration of Indonesia's future presidential palace in East Kalimantan, as part of the country's relocation of its capital from slowly sinking Jakarta to a site 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) away on jungle-clad Borneo island that will be named "Nusantara". — AFP

Indonesia passes law for capital's move to Borneo

JAKARTA: Indonesia's parliament yesterday passed a law approving the relocation of its capital from slowly sinking Jakarta to a site 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) away on jungle-clad Borneo island that will be named "Nusantara".

The House of Representatives vote provides the legal framework for the move, which was first tipped by President Joko Widodo in April 2019, citing rising sea levels and severe congestion on densely populated Java island. Home to more than 30 million people in its greater metro area, Jakarta has long been plagued by serious infrastructure problems and flooding exacerbated by climate change, with

experts predicting up to a third of the city could be underwater by 2050.

The new capital will cover about 56,180 hectares (216 square miles) in East Kalimantan province on the Indonesian part of Borneo, which the country shares with Malaysia and Brunei. In all, 256,142 hectares have been set aside for the project, with the additional land intended for potential future expansion.

Early plans for the new capital depict a utopian design aimed at creating an environmentally friendly "smart" city, but few details have been confirmed. Plans to begin construction in 2020 were hampered by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Environmentalists critics of the capital's move have warned it could damage ecosystems in the region, where mining and palm oil plantations already threaten rainforests that are home to Borneo's endangered species. On Monday, Widodo said the new capital would be one "where the people are close from any destination, where they can bike and walk everywhere because there are zero emissions".

accused by Beijing of espionage and is facing a trial which started last year behind closed doors.

But the Australian foreign minister said in a radio interview that Yang was being held arbitrarily, and that Canberra was increasingly concerned about his well-being.

"We are concerned about his health and we've been consistently clear that he needs to be provided with the necessary treatment for both his physical and his mental health," Marise Payne said yesterday.

In response to Payne's comments, China's foreign ministry said the case was being handled "in strict accordance with the law."

"All legal rights and interests of Yang Jun have

"This (capital) will not only have government offices, we want to build a new smart metropolis that can be a magnet for global talent and a centre of innovation," he said in a speech at a local university. "Nusantara", which means "archipelago", was chosen from a list of 80 names because it was widely recognisable by Indonesians and easy to memorise, the nation's development minister, Suharso Monoarfa, said Monday.

The new city will be governed by a body dubbed the State Capital Authority, with leadership appointed to five-year terms directly by the president, according to yesterday's legislation. Budget details have not yet been revealed in a presidential decree, though previous reports have pegged the project's costs at \$33 billion.

Indonesia is not the first country in the region to relocate from an overpopulated capital. Malaysia moved its government to Putrajaya from Kuala Lumpur in 2003, while Myanmar moved its capital to Naypyidaw from Rangoon in 2006. — AFP

been fully protected," said foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian at a press briefing.

"We firmly oppose the Australian side's unjustifiable disruptions to the handling of the cases in accordance with the law and the gross interference in China's judicial sovereignty."

Yang, who denies the charges, was arrested on a rare return to China from his home in the United States in January 2019. The writer and academic — who also goes by his pen name Yang Hengjun — has previously told supporters he was tortured while at a secret detention site and fears forced confessions may be used against him.

Elaine Pearson, Australia director for Human

Rights Watch, wrote on Twitter that three years of detention in China "has exacerbated Yang Hengjun's medical problems & treatment in prison is inadequate."

She added that there was a "long list of human rights defenders who have died in Chinese custody or shortly after being released."

Yang is one of at least two Australians currently being detained in China, with TV anchor Cheng Lei having been held since August 2020.

Relations between the two countries have sharply deteriorated in recent years with disputes over everything from telecoms giant Huawei to the origins of COVID-19. — AFP

China rebuffs Australia over health of writer

BEIJING: Beijing yesterday pushed back against claims from Canberra that a detained Australian writer was being arbitrarily held and not receiving adequate medical support despite his declining health.

Chinese-born Australian Yang Jun has been

Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2022

OPEC: 'Robust' oil demand to overcome Omicron threat

Oil hits 7-year highs on recovery hopes, unrest

PARIS: Global demand for oil is expected to remain "robust" in 2022 and overcome short-term disruption caused by the Omicron coronavirus variant, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries said yesterday.

But the Saudi-led group of top oil producers warned future virus strains and pandemic-related travel restrictions could threaten the global economic recovery. The positive forecast comes as prices for the benchmark Brent crude oil reached their highest level since 2014.

Omicron's rapid worldwide spread forced countries to reimpose travel bans and social restrictions following its emergence in November. Studies have since suggested the highly transmissible variant causes less severe illness, providing optimism for a sustained economic recovery in 2022 driving demand for oil. OPEC's monthly oil market report provided a "robust oil demand forecast", with its estimate for growth of demand unchanged from previous predictions at 4.2 million barrels per day in 2022. Total global consumption is expected to reach 100.8 million barrels per day this year.

OPEC predicted Omicron's impact "to be mild and short-lived" but said "uncertainties remain regarding new variants and renewed mobility restrictions, amid an otherwise steady global economic recovery". Although "supply chain bottlenecks, ongoing trade issues and their impact on industrial and transportation fuel requirements remain key factors of uncertainty", the report said the oil market "is expected to remain well-supported throughout 2022".

Meanwhile, oil prices traded at the highest levels

in more than seven years yesterday, in part on hopes of a global economic recovery ramping up demand. Stock markets headed south with US Treasury yields surging on expectations the Federal Reserve will have to unveil several interest rate hikes to tackle a worrying spike in inflation. Expectations of Fed tightening continued to support the dollar.

European crude benchmark Brent North Sea reached \$88.13 per barrel, while US contract WTI hit \$85.74 — the highest levels since October 2014.

Also supporting prices was the claim of an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels in Abu Dhabi that triggered a fuel tank blast killing three people Monday, with the group warning civilians and foreign firms in the United Arab Emirates to avoid "vital installations".

The news fuelled concerns about supplies from the crude-rich region. "The suspected drone attack in Abu Dhabi underscores the ongoing threat against civilian and energy infrastructure in the region amid heightened regional tensions," said Torbjorn Soltvedt at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

"Reports of damage to fuel trucks and storage will concern oil market watchers, who are also keeping a close eye on the trajectory of ongoing nuclear talks between the US and Iran," he added.

OANDA analyst Craig Erlam said OPEC nations and other key producers struggling to meet targets to lift output by 400,000 barrels a month was adding to upward pressure. "The evidence suggests it's not that straightforward and the group is missing the targets by a large margin after a period of



TOKYO: The price of gasoline is seen on a board at a gas station in Chuo district of Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

underinvestment and outages," he noted.

"That should continue to be supportive for oil and increase talk of triple-figure prices."

Hopes for more monetary easing by major consumer China to reinforce its stuttering economy were also seen as a key support for the oil market.

As for equities, following an almost uninterrupted rally since the early days of the pandemic, stock markets are showing signs of leveling out as global

finance chiefs shift from economy-boosting largesse to measures aimed at reining in inflation. Still, there is an expectation that equities will enjoy further gains this year as countries reopen and people grow more confident about travel as concerns ease over the Omicron coronavirus variant. Analysts are also watching the corporate earnings season that is under way, with hopes that firms can match their stellar performances last year. —AFP

Chip crisis pushes European car sales to new low

PARIS: EU car sales fell to a new low last year as the auto sector was hobbled by the COVID pandemic and a shortage of computer chips, industry figures showed yesterday.

Registrations of new passenger cars in the EU slid by 2.4 percent in 2021, to 9.7 million vehicles, the worst performance since statistics began in 1990, according to data from the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA). That follows the historic fall of nearly 24 percent suffered in 2020 due to pandemic restrictions, and brought new car registrations in the EU to 3.3 million below the pre-crisis sales of 2019.

The lack of semiconductors, the computer chips used in a multitude of car systems in both traditional and electric vehicles, was the main reason holding the industry back. "This fall was the result of the semiconductor shortage that negatively impacted car production throughout the year, but especially during the second half of 2021," said the ACEA.

Car manufacturers initially downplayed the impact of the chip shortage, but it eventually led them to slow production and even idle factories. EU car sales did rebound strongly in the second quarter, but for most of the sec-

ond half they were down by around 20 percent. The short-term perspectives for supplies are not good.

"The start of 2022 will be difficult in terms of supplies of chips," Alexandre Marian at the AlixPartners consultancy said. "The situation should improve in the middle of the year, but that doesn't mean other problems won't crop up, concerning raw materials, supply chains and labour shortages," he said. The chip shortage is a consequence of the pandemic as manufacturers were disrupted by lockdowns and sick employees, as well as supply chain problems and increased global demand for electronics. The pandemic has also sent prices for many raw materials soaring and caused labour shortages in some areas.

Germany stuck in reverse

If the markets in France, Italy and Spain posted modest gains, a 10.1-percent drop in Germany dragged down the overall EU figure. Germany is by far Europe's largest car market, accounting for a quarter of total sales at over 2.6 million last year. If the shortage of semiconductors was the major factor holding back a rebound, the EU also underperformed compared to the other major markets



PARIS: EU car sales fell to a new low last year as the auto sector was hobbled by the COVID pandemic and a shortage of computer chips, industry figures showed yesterday.

where the recovery from the pandemic was stronger.

The Chinese car market grew by 4.4 percent and the US market by 3.7 percent. The decline in European sales may also reflect "the sharp increase in the average price of cars as well as an expectant attitude by consumers concerning electric vehicles which is pushing them to put off purchases and hold on to their current vehicle longer," said analysts at Inovev, an automotive data analytics firm.

Renault hits sales pothole

Europe's top three auto manufacturers all saw a drop in sales in the bloc. Volkswagen managed to retain the top spot, but a 4.8-percent drop in

sales to 1.4 million vehicles caused its market share to dip to 25.1 percent. Stellantis, which was formed from the merger of Italy's Fiat group and France's Peugeot-Citroen, suffered a smaller 2.1-percent drop to 2.1 million units, nudging its market share higher to 21.9 percent. Renault group suffered a 10-percent drop, with sales of its eponymous brand tumbling by 16 percent, while sales of both its low-cost Dacia brand and sporty Alpine brands rose. The French automotive group saw its market share narrow to 10.6 percent. Germany's BMW managed a 1.5-percent increase in registrations, but Daimler—the owner of the Mercedes and Smart brands—suffered a 12.4-percent drop. —AFP

UK jobs picture robust as Omicron struck

LONDON: Britain's unemployment rate dropped and payrolls recovered further at the end of last year despite the onset of the Omicron variant, official data showed yesterday. The unemployment rate fell to 4.1 percent in the three months to the end of November, from 4.2 percent in the quarter ending in October, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

The number of payrolled workers meanwhile jumped 0.6 percent in December from November, the ONS added. "The number of employees on payrolls continued to grow strongly in December, with the total now well above pre-pandemic levels," said ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan. He added that the unemployment rate "fell back almost to where it was before COVID-19 hit".

Morgan noted however that job vacancies were growing at a slower

pace compared with last summer and that real wages in November fell on the year for the first time since mid-2020 following a spike to inflation. All eyes will be on the latest UK inflation data due out today, as consumers and businesses struggle with surging costs.

"Rising inflation means that squeezed incomes joins the difficulties firms are facing filling vacancies as major challenges in the UK labour market," Matthew Percival, director of employment at Britain's main lobby group the CBI, said following yesterday's jobs data. "To break this cycle and deliver sustainably rising living standards, the UK needs a plan to unleash business investment and raise ambitions for growth."

Jobs market 'thriving'

Economies are battling against decades-high inflation that is forcing central banks to hike interest rates, including the Bank of England which last month raised its key borrowing cost to 0.25 percent.

The rate was increased from a record-low level of 0.1 percent. At the same time, Britain's economy has sur-



LONDON: In this file photo, commuters walk over London Bridge during the morning rush hour in central London. —AFP

passed its pre-pandemic level after recording strong growth in November, recent official data showed. British finance minister Rishi Sunak said yesterday's unemployment figures "are proof that the jobs market is thriving, with employee numbers rising to record levels, and redundancy notifications at their lowest levels

since 2006 in December". Some analysts however cautioned over the immediate outlook, amid energy bills soaring during the UK winter.

Average pay falling in real terms was "an unwelcome development which is likely to worsen over the next few months", said EY ITEM Club economist Martin Beck. —AFP

US airlines warn of 'calamity' if 5G deployed near airports

WASHINGTON: The chief executives of America's largest airlines warned of a "catastrophic disruption" to travel and shipping operations if telecommunication firms roll out their 5G technology as planned today without limiting the technology near US airports.

Verizon and AT&T have already twice delayed the launch of their new C-Band 5G service, due to warnings from airlines and aircraft manufacturers concerned that the new system might interfere with the devices planes use to measure altitude.

"We are writing with urgency to request that 5G be implemented everywhere in the country except within the approximate two miles of airport runways as defined by the FAA on January 19, 2022," the CEOs said in a Monday letter



BARCELONA: In this file photo, a 5G hotspot sign is displayed at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona. —AFP

obtained by AFP. The executives, writing to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and other US government officials, highlighted the risk of "economic calamity" should Verizon and AT&T proceed with deploying the new technology before the necessary upgrades and changes have been made to aviation equipment.

"To be blunt, the nation's commerce will grind to a halt," they said. The Federal Aviation Administration said Sunday it had approved some transponders to be safely operated within areas where 5G will be deployed, clearing "as many as 48 of the 88 airports most directly affected by 5G C-Band interference." But the airlines are worried that remaining limitations at those airports, as well as a large amount of equipment still uncertified, could trigger a crisis including the grounding of thousands of flights.

In addition to the transport secretary, their letter was addressed to the head of the FAA, the head of the Federal Communications Commission and the White House's National Economic Council. US airlines also have protested against the potential costs incurred. —AFP

Business

Desperate Afghans queue for free bread as poverty crisis deepens

Taleban takeover worsens Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis

KABUL: In the early hours of each morning, Muhajira rushes in freezing temperatures to a modest bakery in the Afghan capital to wait for warm naan bread to be distributed. On some days, it is all her family, and the others who have joined the queue, will eat for the day.

"If I don't bring bread from here, we will go to bed hungry," mother of two Muhajira Amanallah told AFP yesterday. "I even thought of selling my daughters, but I backed down and relied on God alone."

Afghanistan is in the grip of a humanitarian disaster, worsened by the Taleban takeover in August — when Western countries froze international aid and access to assets held abroad. Jobs have dried up and many government workers have not been paid for months in the country, which was almost entirely dependent on foreign donations under the previous US-backed government.

The United Nations has warned that half the country is threatened with food shortages. The bread distribution launched on Saturday is part of the Save Afghans From Hunger campaign organized by a Kabul university professor.

At least 75 families in seven districts of the capital, currently blanketed in snow, will receive daily naan rations for a month. In the queue, Nouriya stands alongside five other women, all in the blue burqa that the Taleban encourages women in the country to wear.

After the death of her husband she got handouts from friends, but that has ended. "We eat rice or



KABUL: People stand as they receive free bread distributed as part of the Save Afghans From Hunger campaign in front of a bakery in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

soup made with carrots and turnips... and we put pieces of bread in it instead of meat," said Nouriya, a mother of five.

While men and women wait for their share of bread, children play, some wearing tattered shoes

too big for them. As the last person left the bakery, owner Makram El-Din said: "People have lost their jobs, and they no longer have any income. We used to use four sacks of flour a day, now we only use one and a half." — AFP

Germany, France show divisions on EU budget rules

BRUSSELS: Germany and France laid out differing visions for the future of the European economy Monday, signaling a fight later this year to overhaul the bloc's strict rules on government spending. The EU wants to simplify the decades old regulations on running national budgets, and the positions taken by the eurozone's top two economies will drive the debate.

The rules force members of the eurozone to cooperate when drawing up their spending plans, an exercise that gained importance after the debt crisis of 2010-15, which nearly sank the single currency.

Berlin's new finance minister, Christian Lindner, was attending his first meeting with his eurozone counterparts, and made it clear that his focus will be on keeping spending under control. Though part of a newly installed coalition with the center left and greens, Lindner comes from the liberal FDP, which has traditionally held to a sound spending, zero deficit policy.

"It is crucial that we continue to pay attention to the importance of the fiscal rules," Lindner said as he arrived for the talks. "Fiscal rules are crucial to maintaining the credibility of governments vis-a-vis the capital markets."

The rules, known as the stability and growth pact, limit government debt to 60 percent of an economy's annual GDP and its yearly deficit to three percent.

Constructive spirit

The debt rule is often broken and France and Belgium have joined Italy, Spain and Greece with debt ratios of more than 100 percent, reflecting years of overspending. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rules were suspended and are due back into force at the end of the year, hopefully with new benchmarks in place. "I'm very much in favor of reducing sovereign debt and this is one of the important details," Lindner said. But French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire insisted the bloc's energy should be directed towards



BRUSSELS: Greek Finance Minister Christos Staikouras talks with Michael Argyrou, Chairman of Greece's Council of Economic Advisors during a Eurogroup meeting at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Monday. — AFP

growth, especially since Europe's COVID-era recovery is trailing that of the United States.

"It must be a growth pact first. Growth comes before stability," Le Maire said, with France in favor of allowing the massive investments needed to green Europe's economy to be absolved from the rules.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, speaking during a visit to Spain, defended the pact. "Europe must continue to march together in the coming years and we'll do so ... on the basis of our stability and growth pact, which provides an important framework," he said, pointing out that it served as the basis underpinning the bloc's COVID-19 economic recovery plan.

The discussion is not expected to begin in earnest until June, Lindner told reporters, when the European Commission is expected to table its proposal to amend the rules. The commission's executive vice president, Valdis Dombrovskis, said it held no "pre-cooked ideas or predetermined positions," and the EU's executive would listen to member states in a "constructive spirit." The debate will rumble on until at least EU leaders meet at a summit dedicated to the topic in March. — AFP

in the surrounding industrial area. Some of the factories have been mothballed for years.

"Just that tells you what sanctions are," Jokonya said. He refers to one of his biggest wounds suffered by the Zimbabwean economy—US-led sanctions imposed two decades ago when then president Robert Mugabe launched a violent election crackdown. Intended to apply to the elite, the sanctions imposed travel bans and a freeze on assets held top Zimbabwean officials.

But the measures have had a far-reaching and probably unintended impact on the Zimbabwean economy by strangling the country's access to the international banking system.

To take the case of Imperial Refrigeration, Jokonya wanted to get a loan to expand production at Imperial. All his equipment needs to be imported, for which he has to pay in US dollars.

But the American law, known as the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (Zidera), forbids global lenders from working with Zimbabwe. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are usually the first line of support for countries in financial trouble.

Zimbabwe has not met all of the requirements for IMF support—and Zidera means there is little incentive for Harare to try, or for the IMF to look at compromises. Private banks also struggle to access international funds. Zidera imposes stiff penalties for companies who deal with companies targeted by the law. The result is that Zimbabwe has meager supplies of US dollars at home, and it is risky for entrepreneurs to seek access to greenbacks abroad via private banks.

A UN expert said after a visit in November that 87 financial institutions had stopped doing business with Zimbabwe for fear of running afoul of the sanctions. Foreign leaders often have much leeway to adjust sanctions over time. But in the case of Zidera, the punishment is enshrined in US law, which would require any changes to be endorsed by Congress.—AFP

US sanctions on Zimbabwe's elite ricochet across economy

HARARE: Callisto Jokonya stands in the cavernous factory of Imperial Refrigeration and recalls the halcyon days. In the 1990s, his factory, located in the Zimbabwean capital Harare, was buzzing.

It had a workforce of 350 people, who cranked out 20,000 refrigerators per year. Today, the company employs just 50 people, and annual output is just 1,000 units. Weeds grow outside many of the buildings



HARARE: Blessing Dzinzi, who is a self-employed craftsman, stands among his rudimentary handmade deep chip fryers for sale at an open market in Mbare, Harare. — AFP

Microsoft to buy US gaming giant Activision Blizzard

WASHINGTON: Microsoft announced yesterday a \$69 billion deal to purchase US gaming giant Activision Blizzard, the firm behind hits like "Call of Duty" that has been hit by allegations of sex discrimination against women. "This acquisition will accelerate the growth in Microsoft's gaming business across mobile, PC, console and cloud and will provide building blocks for the metaverse," Microsoft said in a statement.

Activision, the California-based maker of "Candy Crush" has been hit by employee protests, departures, and a state lawsuit alleging it enabled toxic workplace conditions and sexual harassment against women. Over the past seven months the company has received about 700 reports of employee concerns over sexual assault or harassment or other misconduct, in some cases separate reports about the same incident, The Wall Street Journal has reported.—AFP

BoJ lifts inflation forecast, no policy change

TOKYO: Japan's central bank revised its inflation forecast yesterday and adjusted its view of price risks, while leaving its monetary easing policy in place in a nod to lingering pandemic uncertainty. As prices rise swiftly in other economies, Japan's inflation remains relatively feeble, and still far below the long-held two percent target seen as necessary to turbo-charge the world's third largest economy.

In a quarterly report on prices and the economy, the central bank said it now forecasts inflation of 1.1 percent for the fiscal year to March 2023, up from its previous forecast of 0.9 percent.

It also revised up its forecast for the fiscal year to March 2024 to 1.1 percent from 1.0 percent, leaving the projection for the current year unchanged. "The projected rate of increase in the CPI (consumer price index) for fiscal 2022 is somewhat higher, mainly reflecting a rise in commodity prices and the pass-through of that rise to consumer prices," the central bank said.

It declared "risks to prices are generally balanced," adjusting its previous assessment of risk as "skewed to the downside." The BoJ revised down its growth forecast for the current fiscal year to 2.8 percent from the previous 3.4 percent.

But it now sees faster-than-expected 3.8 percent growth in the fiscal year to March 2023, with a slight downward revision of 1.1 percent growth in the year to March 2024. "Risks to economic activity are skewed to the downside for the time being, mainly due to the impact of COVID-19," it added.

The central bank maintained its longstanding target of two-percent inflation, which remains far off despite years of efforts and prices surging globally. Even with the latest upward revision in prices, "a change in (the BoJ's) policy stance is hard to imagine" as the inflation

target "is still far away," said economist Masamichi Adachi of UBS in a note ahead of the decision.

"With no Board member expecting inflation to come close to the two percent target for the foreseeable future, talk of policy tightening is premature," added Marcel Thieliand, senior Japan economist at Capital Economics. "We are even more pessimistic than the Bank about the medium-term outlook for inflation," he added in a note. "We're sticking to our view that the Bank will keep interest rates low for the foreseeable future."

Meanwhile, Tokyo stocks closed lower yesterday as investors awaited a press conference by the Bank of Japan's governor after the central bank revised up inflation forecasts. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index closed down 0.27 percent or 76.27 points at 28,257.25, while the broader Topix index ended down 0.42 percent or 8.33 points at 1,978.38.

"After the Bank of Japan announced it was keeping its monetary policy unchanged, the focus is on how to interpret the Bank's revision of inflation forecasts," Mutsumi Kanamori, a strategist at Daiwa Securities, said in a commentary. During late morning Tokyo trade, Japan's central bank said it had revised up its inflation forecast and adjusted its view of price risks, while leaving its monetary easing policy in place in a nod to lingering pandemic uncertainty.

Investors were awaiting bank governor Haruhiko Kuroda's press conference after the market close "to confirm the Bank of Japan's mid- to long-term policy" as pressure to fight inflation in other developed economies grows, she added. The situation in Japan is different, as even the revised inflation estimates still fall well below the bank's long-held two percent target. Among major shares in Tokyo, Shionogi was down 1.23 percent at 7,388 yen despite a report the drugmaker has entered into the final phase of clinical trials for a COVID-19 vaccine it is developing.

Panasonic was down 0.72 percent at 1,318.5 yen and investment giant SoftBank Group was off 0.40 percent at 5,508 yen. But Uniqlo casual wear operator Fast Retailing rallied 2.37 percent to 66,640 yen, and industrial robot maker Fanuc was up 0.52 percent at 23,020 yen. The dollar fetched 114.83 yen in Asian trade, against 114.58 yen late Monday in London. — AFP



TOKYO: Japan's inflation remains relatively feeble, and still far below the long-held two percent target seen as necessary to turbo-charge the world's third largest economy.

German investor morale rebounds despite supply crunch

BERLIN: Confidence among investors in Germany jumped in January, according to figures published yesterday, shaking off concerns about global supply chain disruptions and the spread of the Omicron variant. The ZEW institute's monthly barometer measuring economic expectations rose 21.8 points to 51.7 to begin the new year despite difficult circumstances.

Investors assessment of the current economic situation dipped again, down 2.8 points to minus 10.2, after Europe's largest economy more than likely shrank

in the last quarter of 2021. The period of economic weakness "should soon be overcome", ZEW president Achim Wambach said.

Investors expected growth to "improve in the first half of the year", Wambach said, attributing the increasing positivity to expectations the "incidence of the coronavirus would diminish" over the coming months. The German economy has been beset by supply chain disruptions that have held back industrial production and growth.

Last week, the federal statistics agency said that early estimates showed the economy had shrunk "between 0.5 and one percent" in the last three months of 2021 on the back of bottlenecks and new health restrictions. Shortages of semiconductors, a key component in both conventional and electric vehicles, have hit the country's flagship auto sector particularly hard.—AFP

KAMCO REPORT ON GCC IPOs 2021

GCC IPOs had a standout year in 2021 supported by valuations

Global IPO issuances in 2021 witness highest activity in 20 years

KUWAIT: After remaining active in 2020, GCC IPO issuances had a standout year in 2021, supported by secondary market valuations, and global cues in terms of performance and liquidity. Total number of IPOs from the GCC increased to 20 issuances in 2021, from 7 issuances in 2020, as per our analysis. Proceeds for 2021 from GCC issuers jumped almost 4.6x to \$7.52 billion from \$1.64 billion in 2020, based on Bloomberg and PWC estimates.

IPO activity within the region picked up in-line with global IPO activity, while secondary market performance and valuations supported issuers' pursuits to come to primary capital markets, as the MSCI GCC was up 34.9 percent in 2021.

Saudi Arabia maintained its leadership position for IPO issuances from the region in 2021, as 15 out of the 20 GCC IPOs debuted on either the Tadawul or the Nomu. Saudi Arabia dominated in terms of IPO proceeds, raking in almost 62 percent of the issuances at around \$4.65 billion in 2021. Saudi Arabia also registered the largest IPO in the region in 2021 with ACWA Power (\$1.21 billion). ADX was the other active market with 3 deals and proceeds of \$2.63 billion, and witnessed the second largest regional issuance of 2021 with the IPO of ADNOC Drilling (\$1.10 billion). Separately, similar to global trends, SPAC IPOs were also sponsored from the GCC, with the IPO of Blue Whale Acquisition Corp I (\$229 million) from Mubadala Capital listed on Nasdaq, as per Bloomberg. Blue Whale I will focus on high-quality growth companies in the media, entertainment, and technology, and is included in our IPO deals list for 2021.

Global IPO issuances in 2021

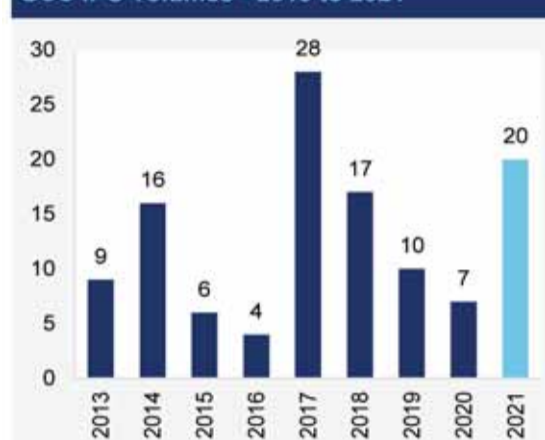
The COVID-19 vaccine rollout optimism, rebound in global economic activity, stimulus-led liquidity, and strong stock market performance pushed global IPO markets in 2021 to witness its best year in 20 years, with 2,388 deals raising \$453.3 billion as per EY. Deal numbers were reportedly up by 64 percent y-o-y, while issuance proceeds jumped by 67 percent y-o-y. Technology (611 deals, proceeds of \$147.5 billion), Healthcare (376 deals, proceeds of \$65.4 billion) and Industrials (310 deals, proceeds of \$63.1 billion) led 2021 glob-

al IPO sectoral activity, with both Technology and Healthcare witnessing record-breaking deal numbers and proceeds in 2021, bettering record numbers set in 2020, as per EY. SPAC IPO activity continued to remain popular, as deal numbers and proceeds increased by 136 percent and 97 percent y-o-y, respectively, as per EY. The number of unicorn IPOs also reportedly doubled in 2021 with 79 unicorn IPOs raising total proceeds of \$83 billion (2020: 31 unicorn IPOs for \$31.6 billion). Potential headwinds for GCC IPO activity in 2022; but market valuations will have final say. A number of potential risks do appear in 2022, that could impact IPO activity within the region, after a stellar 2021 performance. However, IPO pipelines remain strong from both corporates and potential listings of state-owned assets. Saudi Arabia's stock exchange reportedly has 50 applications for IPOs in 2022, while Dubai announced the listing of 10 government and state-owned companies for the year. Regulators are also considering different vehicles such as SPACs and market maker funds to improve liquidity and participation within their respective stock markets. We therefore believe that a strong pipeline, steady market valuations and regulator support are enough catalysts to keep GCC IPO market activity strong in 2022, and expect Saudi and UAE (DFM & ADX) stock exchanges to continue to lead the region in terms of issuances.

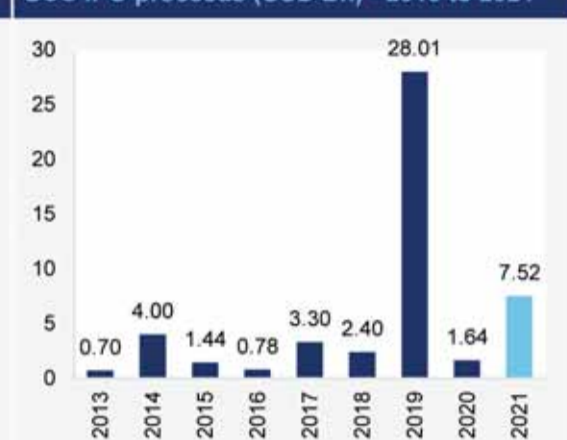
GCC IPO proceeds

Globally, the highest growth was registered from EMEA exchanges as deal numbers and proceeds grew by 158 percent and 214 percent respectively y-o-y, as per EY, reportedly due to the pent-up demand, that was held back as the European markets navigated Brexit and other geopolitical factors. The US continued to reportedly dominate global IPO markets, as it contributed to around 80 percent of the Americas region deals, pushing the regional deal count higher by 87 percent y-o-y to 528 deals, while issuances reached \$174.6 billion. In Asia-Pacific, issuances continued to climb in 2021, with deal numbers (1,136) and proceeds (\$169.3 billion) up 28 percent and 22 percent respectively y-o-y, as per EY. Growth was however relatively more mod-

GCC IPO volumes - 2013 to 2021



GCC IPO proceeds (USD Bn) - 2013 to 2021



Source: Kamco Invest Research, Bloomberg, PWC. IPOs include international issuances from corporates domiciled/headquartered or doing business within GCC

est than witnessed in prior years, as activity on Mainland China and Hong Kong stock exchanges slowed in H2-2021, reportedly due to tighter regulations on Chinese companies looking to complete an overseas IPO and certain sectoral policy changes.

In terms of sectoral split, Consumer (5) led all sectors in terms of deal numbers, with participation from both consumer staples and consumer discretionary plays. Technology (3) and Industrials (3) were the other broad sectors which saw IPO forays; however, it is important to note that most corporates that took to primary market issuances had distinct product lines and business models to peers. Apart from IPOs, GCC corporates also took the direct listing route, which was once again dominated by Saudi Arabia, as the Nomu witnessed 8 direct listing deals, which included Watani Steel, Banan Real Estate and Natural Gas Distribution. The Qatar Exchange Venture Market Program (QEVMP), where SMEs are listed and trading, saw the direct listings of Al Fahh Educational Holding and Mekdam Holding Group (Mekdam). Kuwait witnessed the direct listing of industrials player Jassim Transport & Stevedoring Co. Similar to H2-2020, GCC IPO markets were particularly active in H2-2021.

Regulators and government support also con-

tributed to enhance primary market activity, as Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) remains well on course to achieving certain parameters of its new "ADX ONE" strategy announced in early 2021, like the doubling market capitalization over the next three years. Other parameters that were announced were the increase of market liquidity, initiatives to launch derivatives trading, an investor relations guide and a program to support research coverage of stocks, further improving market efficiency. Separately, Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) announced the launch of the QE Venture Market (QEVMP), which provides a listing and trading venue for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that do not fulfill the listing requirements of the main market.

Potential risks for regional IPO markets include new waves and variants of COVID-19, interest rate hikes, global supply chain disruptions, geopolitics, stock market volatility and oil price volatility. Nevertheless, we expect secondary market valuations and stock market performance to be the more important considerations for corporates and potential IPO forays in 2022, as GCC corporates would like to capitalize on valuations and liquidity that currently prevail in the market.

KFH awareness campaign for customers with special needs

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues its efforts in highlighting the banking services and rights of customers with special needs. This comes as part of the bank's efforts to support the banking awareness campaign "Be Aware". KFH offers all services to this segment of customers to ensure that they obtain banking services without incurring any additional fees or costs. This includes allocating a special branch for them in each governorate, with adequate car parks, wheelchairs, and other means necessary for customers with special needs.

Banks also allow at least one ATM machine in the branch that provides banking services for people with special needs, which can be easily accessed. It provides complete privacy to the customer through a glass room that opens with the card and enables the usage of headphones.

Additionally, KFH provides safe-deposit box services, staff trained in sign language to communicate with this segment of customers, and forms for account opening and other contracts and financial transactions printed in the Braille system. In addition, KFH provides voice service on the bank's website, which makes it easier for the customer to obtain banking services through the Internet.

KFH is keen on providing its services to people with special needs in an optimal manner. This supports its strategy in serving all customer segments, while facilitating their access to banking services easily and as per the highest quality and safety standards. KFH supports the "Be Aware" campaign activities with the aim of spreading financial education in society and raising awareness among the public about their rights regarding dealing with banks, so that they are aware of financial and banking transactions. This is through publishing videos, educational materials and awareness messages through the bank's social media channels, website, ATM screens, display screens in branches, in addition to newspapers and other media outlets.

The "Be Aware" campaign addresses several topics, such as the consumer and housing finance process, banking cards, awareness of the rights of customers with special needs, advice related to cybersecurity and the protection of bank accounts, clarifying the mechanisms for submitting a complaint and protecting the rights of customers, as well as introducing the functions of the banking sector and its role in stimulating and developing the economy.

Huawei Watch GT 3 Moon Phase Collection II

KUWAIT: The new Huawei Watch GT 3 - Moon Phase Collection II has already hit the shelves and is creating a frenzy amongst media and end users. It features the stunning design of the new Moon Phase Collection II, up to 14-days battery life, all-day health management, 100+ workout modes, and convenient life assistant features. Also, it can connect with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices. Now we know you must have many questions as to what's so special about this so we rounded up the below for you!

What's so special about it?

Traditionally, moon phase complications have been seen on high-end classic watches. The significance of the Huawei GT 3 Moon Phase Collection II is that it brings you the look and luxurious feel of the moon phase complication to a smartwatch. It also allows you to observe the different phases of the moon as it changes, ranging from new moon, full moon, quarter moon and more.

Besides, the design of the watch is also stunning and fashionable. This time around, you get the always-on display and an ultra-clear and large screen that allows more room to display things that matter to you. The watch strikes the perfect balance between traditional and modern design aesthetics. While the watch inherits the classic rounded design, the minimalist lugs and lightweight design give it a futuristic feel. Furthermore, you can change or customize it to your taste using a variety of straps.

Two weeks battery life

Unbelievable, isn't it? But it's true, the larger

Scotland moves ahead with vast wind power projects

LONDON: Scotland, fresh from hosting the COP26 climate summit, on Monday awarded offshore wind project concessions for almost £700 million (\$960 million, 840 million euros). Crown Estate Scotland announced in a statement that it has granted 17 concessions via an auction process to energy companies including BP, Royal Dutch Shell and SSE, as well as Spain's Iberdrola and France's TotalEnergies.

The final awards received a total of 74 bids, totalling £699.2 million in the first leasing round in a decade, according to the public investment body which hailed it as a "move towards a net zero economy". Scotland's planned new projects will have a combined power generation capacity of 25 gigawatts (GW) — which is equal to Europe's current offshore wind power capacity.

The news comes after Glasgow played host to

46mm model of the Huawei Watch GT 3 has a battery life of 14 days. If you are going for the smaller 42mm model, you get a battery life of 7 days, which is also pretty good. Having a long battery life makes the watch a whole lot more convenient to use. First of all, you don't have to take it off your wrist every day to charge it. Secondly, as you can wear the watch all day long and even to bed, it makes the watch an excellent health management gadget.

Are the health-management features on the watch anything to be excited about?

The Huawei Watch GT 3 has made some huge leaps in health management. There are extensive improvements in terms of hardware and software. The watch can monitor accurately monitor blood oxygen (SpO2), sleep, respiratory health, stress levels, etc., continuously in real-time. The watch features the Huawei TruSleep 2.0 technology, which is currently one of the best sleep monitoring technology around. As you can synchronize all the health data with the Huawei Health App, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to keep track of your family's health. Well, rocket scientists haven't got much to do with health; but a fitting figure of speech nonetheless. The watch will remind you to complete health challenges, daily water intake, take medications, and daily mindfulness to help you cultivate healthy habits even with a hectic lifestyle.

How can I make the most out of the watch disciplined workout features?

Whether you are a fitness enthusiast or somebody trying to get into shape, the Huawei Watch GT 3 has everything you will need. The most important part of it is the Huawei TruSeen 5.0+ heart rate monitoring technology. It has a precision of 5bpm while consuming very little power. The technology combines special ergonomic design and optimized motion interference noise reduction algorithm to effectively avoid interference in running, walking, cycling and other sports. Position tracking is also



greatly improved with the new Dual-Band Five-System GNSS positioning technology. The watch can measure every bit of effort you put into running and walking sessions.

If you are into running, you must take advantage of the personalized scientific running plans. Unlike traditional running plans that are rigid and don't adapt to the user's ability and needs, the Huawei Watch GT 3 provides you with a personalized running plan that continuously adapts to your habits and physical condition. Furthermore, you can set your training goals, and the watch will give you customized training plans. During the training, you will receive real-time voice reminders about the training goals and status.

It's not just about running, either. The watch offers over 100 workout modes, including 18 professional workout modes. The 12 outdoor workout modes on the watch are running, walking, mountain climbing, hiking, cross-country running, cycling, open water swimming, triathlon, skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, and golf. There are 7 indoor workout modes, as well.

the COP26 United Nations climate summit in November, when major world powers agreed to curb the use of fossil fuels.

"Today's results are a fantastic vote of confidence in Scotland's ability to transform our energy sector," said Crown Estate Scotland boss Simon Hodge in the statement. "In addition to the environmental benefits, this also represents a major investment in the Scottish economy," he added.

Most of Scotland's planned new sites are on the east, north east or northern coast, with just one on the western side of the devolved nation.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who heads Scotland's pro-independence administration, praised the announcement. Sturgeon said Monday was "possibly one of the most significant days in energy and industrial terms that Scotland has seen for a very, very long time".

The proposed 17 developments—a combination of floating, fixed and mixed turbines—will cover more than 7,000 square kilometers of seabed. "I think it's hard-really hard—to overstate the significance of today's announcement for our energy, environmental and economic future," said Sturgeon.

"What's been announced today—although there's lots of work to be done to bring it to fruition—really



GLASGOW: Wind turbines operated by ScottishPower Renewables, are pictured at Whitelee Onshore Windfarm on Eaglesham Moor, southwest of Glasgow, on Monday. — AFP

has the potential not just to meet energy needs from renewable sources, but to position us as a major exporter in renewable energy and green hydrogen, but it also brings massive opportunities for the economy." — AFP



Qasr Iraq Al-Amir: Hallmark of Hellenistic architecture

Qasr Iraq Al-Amir, an ancient sight located on the outskirts of Jordanian capital of Amman is considered a hallmark of Hellenistic era architecture as it is most notable for its large stone masses. The naming, Iraq Al-Amir, is of Sumerian origins and the word "Iraq" means cave. It is named so as the area is riddled with caves, and similar in properties to Iraq Al-Dub area in Ajlun northwest of the country.

The palace is believed to have been built during the reign of Hyrcanus, head of the Tobiad family and governor of Ammon who lived during the second century BCE, and is considered last of the Ammouni kings. Visitors of the ancient ruins can enjoy a scenic route of lush greenery and running water as the road leading up to it goes through Seer Valley. — KUNA



Photo shows 'The Enigma' - a 555.55 carat black diamond, at Sotheby's in the Gulf emirate of Dubai. — AFP photos

Black diamond, largest ever cut, goes on show in Dubai



The world's largest known cut diamond went on public display for the first time Monday 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. The diamond is believed to have been created when a meteorite or an asteroid hit the Earth more than 2.6 billion years ago, according to Sotheby's auction house jewelry specialist Sophie Stevens.



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. Its shape was inspired by the Middle East palm-shaped symbol of power and protection, the Hamsa, which is also associated with the number five. "It is very different," said Stevens of the jewel, which holds a Guinness World Record as the largest cut diamond.

After being on show in Dubai the Enigma will also be taken to Los Angeles and London, before a seven day online auction starts on February 3. What Sotheby's called a "cosmic wonder" could very well go to a bitcoin bidder, Stevens said. "We are accepting cryptocurrency for the diamond, which we have done for other important stones," she said. Last year in Hong Kong, the Key 10138 diamond sold for 12.3 million dollars which was paid in cryptocurrency. — AFP



Indian cowboys grab the bull by the horns at Jallikattu

Teams of daring young men grappled in the dirt with furious bucking bulls on Monday at an often-lethal Indian festival that has been a proverbial red rag to animal rights activists. "Jallikattu," or the taming of the bulls, is a hugely popular annual event in Tamil Nadu state, where revelers wrestle the beasts into submission as they run past crowds of people. The animals, often festooned with marigold flowers, are released from pens and young men try to grab them by their sharpened horns or humps.

Prizes for the best bull-tamers range from cars, motorcycles and fridges to television sets, gold coins and furniture. Jallikattu remains wildly popular despite the danger of the spectacle. One teenage spectator

was gored by a bull on Friday and brought to hospital where he was declared dead, local media reported. Fatalities are common, with several killed in recent years after bulls broke through the barricades separating fans from the action in the arena.

Controversy has also raged over the treatment of the animals. Activists say they are fed alcohol and chilli powder is thrown in their faces to make them aggressive before the contest. India's Supreme Court outlawed Jallikattu in 2016 after animal rights groups argued the bulls were abused. The court ruling triggered widespread protests in the state capital Chennai and other major cities, and the state government issued an executive order to allow the festival to resume a year later.

Organizers and politicians in Tamil Nadu have denied the animals are mistreated, and fans describe Jallikattu as a crucial part of the area's culture and identity. "This is very ancient, it dates back since the time of my grandfather's grandfather," Ayyanan Subbaiah, a farmer at the festival, told AFP. The number of competitors was lower this year, however, as India sees a recent surge in Covid-19 cases with the spread of the Omicron variant. The festival capped the number of bulls at 800 - two-thirds of the usual number - and all bull-tamers required full vaccination. - AFP



Participants try to control a bull during an annual bull taming event 'Jallikattu' in Palamedu village on the outskirts of Madurai in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.



A participant tries to control a bull during an annual bull taming event 'Jallikattu' in Palamedu village on the outskirts of Madurai in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. — AFP photos



Horsemen ride through a bonfire in the village of San Bartolome de Pinares in the province of Avila in central Spain, during the traditional religious festival of 'Las Luminarias' in honor of San Antonio Abad (Saint Anthony), patron saint of animals. — AFP photos

IN ANCIENT RITE, SPANISH HORSES BRAVE FIRE TO FIGHT VIRUS

At full gallop, the horse emerges from the darkness and races through a string of bonfires in an ancient ritual to ward off sickness performed every January in a tiny Spanish village. Known as Luminarias, the festival takes place every January 16 in San Bartolome de Pinares, a village perched high in the hills about 100 kilometers west of Madrid.

By the light of an almost full moon, several local officials are sweating copiously, despite freezing temperatures, as they pile branches onto the bonfires blazing along the main street of this village of just 600 residents. As the bells ring out, there's a sudden clatter of hooves as the first horse and rider come charging out. After the first horse passes another follows, then a group of them, sparks flying from their hooves as they gallop down the street, cheered on by hundreds of onlookers here to witness this mystical, medieval-like spectacle.

The tradition takes place every year on the eve of the feast of San Anton, Spain's patron saint of animals, and dates back to the 18th century when an epidemic devastated the horse population. "Before when

animal died because of infection, they had to be burned," said Leticia Martin, a 29-year-old physiotherapist riding a horse called Fiel. "So when the epidemic disappeared, people began to believe that the smoke protected the animals."

Purifying fire

"These fires, which purify animals from all diseases, are lit on the eve of San Anton's day, which is celebrated on January 17," said Anton Erkoreka of the Museum of the History of Medicine in Spain's Basque Country region. During the feast, masses are held across Spain to bless animals. "Fire is always a purifying element and this festival asks the saint for his protection on animals." In other Spanish villages, bonfires are lit at different times of the year to remember earlier plagues and epidemics, although the global pandemic has given the Luminarias festival a slightly new dimension.

But locals such as Emmanuel Martin insist the tradition has nothing to do with Covid. It is only about blessing the animals and keeping them "healthy all year round as the smoke from the green branches

purifies them", he says. "It's not a show to entertain people," insists this 26-year-old who first witnessed the event when he was two years old. Urged on by the crowd, one rider crosses the bonfires with his arms spread wide in a cross, his horse's mane plaited, its tail rolled up in a type of

topknot, to avoid catching fire.

Adrenaline

Although the tradition is widely criticized by animal rights groups, Martin insists it doesn't harm the horse nor the rider. "You don't even notice it," says his cousin

Andrea Lenela, who compares it to brushing a finger quickly through the flame of a cigarette lighter. Every year, the event is attended by vets and firefighters brought in by the local authorities. "If I thought there was any risk to the horses, I wouldn't do it," says local resident Mario Candil.

"Nothing has ever happened to anyone, ever," insists Monce Garcia, 49, who has come along to enjoy the "atmosphere, the smoke and the typical village tradition". Dismounting from her horse, a 46-year-old pharmacist Noelia Guerra speaks animatedly about "the emotions and the adrenaline" which flood through both horse and rider.

"You don't have to force them, they just go on their own," she says of the festival, which was celebrated this year for the first time since the pandemic began. "In this village, there wasn't a single case of Covid until December 2021," when Omicron arrived, says Leticia Martin. "We laughed about that, saying it was because we didn't celebrate the Luminarias in January 2021." — AFP

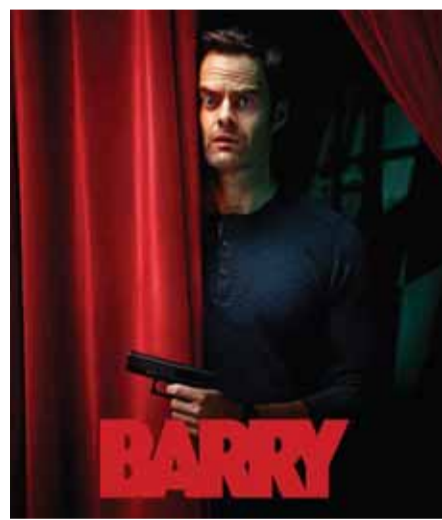


OSN strengthens its partnership with HBO

OSN, the region's leading entertainment hub, yesterday announced that it has further strengthened its partnership with HBO and extended its exclusive licensing agreement. The agreement cements OSN's position as the exclusive home for HBO programming across the MENA region. As part of the deal, OSN Streaming will be the exclusive home to complete boxsets for all your favourite HBO series including Game of Thrones, The Sopranos, Sex and the City, The Wire and much more.

Current hits such as Euphoria, Westworld, Barry and His Dark Materials will see new seasons in 2022, alongside exciting new projects including The Gilded Age, an adaptation of The Time Traveller's Wife, and Winning Time: The Rise of the Lakers Dynasty. All these exciting titles will be available on OSN across the MENA region at the same time as their worldwide Premieres. As a part of the deal, OSN will also mark the 20th anniversary of the release of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by making all eight Harry Potter Films available to subscribers in 2022.

"HBO is the most respected name in global television, and we couldn't be more pleased to extend and expand our long-standing partnership. Together with the addition of an incredible line-up of Warner Bros. movies and series to our customers, this deal continues to demonstrate OSN's commitment to bringing more of the world's very best TV to OSN's customers" said Nick Forward, Managing Director Streaming & Chief Content Officer at OSN.



With hundreds of hours of exclusive content that appeals to the entire family, subscribers can immerse themselves into new worlds with the latest cinema releases, the latest Hollywood blockbusters, series, OSN Originals and enjoy the ease of entertainment anytime and anywhere with the OSN Streaming app.

Korean director takes on decades of generational trauma

Award-winning filmmaker Yang Yonghi was just six years old when she watched her eldest brother leave Japan for North Korea as one of 200 "human gifts" for leader Kim Il Sung's 60th birthday. As a North Korean anthem blared, through bursts of confetti, he handed her a note before his ferry departed Niigata port: "Yonghi, listen to a lot of music. Watch as many movies as you want." It was 1972, a year after her parents - members of the ethnic Korean "Zainichi" community in Japan - had sent their other two sons the same way, lured by the Kim regime's promise of a socialist paradise with free education, healthcare and jobs for all.

The boys never moved back. "My parents dedicated their entire lives to an entity that came up with such a senseless project and forced them to sacrifice their own children for it," Yang, now 57, told AFP. The trauma of being ripped apart from her siblings reverberates in all of Osaka-born Yang's films, which document the suffering of her family across generations - from the end of Japanese colonial rule to decades after the split of the Korean peninsula.

Her father was a prominent pro-North Korean activist in Osaka, and had sent his sons to live there in the 1970s as part of a repatriation program organized by Pyongyang and Tokyo. Around 93,000 Japan-based Koreans left for North Korea under the scheme between 1959 and 1984. Yang's eldest brother was among 200 university students specially chosen to honor Kim Il Sung.

The regime's promises came to almost nothing, but the Zainichi arrivals were forced to stay. Their families could do little to bring them back. Yang's parents "had no choice after having already sent their children. To keep the kids safe (in North Korea), they couldn't leave the regime, and had to become even more devoted," she said. "I was so angry at the system that kept my brothers as hostages." Unlike her parents, Yang rebelled.

'I wanted to be free'

Yang said she faced discrimination in Japan - repeatedly denied jobs and fired

from a film project because of her Korean heritage. She also had to grapple with the pro-North Korean sentiment in her community. Her father was a prominent figure in the Chongryon organization - Pyongyang's de facto embassy in Japan - which ran the university where she studied literature.

During her time at the school, when students were asked to interpret texts with leader "Kim Jong Il's literary theories", Yang said she once submitted a blank page. And at home, where portraits of North Korean leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il hung side by side, she resented her parents for sending her brothers away. "I wanted to be free," Yang told AFP. "I could have... pretended I was Japanese, and avoided being honest about my father and brothers, acting as if I don't recognize any problems."

"But to really break free, I had to confront them all." After a failed marriage and spending some three years as a teacher at a Pyongyang-linked high school, she left for New York to study documentary filmmaking. And it was through movies

Desperate for a homeland

Yang's latest step in that quest is the film "Soup and Ideology", set for a theatrical release this year. It focuses on her mother Kang Jung-hee, who fiercely loves her children but is also deeply loyal to Pyongyang. For 45 years, she sent food, money and other goods to her sons in Pyongyang, including Seiko watches to be exchanged for cash. Yang said her mother was often "unnaturally and overly cheerful", telling people that her sons are doing well in Pyongyang "thanks to the North Korean leaders". "But at home, she would cry alone," the director said, especially after Kang's eldest son was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Yang said her mother would send any medicine for the disease she could afford from Japan to North Korea, without knowing what he might need. He died in 2009. In her old age, she told Yang of yet another traumatic event - a bloody crackdown by South Korean forces on Jeju Island in 1947-54 to crush an uprising. As many as 30,000 people were killed, according to the National Archives of Korea. They



Japanese-born South Korean filmmaker Yang Yonghi poses during an interview with AFP in Seoul. — AFP

that she began to unpack the story of her family. Her first documentary, "Dear Pyongyang", was released in 2005 to critical acclaim, including at the Sundance and Berlin film festivals.

It offered a rare, independent look inside North Korea, featuring footage from Yang's camcorder during her trips to visit her brothers. It infuriated the Chongryon, which demanded an apology. By then, Yang had acquired South Korean nationality, making it impossible for her to ever visit her brothers again. "It's a huge price, but I have no regrets. I at least stayed true to my own desire - to make a movie, and to tell a story about my own family," Yang explained.

included Kang's fiancée and relatives.

"My mother is someone who desperately wanted a homeland. She wanted to belong to Jeju but she was forced to leave. She didn't see her place in Japan," Yang said. "She was looking for a government that she could trust, and she believed in North Korea." That is where Yang's two surviving brothers remain. Despite the struggles facing her, Yang said she still wanted to speak out. "Since I was young, I was constantly told: 'don't say this, don't say that, always say this'," she said. "I realized I wanted to do it whatever the price." — AFP



Bribes in lunchboxes: TV series on China's corrupt officials hooks millions

A huge designer property in Beijing and millions of dollars hidden in seafood boxes - a state television series on China's anti-graft campaign is captivating viewers and lifting the lid on officials brought down on graft charges. A staggering number of Communist cadres have been caught up in President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive in recent years, which critics say has also served as a way to remove political enemies since he came to power in 2013.

The ongoing five-part series aired by state broadcaster CCTV shows televised confessions by officials accused of corruption, including former vice public security minister Sun Lijun. Sun - who oversaw security in Hong Kong during months of unrest - is facing allegations that include taking bribes, manipulating

the stock market, illegally possessing firearms and paying for sex. The TV series claimed Sun received regular bribes worth \$14 million disguised as "small seafood boxes" from a man he later appointed as police chief in eastern Jiangsu province. "I helped him all this way," said Sun on the program.

It is common practice for CCTV to air "confessions" by criminal suspects, including former officials, before they have even appeared in court - something widely condemned by rights groups. Another episode featured imprisoned Chen Gang of the China Association for Science and Technology - who was said to have built a 72,000-square-metre (775,000-square-foot) private compound complete with a Chinese-style residence, swimming pool and artificial beach with illicit funds.



A woman buys fruits at a market in Beijing. — AFP

Others featured were accused of taking millions in bribes. Those convicted of corruption can be stripped of their wealth, party membership, and face a lifetime behind bars or even death. More than a million officials have been pun-

ished under the anti-corruption campaign so far, which has been a cornerstone of Xi's tenure. Wang Fuyu, who featured in the second episode of the series, was given a death sentence with a two-year reprieve on Monday - a day after his confession was aired.

Hundreds of millions took to social media in China to dissect the series, most angered by the luxuries the officials had enjoyed. One user complained that the men didn't seem to be remorseful and had, on the contrary, "lived a wonderful life" and were "unable to hide their pride." Some feared the display of excessive wealth was more likely to be appealing. "Is this a damned civil servant recruitment advertisement?" one sceptic wrote. — AFP



Photos show staff member Kimiko Osawa making crafts for a welfare trade shop that sells items made by hand by people with various disabilities across Japan, in the city of Hachioji in Tokyo. — AFP photos

JAPAN'S 'INVISIBLE' DISABLED ARTISANS FIGHT FOR SPOTLIGHT

In a trendy Tokyo neighborhood, customers browse the wares at Majerca, a shop stocked with handmade items from scarves to glassware, all produced by people with disabilities. The shop, and the workshops where the items were produced, are part of a small but burgeoning movement in Japan aiming to promote work by people with impairments. Despite being the only country to host the Paralympics twice, and the government's public commitment to integrate people with disabilities, activists and experts say workplaces in Japan are rarely accessible to them.

In fact, public subsidies for those with disabilities have generally been understood to mean recipients will simply stay at home, and activists say there is little support for those seeking active employment. That's a huge loss for society, according to Miho Hattori, who works with some of the producers at a workshop that supplies Majerca. "Some workers here have a career of more than 30 years, and they are so experienced that we should refer to them as artisans," Hattori told AFP.

Around two dozen employees with various intellectual impairments work at the site. In one area, men filter pulp and press paper to make cards, while elsewhere a woman spins yarn from raw wool and others manage a wooden weaver unfurling beautiful fabric. "I am making the fabric for

stoles, using wool for the woof and cotton for the warp," Ayame Kawasaki, a 28-year-old with Down's syndrome, tells AFP. "I like weaving."

'Apologetically priced'

The workshop sells bags and stoles to shops and galleries, with items priced at several thousand yen. After costs, each worker can expect to bring in about 15,000 yen (\$130) a month, an amount Hattori describes as "heartbreaking". It is not the main source of income for the workers, who are entitled to government support, and the figure is about the national average for people with intellectual disabilities, according to the welfare ministry.

"Their labor and their products are so valuable but they remain invisible," said Mitsuhiro Fujimoto, founder of Majerca, which is operated by five employees without disabilities. Fujimoto was inspired to launch the store after buying wooden toys he later discovered were made by workers with intellectual disabilities. Majerca passes about 60-70 percent of product revenue back to producers and Fujimoto says he encourages artisans to value their work and demand fair pay, not just charity.

"At times, I've raised the price by more than five times on something that was apologetically priced at just 500 yen," he said. Fashion house Heralbony, which



Photo shows Mitsuhiro Fujimoto, an operator for Majerca, a welfare trade shop that sells items made by hand by people with various disabilities across Japan, at a store in the Kichijoji district in Tokyo's Musashino area.

produces high-end items working with about 150 designers with intellectual disabilities, also prices its products at a level it says reflects the work of its employees. It has organized pop-up shops at glitzy department stores, showcasing its colorful apparel next to products from top makers such as Hermes and Louis Vuitton.

It offers ties at 24,200 yen and blouses

at more than that, which spokeswoman Miu Nakatsuka says are fairly priced. "In Japan's welfare sector, there's long been a sort of hesitation that suggested people receiving public welfare services are not supposed to make money," she said. Heralbony says its workers receive a licensing fee of at least five percent of an item's price, and sometimes 10-30 per-

cent, exceeding the local industry average of three percent.

'This is discrimination'

Welfare workers say social stereotypes hinder work opportunities for people with impairments, but they also blame Japanese law. "In Japan, a disabled working person is not allowed to use their publicly funded helper to commute or at a workplace," said Masashi Hojo, the director of an association of welfare workshops in Tokyo. "This is discrimination." The situation was highlighted in 2019 when two severely disabled candidates won seats in Japan's upper house. Their assistants are paid for by the upper house, but the lawmakers want the rules changed to help the 11,500 other seriously disabled people who rely on public care.

Despite the obstacles for workers, Heralbony, which was founded three years ago, is profitable. The firm plans to expand into interior and furniture items this year. And Majerca operator Fujimoto believes showcasing products by workers with disabilities will help challenge stereotypes about working with an impairment. "By visiting Majerca, I hope people will see what they do, and what they can do, and start thinking about whether they are being treated fairly," he said. — AFP



Sports

Spezia strike late to stop AC Milan from topping Serie A

Fiorentina crush dispirited Genoa 6-0 to jump 6th

MILAN: Emmanuel Gyasi coolly finished a 96th minute counter-attack to give Spezia their first Serie A victory away to AC Milan, 2-1, on Monday night. Milan gave up a 1-0 lead as they missed a chance to overtake neighbours Inter at the top of Serie A, while third-place Napoli closed to within two points with a 2-0 win in Bologna.

In the late game, Fiorentina crushed dispirited Genoa 6-0 to jump sixth. Milan dominated much of the game but spurned a host of chances. In the 44th minute, Rafael Leao escaped behind the Spezia defense but was flattened by goalie Ivan Provedel kicking wildly at the bouncing ball. Theo Hernandez fired the penalty wide.

Milan coach Stefano Pioli blamed that decision for what happened next. "We lost our lucidity after having suffered an injustice, it's a shame," Pioli told Italian broadcaster DAZN. "The responsibility is ours but it must be shared tonight with the referee. It's all the more strange that he didn't whistle for half-fouls during the whole game and now he whistles when the ball is on our player's foot."

Milan applied frenzied pressure and Provedel made three saves from Zlatan Ibrahimovic. The first was from a close-range shot, the second from a curling free kick and the third, and best, to claw away a looping header dropping just under the bar. Spezia sprung one last counter-attack. Victor Kovalenko rolled the ball across the penalty area to Gyasi, who, with the game on the line, carefully controlled then coolly placed the ball inside the far post.

'Bad night'

"Anyone can have a bad night," said Pioli. "We will try to react, the team has always known how to do it." Milan host Juventus on Sunday. It was Spezia's third straight away victory and lifted them to 14th in the table, six pints clear of the relegation places. In Bologna, Mexican Hirving Lozano scored from close range in the 20th and 47th minutes. Striker Victor Osimhen came on for the last 20 minutes wearing a protective mask, a little less than two months after suffering facial fractures. Osimhen had travelled to Nigeria to join the national squad for the Africa Cup of Nations but returned to Italy after contracting COVID-19.

In Florence, rising star Dusan Vlahovic squandered an 11th minute penalty for the home team with a lazy Panenka that Salvatore Sirigu, reaching up, pawed away. It hardly mattered, as the home team tore apart



MILAN: AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud (center) and Spezia's Italian goalkeeper Ivan Provedel (right) go for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Spezia on January 17, 2022.—AFP

Genoa, who have won once in the league all season and on Saturday fired Andriy Shevchenko after just two months as coach. Four minutes later, Sirigu dived at Vlahovic's feet for a brave save but the ball ran to Alvaro Odriozola who scored to start the rout.

Cristiano Biraghi struck with two long-range free kicks. Giacomo Bonaventura scored from close range. Vlahovic hit the target with another cute lob. Diminutive Lucas Torreira ended the scoring with a header.—AFP



Spezia get their first Serie A victory away

A minute later Leao escaped again and this time reached the ball first and lobbed Provedel to give Milan the lead. Spezia hit back when Kevin Agudelo, finding a huge hole in the home defense, tapped in a low Daniele Verde cross at the near post after 64 minutes. As the game entered five minutes of added time, Junior Messias put the ball in the net for Milan, but the referee had already whistled for a foul rather than allow the home team the advantage.



KUWAIT: Dr Hamad Rouhadden recognizes Waleed Al Khashti for Zain's support.

Zain 'main sponsor' of Kuwait Purebred Arabian Horse Show

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main sponsorship of the Kuwait Purebred Arabian Horse Show. The company took part in awarding the winners during the event held at Bait Al Arab headquarters in Sabhan throughout four days. The show attracted a great number of purebred Arabian horse enthusiasts, and came under the patronage and attendance of HE Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouhadden.

Zain sponsored this unique local competition as part of its continuous efforts to shoulder and develop the various cultural activities and programs in the community, most importantly those that offer a positive environment for all ages, including the youth. This is especially true as the passion for purebred Arabian horses is an integral and deep-rooted part of Kuwaiti, Arab, and Islamic identity throughout history.

The Kuwait Purebred Arabian Horse Show was held at Bait Al Arab headquarters (The Arabian Horse Center) at Sabhan throughout four consecutive days. The event featured the participation of 450 horses, and the winners were awarded with cash prizes. The show also featured a huge festival, considered the biggest of its kind in Kuwait, which witnessed many cultural and entertainment programs for visitors.

Zain is committed to being an active partner of the various creative projects that aim at enriching national unity, especially the ones that reflect the beautiful values of Kuwaiti, Arab, and Islamic heritage, history, and traditions. Zain's support to this show comes to affirm its social responsibility and role as a leading national company in the Kuwaiti private sector in imprinting a positive impact within the social fabric of the community.

The company is always keen on supporting and encouraging initiatives and projects that contribute to the country's cultural and touristic scenes. Zain will spare no efforts in offering its support to any entity that possess innovative and creative ideas that serve the community and further push the national economy wheel, especially those that aim at enriching Kuwait's culture and traditions as per the highest international standards.



Al Khashti awarding one of the winners.

'Fire on ice': Jamaica make history with 3 bobsleigh teams

KINGSTON: Jamaica have qualified for three Olympic bobsleigh events for the first time ever, their team said, setting the stage for a "Cool Runnings"-style underdog drama to unfold at the Beijing Games.

For the first time in 24 years, Team Jamaica will send a four-man sled, the event which inspired the popular film about the Caribbean country's first unlikely foray into the winter sport. "It will be fire on ice," Team Jamaica said Monday on their official Twitter account. "This will be the 1st time JAM has qualified in 3 Olympic bobsled events: four-man, two-man and women's monobob."

But in a sign of the challenges they face, the team have been trying to crowdfund \$194,000 for new equipment since late November, with an appeal called "Cool Sleds for the Hottest Thing On Ice". "(The athletes) are as committed, hardworking, resilient, and tal-

Deposed captains Kohli, De Kock gear up for 1-day series

PAARL: Two deposed captains, Virat Kohli and Quinton de Kock, could play significant roles in a three-match one-day international series between South Africa and India, starting at Boland Park in Paarl today. Both former skippers have the potential to be the leading batters for their respective sides. For Kohli, it will be the first ODI series since Rohit Sharma was named captain by the Indian selectors in December. Even though Sharma had to withdraw from the series in South Africa because of injury, the captaincy was not returned to Kohli but was passed to KL Rahul.

Kohli, who captained India in 95 ODIs with a 65-27 win-loss ratio, made it clear after India's Test series defeat last week that he could speak about the coming one-day games purely "from a player's point of view". Kohli, who subsequently stepped down from the Test captaincy, said: "You are obviously very driven and motivated to perform in any match you play for India. As an individual I can definitely say that I am looking forward to the ODI series and I am driven to perform in those ODI games."

De Kock was made South Africa's long-term white-ball captain in February 2020 and was made Test captain for four matches last season. But he did not seem comfortable in the role and a decision was made last March to put Temba Bavuma in charge of the white-ball teams, with Dean Elgar taking over as Test captain. De Kock, who was already due to miss the last two Tests against India on paternity leave, announced after the first Test last month that he was retiring from Test cricket, although he remained available for limited-overs games.

The series marks De Kock's return to action for the first time since becoming the father of a baby daughter. He fell to two indifferent shots in his final Test match and South Africa will be hoping for a return to the free-flowing, motivated batsman who hit three centuries in successive matches against India eight seasons ago. The series is not part of the International Cricket Council's World Cup Super League but South Africa in particular will be keen to record their first one-day series win since beating Australia 3-0 in March 2020 before cricket was effectively shut down by the coronavirus pandemic.

Since then, series against India and England have been aborted because of the virus, they have lost against Pakistan and Sri Lanka and have had to share the honors against Ireland and the Netherlands. One match was lost, one won and another rained off in Ireland and the first match of a series against the Netherlands was washed out and the remaining matches postponed because South Africa was placed on a coronavirus travel "red list".—AFP

ented as any, but without elite sleds they can never reach their potential," the webpage reads. "We don't want to be drag racing in a Prius."

So far less than \$4,000 has been raised. Jamaica also missed a two-woman spot at Beijing on a tiebreaker, but could still make it as first alternate if a qualified nation gives up a spot. The country's bobsleigh team made headlines with their improbable attempt at Olympic glory in Calgary 1988, and their story as told in the 1993 film captured imaginations around the world. Last minute team member replacement Chris Stokes is now the president of Jamaica's bobsleigh federation.—AFP



Women's Futsal league kick start

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The first semi-final match of the Women's Futsal URC league will be held today at Al-Fatat club hall in Khaldiya area (by 6:00pm), while the second match will be held on Saturday after the quarantine period for the Al-Arabi girls. The winner of two out of three matches will meet Kuwait Club for the final match which will be held on January 29.

Earlier, Kuwait beat Salwa Al-Sabah in two matches. The upcoming match between Arabi and Fatat is expected to be highly competitive. Arabi Club coach Faisal Al-Shamroukh relies on Mariam Al-Baroun, Marqueeze da Silva and Joud Al-Ahmad to win while Fatat coach Mohammad Al-Kandary is counting on Haifa Al-Qadari, Sheikha Al-Mohammad and goalkeeper Yasmeen Saadoun.



Sports

Aboubakar strikes as Cameroon joined by Burkina Faso in last 16

Burkina Faso and Ethiopia draw 1-1

YAOUNDE: Cameroon captain Vincent Aboubakar scored his fifth goal of the Africa Cup of Nations and his already-qualified side were joined by Burkina Faso on Monday in the second round. The Saudi Arabia-based forward, who turns 30 on Saturday, put Cameroon ahead and substitute Garry Rodrigues equalized for Cape Verde after half-time in a 1-1 draw in Yaounde.

Cyrille Bayala put Burkina Faso in front and Getaneh Kebede leveled for Ethiopia from a penalty in Bafoussam in another 1-1 draw that was enough to take the west Africans through. Cameroon topped the final group table with seven points. Burkina Faso edged Cape Verde on head-to-head records for second place after both accumulated four points. Ethiopia were eliminated with just one point.

While Cameroon and Burkina Faso are assured of last-16 places, Cape Verde must wait to see if they go through as one of the best four third-placed teams from the six groups.

Cameroon will remain in Yaounde to play a third-placed team on January 24, a day after Burkina Faso meet the Group C runners-up in Limbe. Should Cape Verde survive, they will play the winners of Group B or Group C in Bafoussam or Yaounde on January 25.

"We won the group, which was our goal, although we wanted to win all our matches. We will continue to play here in Olembe," said Cameroon coach Toni Conceicao. "We had many chances. The

Cameroonian team was not brilliant but still played a good game. We can do better, but if we take an overall reading, we were superior to our opponents in the group." Aboubakar is the first Cameroonian to score in all three group matches at a Cup of Nations since Samuel Eto'o achieved the feat with five goals at the 2008 finals in Ghana.

Nine-goal record

Ndaye Mulamba holds the record for the most goals by an individual in the flagship African tournament with nine for Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) in Egypt 48 years ago. Aboubakar has a clear lead in the Golden Boot competition with his closest rivals, compatriot Karl Toko-Ekambi, Tunisian Wahbi Khazri, Malian Ibrahima Kone and Malawian Frank Mhango, scoring two each.

In Yaounde, Cameroon broke the deadlock on 39 minutes in a cagey opening half dominated by the two defenses. A free-kick from the Indomitable Lions was partially cleared and Aboubakar rifled a low, left-foot shot through a crowd of players and past goalkeeper Josimar 'Vozinha' Dias into the corner of the net.

Cape Verde reacted to falling behind by becoming more adventurous and troubled the Cameroon rearguard several times before half-time without managing an equalizer. The island nation introduced Rodrigues for the second half and he equalized



BAFOUSSAM: Ethiopia's forward Dawa Hotessa (right) fights for the ball with Burkina Faso's defender Steeve Yago during the Group A Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 football match between Burkina Faso and Ethiopia on January 17, 2022. — AFP

within eight minutes through an exquisite back-heel off a low cross that beat goalkeeper Andre Onana. Aboubakar should have put Cameroon ahead again midway through the second half but blazed over when the ball ran loose inside the box.

In Bafoussam, a city 300 kilometers north west of Yaounde, Burkina Faso went ahead on 25 minutes through Bayala. After a superb long pass from the centre circle by Adama Guira, Bayala outmuscled

two Ethiopian defenders and chipped the ball over advancing goalkeeper Teklemariam Shanko and into the net. But instead of building their lead, the Burkinabe Stallions conceded on 52 minutes when Ethiopia captain Kebede leveled from a penalty awarded after a VAR review. Burkina Faso welcomed back captain Bertrand Traore, the Aston Villa forward, after his recovery from Covid-19, but a positive test ruled out goalkeeper Herve Koffi. — AFP



Cameroon top the group table with 7 points

Lewandowski, Putellas win FIFA 'Best' awards

PARIS: Bayern Munich's record-setting striker Robert Lewandowski retained FIFA's top men's player title Monday at "The Best" of 2021 ceremony as Barcelona captain Alexia Putellas collected the award for best women's player. The 33-year-old Lewandowski set a Bundesliga goal record last season, and edged Argentine Lionel Messi of Paris Saint-Germain and Egyptian Mohamed Salah of Liverpool for the award. "I'm happy and honored to win this award, and I feel very proud," said Lewandowski who scored a total of 48 goals for club and country in 2020-2021. Lewandowski scored three times for Bayern at the weekend taking his 2021-2022 season tally to 39 goals in 33 matches.

The trophy was some consolation for the Polish striker who lost out to Messi for the older and rival award the Ballon d'Or in November. For Putellas, it marked an awards double as the Spaniard triumphed over Barcelona team-mate Jennifer Hermoso and Chelsea's Australian striker Sam Kerr, just as she did for the Ballon d'Or. The 27-year-old midfielder enjoyed an exceptional 2020-2021 season with Barcelona, leading the Catalans to the Spanish league and cup double as well as the Champions League.

"This trophy is for everyone in the team," Putellas said. "The trophy will be an inspiration for us all." The best starting women's XI however featured no Barcelona player. Cristiano Ronaldo won the Special Award in recognition of setting a record of most international goals scored for his country, beating Ali Daei's long-standing mark of 109 for Iran. The 36-year-old Ronaldo now has 115 goals from 184 games with Portugal after making his debut aged 18 back in 2003.

"I never expected to beat this record, and I thank my teammates from these past 20 years," said Ronaldo, who also holds the record for 140



ZURICH: FIFA President Gianni Infantino speaks with the Best FIFA Men's Player 2021 award winner Robert Lewandowski (on screen) during the Best FIFA Football Awards 2021 on January 17, 2022. — AFP

Champions League goals. Chelsea's Senegalese stopper Edouard Mendy and Christiane Endler of Lyon won the goalkeeping awards. Chelsea picked up both coaching awards through Thomas Tuchel and Emma Hayes. "Ultimately, the coach is only as good as the people they have around them," said Hayes, whose charges were beaten in the Women's Champions League final but won the Super League and the League Cup.

German coach Tuchel arrived at Chelsea halfway through the season, and transformed an under-achieving side into a ruthless unit to win the prestige Champions League title. "I'm overwhelmed," said Tuchel. "I enjoy being here, it's a good fit." "I'm grateful to have such supportive people around me, to feel so good in such a competitive club. Erik Lamela, now of Sevilla, won the best goal award for his trick rabona shot for Spurs in the North London derby. The medical staff and players of Denmark, who had to deal with Christian Eriksen's collapse on the field at the Euro won the "fair-play" award. — AFP

Maeda scores on debut as Celtic beat Hibernian

GLASGOW: Japanese forward Daizen Maeda scored in just the fourth minutes of his debut as Celtic beat Hibernian 2-0 on Monday in a match that marked the resumption of the Scottish Premiership. Josip Juranovic was also on target, with a first-half penalty, as Celtic moved to within three points of leaders and arch Glasgow rivals Rangers ahead of the champions' match away to Aberdeen on Tuesday.

Rather than play matches behind closed doors, officials brought forward the scheduled winter break in Scottish football's top flight last month in response to a surge in the Omicron strain of the coronavirus. After the Scottish government relaxing restrictions on attendance at sporting events,

Celtic's three Japanese signings in the current transfer window were able to make their debuts in front of the Hoops' loyal fans.

Reo Hatate also made his first start and Yosuke Ideguchi came off the bench while their compatriot Kyogo Furuhashi remained sidelined with a hamstring injury. The Japanese trio all began their careers with the Glasgow giants in a comfortable win. "I think we were in control for the whole 90 minutes," Celtic manager Ange Postecoglou told the BBC. "We started the game with really good energy and tempo and we could have had one or two more if we weren't as wasteful."

The Australian added: "Second half we didn't create as much but we were still in control, that's the balancing act of having a few weeks break, they were fresh and ready but maybe a bit rusty in a few areas." Hibs counterpart Shaun Maloney said: "It was a big test for our players with Celtic going ahead early. "We need to be more aggressive when we do get through their line of pressure, but that's for me to work on, I'm the coach." — AFP

Farrell returns as England captain for Six Nations

LONDON: Owen Farrell has been retained as England's captain for the Six Nations but there are several high-profile absentees from the 36-strong squad announced by Eddie Jones yesterday. With the in-form Marcus Smith set to start at fly-half for England in their tournament opener away to Scotland on February 5, Farrell could be deployed as a centre rather than a No 10. Uncapped Bath fly-half Orlando Bailey was included but experienced playmaker George Ford's international exile continues despite an impressive start to the season with Premiership leaders Leicester. Utility back Elliot Daly also missed out despite his recovery from a stress fracture.

His Saracens team-mates, Billy and Mako

Vunipola, were again omitted by Jones as the Australian continues to refresh his squad ahead of the 2023 World Cup in France. Back-row forward Sam Underhill, another member of the squad that helped England reach the 2019 World Cup final, also remained out in the cold. The 30-year-old Farrell, a veteran of 100 Tests, has been sidelined from all rugby since suffering an ankle injury during a Test against Australia at Twickenham in November.

Courtney Lawes stood in as skipper for November's victories over world champions South Africa and Tonga. But Farrell, who had surgery, has been recalled by Jones and could now look to prove his fitness by playing for Saracens against London Irish on Sunday. At the other end of the experience spectrum, Alfie Barbeary, Ollie Chessum, Tommy Freeman, Ollie Hassell-Collins and Luke Northmore have all been included. England, who finished fifth in last season's Six Nations before improving markedly in November, will meet on Monday for a five-day training camp. "Selecting this squad has been a difficult task," said Jones. — 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	Khalidiya	24848075
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaifan	24849807
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shamiya	24848913
Adan Hospital	23940620	Shuwaikh	24814507
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Nuzha	22526804
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
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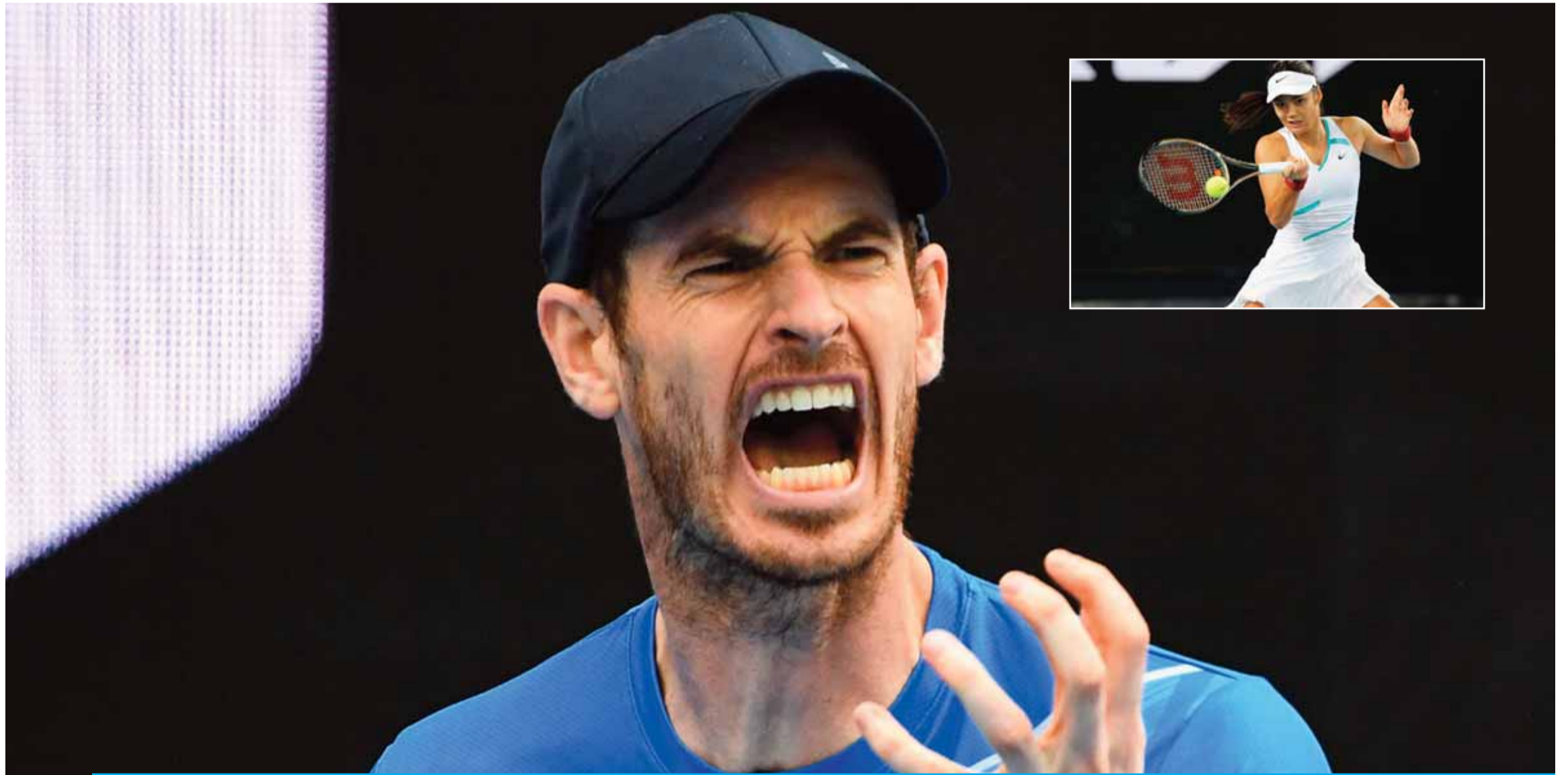
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Murray roars into round two

Raducanu on fire to win on Australian Open debut



MELBOURNE: Britain's Andy Murray reacts as he plays against Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili during their men's singles match on day two of the Australian Open tennis tournament yesterday. (Inset) Britain's Emma Raducanu hits a return against Sloane Stephens of the US during their women's singles match yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Former world number one Andy Murray turned back the clock in typically combative style and favourite Daniil Medvedev set up a blockbuster second-round showdown with Nick Kyrgios at the Australian Open yesterday. In the women's draw, top-10 seeds Garbine Muguruza, Iga Swiatek and Anett Kontaveit all made comfortable starts to their Melbourne title charges, while Simona Halep and Aryna Sabalenka also won despite struggling with their serves.

Emma Raducanu, the US Open champion, was also victorious on her tournament debut but there was defeat at the first hurdle for her fellow 19-year-old Leylah Fernandez—the woman Raducanu beat in the Flushing Meadows decider. Canada's Fernandez, the 23rd seed, went down 6-4, 6-2 to Australian wildcard Maddison Inglis, to the delight of the home crowd.

After Sunday's deportation of men's defending champion and top seed Novak Djokovic, the first Grand Slam of the year is now in full swing and many are eager to move on from the visa saga. That is easier said than done and Tennis Australia (TA), organisers of the so-called "Happy Slam", said in a statement yesterday that they "deeply regret the impact"

it has had on the other players. "As the Australian tennis family, we recognise that recent events have been a significant distraction for everyone," TA said, without mentioning Djokovic by name.

'Couldn't ask for more'

If it has been a distraction for Murray, he did not show it. The 34-year-old, there as a wildcard, showed all the fighting qualities that made him a three-time Grand Slam champion. His epic five-set victory over 21st seed Nikoloz Basilashvili was hugely symbolic—the Briton departed Melbourne Park in 2019 not knowing if he would ever be back because of hip trouble. But here he was, rolling back the years and heading into round two.

"It's amazing to be back and winning a five-set battle like that, I couldn't ask for any more," said Murray. There was no such problem for Russia's Medvedev, the second seed and favorite to lift his second major, who made light work of 91st-ranked Henri Laaksonen on Rod Laver Arena, dismantling the Swiss 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3). With Djokovic out of the picture and Roger Federer not in Melbourne because of injury, the draw has opened up for the 25-year-old Medvedev and Spanish great Rafael Nadal.

Medvedev, who lost last year's final in Melbourne to Djokovic but then beat the Serbian in the US Open final in September, plays combustible but talented Australian showman Kyrgios in round two. Another of the "Next Gen" young talents challenging the "Big Three" of Djokovic, Nadal and Federer is Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas. The fourth seed was a comfortable winner in three sets over practice partner Mikael Ymer to get his tournament up and running.

Raducanu thrives

In the women's draw, Spanish world number three Muguruza, a finalist at Melbourne Park two years ago, eased past 77th-ranked Frenchwoman Clara Burel 6-3, 6-4. There was also little trouble for Kontaveit, despite some early nerves, and Swiatek, but Romania's Halep was far from comfortable. The former number one labored into round two 6-4, 6-3 after an error-strewn clash with Poland's Magdalena Frech which saw 11 service breaks.

Second seed Sabalenka, who was reduced to tears and serving underarm in a disastrous lead-up to Melbourne, had Mark Philippoussis to thank after she revealed the Australian former world number

eight helped iron out some of her serving problems. She was far from perfect on her serve but survived to beat Storm Sanders 5-7, 6-3, 6-2.

In the last action of the day, Raducanu sent 2017 Flushing Meadows winner Sloane Stephens crashing out of the Australian Open at the first hurdle yesterday, producing some devastating tennis in a return to form. Raducanu made history by becoming the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam singles title in New York last year, but had won only two matches since. The 19-year-old was back to some of her dazzling best on Margaret Court Arena despite a second-set battle, ousting the American Stephens 6-0, 2-6, 6-1 in a performance that will make her rivals sit up and take notice.

"Both me and Sloane really put everything out there. I thought it was a high-quality match with some great rallies," said the 17th seed from Britain, who was making her Australian Open debut. "I'm really happy to come through against a great champion like her. "It was a tough match for the first round, I had to work extremely hard for every point, and I'm very pleased." Stephens was ranked just 67, but had plenty of experience, reaching at least the quarter-finals at all four Slams. — AFP

Stafford stands tall as Rams roll over Cardinals

LOS ANGELES: Matthew Stafford threw for two touchdowns and ran for one to post his first playoff victory in four tries as the Los Angeles Rams clobbered the Arizona Cardinals 34-11 in NFL's final wildcard playoff game on Monday. Stafford completed 13 of 17 passes for 202 yards and scored a touchdown on a one-yard run in the second quarter, with the Rams using a solid defense to win their sixth game in the last seven.

"This feels great. What a team win," he said, adding: "We jumped out to a nice lead early. When our defense plays like that I knew it was going to be a long day for Arizona. I am happy to get one and am looking for more." Los Angeles advances to the NFC Divisional playoff round on Sunday to face Tom Brady's second seeded Tampa Bay Buccaneers, with the winner moving on to the NFC Championship game.

The Rams got off to a quick start Monday against the Cardinals as Stafford connected on a four-yard touchdown pass with receiver Odell Beckham—who finished with four catches for 54 yards—in the back of the end zone to open the scoring with 3:50 left in the first quarter. He then scored on a one-yard quarterback sneak with just under 12 minutes left in the second quarter to make it 14-0 at the Los Angeles' SoFi Stadium.

Just four minutes later, the Rams went up 21-0 when David Long intercepted a desperation pass out of the end zone from Arizona quarterback Kyle Murray—who finished with 137 yards passing and had two interceptions—and returned it three yards for a touchdown. But the rout was truly on after Stafford threw a seven-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Cooper Kupp, and



CALIFORNIA: Darius Williams #11 of the Los Angeles Rams hits Eno Benjamin #26 of the Arizona Cardinals during the fourth quarter in the NFC Wild Card Playoff game on January 17, 2022. — AFP

Matt Gray made the extra point to make it 28-0 early in the third quarter.

Kupp has led the NFL this season in receptions (145), TDs (16) and receiving yards (1,947). In a dramatic twist to the final minutes of the third, Cardinals all-star Budda Baker was taken off the field in a stretcher after a collision with Rams running back Cam Akers. Baker was conscious and still able to move his limbs when he was taken to hospital, with Cardinals coach Kliff Kingsbury stating: "He's being checked out. Positive news I have got so far."

The Cardinals were making their first appearance in the postseason since the 2015-16 season. They ended the regular season on a sour note losing four of their last five games which cost them the NFC West title. "They played a great game [and] we didn't do too much right. On offense we were out of sync," said disappointed Kingsbury. "We didn't play to our potential." — AFP

Cavaliers hammer Durant-less Nets

LOS ANGELES: Darius Garland scored 22 points and delivered 12 assists as the Cleveland Cavaliers stretched their winning streak to five games with a 114-107 win over the Brooklyn Nets on Monday. The Cavaliers dominated on offense and defense down the stretch, holding the Nets to just two points during the final 3:43 of the fourth quarter.

Issac Okoro scored 15 points and Lauri Markkanen, Kevin Love and Jarrett Allen each added 14 points for the Cavs, who avenged two losses to the Nets back in November. "It's a signature win for us against a high-level team," Cavs coach JB Bickerstaff said. "To me, the most impressive thing is you hold a team like that to 19 points in the fourth quarter."

The Cavaliers win comes on a day the NBA honored the memory of US civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. with special ceremonies and video tributes throughout the 14 games on Monday. Rookie Evan Mobley tallied 12 points for Cleveland in front of a crowd of 18,100 at Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse arena in Cleveland. The Nets were playing their first full game without NBA leading scorer Kevin Durant, who is sidelined with a sprained medial collateral ligament in his left knee.

"You can't replace Kev," said Irving. "It's impossible. We just faced that reality right now." Part-time Nets player Kyrie Irving led all scorers with 27 points but made just two baskets in the fourth quarter when it mattered the most. Irving, who is unvaccinated, is barred from playing all but the Nets' away games because of New York's COVID-19 health and safety rules. Irving doubled down Monday on his anti-vaccine stand, giving a rambling explanation and bristling when quizzed

by reporters after the game.

'Disrespectful'

"Your bringing my vaccination status into a basketball game," Irving said. "I live my life the majority of the time away from it (NBA). When I say I am not getting vaccinated I am making a choice with my life What I'm trying to better articulate is I'm not bringing science into the basketball game. "So though I feel your feeling and emotion for asking that question, it's just like, sometimes it feels a little disrespectful."

In Florida, CJ McCollum scored 16 points in his first game back from a collapsed lung as the Portland Trail Blazers beat the Orlando Magic 98-88. McCollum missed 17 games over six weeks after being injured December 4. He started but saw limited action Monday as the Trail Blazers try to ease him back into the lineup.

"I worked extremely hard over the last two weeks to recondition, build my body back and getting up shots. And I think you can tell," McCollum said. In Washington, Kyle Kuzma tallied 15 points and 16 rebounds, and Montrezl Harrell finished with 18 points as the Wizards defeated the undermanned Philadelphia 76ers 117-98. Thomas Bryant added 15 points, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 14 and Bradley Beal had 13 for the Wizards. Rui Hachimura and Corey Kispert had 11 apiece.

Also, Devin Booker poured in a season-high 48 points and the Phoenix Suns pulled away for a 121-107 win over the San Antonio Spurs. Phoenix has won four straight games, all on the road, to improve on the league's best record of 34-9. In Los Angeles, LeBron James scored 25 points as the Los Angeles Lakers ended a three-game losing skid with a 101-95 win over the Utah Jazz. The Lakers rebounded for Monday night's win after an embarrassing 37-point loss to the Denver Nuggets on Saturday. — AFP