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World breaks COVID record with 3 million daily cases

Kuwait reports 4,510 new coronavirus cases, two deaths

Amir leaves for Germany



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah left for Germany yesterday on a private visit. HH the Amir was seen off at the airport by HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior states officials. — KUNA

PARIS: The world registered a record-high average of more than three million coronavirus cases a day between Jan 13 and 19, fueled by the Omicron variant, an AFP tally showed yesterday. The figure has increased more than five-fold since the highly transmissible strain was detected in South Africa and Botswana in late Nov 2021. An average of 3,095,971 daily cases were reported over the past seven days, an increase of 17 percent compared with the previous week.

Before Omicron emerged, the previous record for average global daily infections was around 800,000 in late April 2021. Current infection levels are around 440 percent higher than the daily average for the week ending Nov 24, 2021, when South Africa reported Omicron to the World

Health Organization. The world recorded an average of 7,522 COVID-related deaths a day between Jan 13 and 19, an 11-percent rise on the previous week although Omicron has so far seemed to cause less serious illness than the previously dominant Delta variant.

In Britain, new COVID cases skyrocketed by more than 300 percent between late November and early January, but the number of patients requiring ventilation did not increase in that time. The figures are based on official statistics produced by national health authorities and compiled by AFP.

A significant proportion of less severe or asymptomatic cases go undetected despite intensified testing regimes since the beginning of the pandemic. Testing

policies also vary from one country to another. Taking into account excess mortality linked to COVID-19, the WHO estimates the overall death toll could be two to three times higher.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's health ministry announced yesterday 4,510 new COVID-19 cases, 4,109 recoveries and two deaths in the last 24 hours. The ministry's official spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a statement to KUNA that total infections and recoveries reached 484,150 and 436,838 respectively. Deaths went up to 2,482, said the spokesman, revealing that there are 42 patients in ICU, 326 in COVID-19 wards and 44,830 active cases. He indicated total swab tests reached 6,574,401 with 33,957 new tests carried out in the last 24 hours. — Agencies

Defiant Biden touts first year achievements

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden sought to reset his presidency in a marathon first year press conference Wednesday, vowing to reconnect with voters and touting successes, while delivering blunt assessments of the "disaster" facing Russia if it attacks

Ukraine. "Can you think of any other president that's done as much in one year?" Biden asked, ticking off the epic struggle against COVID-19 and trillions of dollars in government funding to save the US economy from pandemic fallout.

"I don't think there's been much on any incoming president's plate that's been a bigger menu than the plate I had given to me," the Democrat said. "The fact of the matter is, we got a lot done." Speaking on the eve of the anniversary of his inauguration on Jan. 20, Biden said he would continue to lead the country. — AFP
Continued on Page 2



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks during a news conference in the East Room of the White House on Wednesday. — AFP

News in brief

Two killed in Lahore blast

LAHORE: At least two people were killed and 22 wounded yesterday by a motorbike bomb blast in a busy shopping district of the Pakistani megacity of Lahore, police and officials said. The attack was claimed on Twitter by a spokesman for the Baloch Nationalist Army, one of several ethnic separatist groups that have been waging an insurgency for years in southwest Pakistan. The blast happened in old Lahore's busy Anarkali shopping district, damaging several motorbikes and upturning market stalls. — AFP

Harris to be Biden running mate

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that Vice President Kamala Harris would be his running mate in the 2024 presidential election if he stood for office again. "She's going to be my running mate," Biden said of Harris during a press conference held to mark the first year of his presidency. In mid-December, Harris said she and Biden had not yet discussed the 2024 election, amid speculation she may not be in the running for the White House if Biden chose not to stand again. — AFP

Red Cross hit by cyberattack

GENEVA: The International Committee of the Red Cross was the victim of a massive cyberattack in which hackers seized the data of more than 515,000 extremely vulnerable people, some of whom had fled conflicts, it said on Wednesday. The body, which has its headquarters in Geneva, had no immediate indication as to who might have carried out the attack. — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti fire service, national guard, civil defense and members of the army take part in the "Shamel 7" fire drill in Arifjan yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 2)

Pig kidney transplanted to human

WASHINGTON: A US medical team yesterday announced it had carried out the second-known kidney transplant from a pig to a human, the first inside the body of a brain dead recipient. The procedure, which was described in a scientific paper, comes on the heels of the successful implantation of a porcine heart into a person earlier this month. It is hoped that advances in the field of so-called xenotransplanta-

tion, or cross-species organ donation, could one day solve the chronic shortage of organ donations.

"Today's results are a remarkable achievement for humanity and advance xenotransplant into the clinical realm," said Selwyn Vickers, dean of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Heersink School of Medicine, which carried out the procedure. The first pig kidney was transplanted into a human by a team at New York University (NYU) Langone on September 25 2021, and involved a brain dead patient on a ventilator whose family had given permission for the proof-of-concept experiment.

That procedure involved attaching a kidney to blood vessels on the top of one of the patient's legs, so that scientists could observe it and take biopsy samples.

Continued on Page 2

Giant coral reef found off Tahiti

PARIS: Scientists have discovered a vast reef of "pristine" rose-shaped corals apparently unharmed by climate change in deep water off the coast of Tahiti, UNESCO announced yesterday. Mapping approximately three kilometers long and up to 65 m wide, UNESCO said it was "one of the most extensive healthy coral reefs on record".

The UN heritage agency said it was "highly unusual" to find healthy coral in cooler waters between 30 and 65 m deep and that it could suggest that there are more reefs in the ocean depth that are safer from the impacts of warming waters. The discovery was made in November by divers with special equipment that allowed them to go deeper and spend 200 hours at the reef.

"It was magical to witness giant, beautiful rose corals which stretch for as far as the eye can see. It was like a work of art," said Alexis Rosenfeld, a French photographer and founder of the UNESCO partner 1 Ocean campaign. The giant rose-shaped corals are each up to two meters in diameter.

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This handout picture taken on Dec 12, 2021 shows a newly-discovered reef of giant rose-shaped corals at a depth of over 30 meters off Tahiti. — AFP

Local

Kuwait forces conduct joint fire drill



ARIFJAN, Kuwait: Kuwaiti Fire Service, National Guard, Civil Defense and the Army take part in the "Shamel 7" fire drill in the Arifjan area, 65 km south of Kuwait City, yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KISR receives the 2021 TWAS Arab regional award

KUWAIT: Research Scientist of Nanotechnology and Advanced Materials Program at Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Dr Adel Ismael was awarded the Arab regional award by The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), for sciences in developing countries for the year 2021. In a statement, KISR mentioned that the award is given to those who tangibly contribute to the simplification of sciences and the development of strategies that serve the spread of science and technology in developing countries.

The institute added that Dr Ismael's focus on Nanotechnology and its applications in easing daily life qualified him to win the award. Dr Ismael's research revolved around producing Nano-sized catalysts to eliminate toxic industrial pollutants like pesticides cyanobacteria and organic compounds produced by industries like textiles, chemicals and petrochemicals. The scientific production also focused on transforming air polluting carbon dioxide into beneficial liquid fuel, as well as producing thin layers of titanium dioxide particles on glass window surfaces to assist self-cleaning applications.

The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), located in Italian city of Trieste, is an academy established for developing countries, uniting 1,000 scientists in some 70 countries and aiming to promote scientific capacity and excellence for sustainable development in developing countries. —KUNA

Kuwait's December trade surplus with Japan quadrupled

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan almost quadrupled from a year earlier to JPY 66.4 billion (\$580 million) in December on higher export bills, government data showed yesterday. The surplus surged by 277.4 percent, up for the ninth consecutive month, and Kuwait posted black ink with Japan for 13 years and 11 months, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report. Kuwaiti overall exports to Japan soared 128.8 percent year-on-year to JPY 78.7 billion (\$688 million) for the ninth straight month of expansion. Imports from Japan slid 26.7 percent to JPY 12.3 billion (\$108 million), down for the fourth month in a row. For the whole of 2021, Kuwait

logged a trade surplus of JPY 565.9 billion (USD 4.9 billion), up 68.1 percent from the previous year.

Middle East's trade surplus with Japan jumped 168.1 percent to JPY 839.8 billion (\$7.3 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region inflating 107.4 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 95.2 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, grew 110.1 percent. The region's overall imports from Japan also rose 5.4 percent on demand for machinery, manufactured goods and electrical machinery.

Japan posted a global trade deficit of 582.4 billion (\$5.4 billion) in December for the fifth consecutive month of red ink, as surging energy prices pushed up the value of its imports. Exports from the world's third-biggest economy rose 17.5 percent from the year before, thanks to robust shipments of automobiles to the US and steel to South Korea. Imports jumped 41.1 percent on higher bills of crude oil, LNG and coal. —AFP

Defiant Biden touts first year...

Continued from Page 1

20, 2021, Biden held only the second White House press conference of his presidency - then surprised many by staying at the podium for one hour and 52 minutes.

The exchange, according to US media, extended beyond even the longest of the famously rambling - though far more frequent - press conferences held by Donald Trump. At various times combative, joking and meandering, Biden rejected criticism over his handling of the pandemic and soaring inflation. Asked about his approval ratings, which have sunk into the low 40 percent area, Biden was curt. "I don't believe the polls," he said.

Biden acknowledged missteps since taking over from Trump, citing "a year of challenges". These included that he "didn't anticipate" the ferocity of Republican obstruction to his agenda in Congress. On COVID testing capabilities, which continue to struggle to meet demand, he said "we should have done it quicker." Biden likewise said he understood "frustration" over steadily rising prices, which he blamed on COVID-related supply chain issues. Fighting inflation will be "hard and take a lot of work". "It's going to be painful for a lot of people," he said, noting that high prices were being felt "at the gas pump, the grocery stores and elsewhere."

On one of the most traumatic episodes of his presidency - the chaotic and rushed final withdrawal from the 20-year long Afghanistan war - Biden said flatly: "I make no apologies." "There was no way to get out of Afghanistan after 20 years easily," he declared. The press conference, which defied the widely shared image of Biden as shrinking from contact with the media, focused especially heavily on the looming crisis in Ukraine, where the United States is leading Western efforts to find a diplomatic solution to Russia's military posturing on the border.

Biden said he was ready to meet with Putin and bluntly warned the Kremlin leader that an attack on Ukraine would be "a disaster" for Russia. However,

Biden raised eyebrows when he appeared to suggest that a small-scale attack by the Russians would prompt much less pushback from the West. The White House quickly issued a statement clarifying that what he meant was that any military invasion would prompt a "severe" response, while non-military aggression, like paramilitary attacks, would be met with a "reciprocal" response. Powerful Republican Senator Lindsey Graham described Biden's comment as "unnerving".

With a State of the Union speech to Congress set for March 1, Biden faces a diminishing period to engineer a strategy to fight off a Republican comeback at midterm congressional elections this November. Republicans are forecast to crush his party and take control of the legislature. That risks bringing two years of complete obstruction from Congress, likely including threats of impeachment and a slew of aggressive committee probes.

Trump, who continues to perpetuate the lie that he beat Biden in 2020 and seeks to undermine Americans' faith in their election system, is eyeing an attempt at another presidential run in 2024. Biden confirmed he would keep Kamala Harris as his vice presidential running mate in a re-election bid. And he said that while Democrats proved unable to use their razor-thin congressional majority to pass two big priorities—the Build Back Better social spending bill and election law reforms - they could instead settle for passing "big chunks" of the legislation.

A reminder of that failure came later Wednesday evening when Democrats in the Senate were unable to pass a raft of voting rights reforms in the face of a Republican blockade. Biden said in a statement he was "profoundly disappointed" after the Democrats failed to advance two major bills, or to trigger the "nuclear option" of doing away with the 60-vote threshold required to move legislation forward in the 100-member chamber.

Above all, Biden in his press conference emphasized his desire to leave the confines of the White House after a year featuring a decidedly light travel schedule. "I find myself in a situation where I don't get a chance to look people in the eye, both because of COVID and the situation in Washington," he said, describing how he wanted to "connect with people, let them take a measure of my sincerity". —AFP

Pig kidney transplanted...

Continued from Page 1

The same team carried out another similar experiment on Nov 22. The newly announced surgery took place on Sept 30, 2021. It involved placing two kidneys from a genetically-modified pig inside a person, 57-year-old Jim Parsons, who had wanted to be an organ donor but his organs were deemed unsuitable.

"The transplanted kidneys filtered blood, produced urine and, importantly, were not immediately rejected," UAB said in a statement. The kidneys remained viable until the study was ended 77 hours later, and the findings were published in the peer-reviewed "American Journal of Transplantation". Moreover, because the kidney was fully connected inside the body, the UAB team says their procedure is a step closer to becoming

a clinical reality. They plan to soon move into human trials and then seek regulatory approval.

The donor pig had 10 key genetic modifications to make its organs suitable for human transplant. All donor pigs involved in the four known pig-to-human transplants came from a herd from Revivacor, a subsidiary of the biotech company United Therapeutics Corporation. Previous research has found such pig transplants suitable for non-human primates. According to official US data, there are nearly 107,000 Americans awaiting an organ - 90,000 of whom need a kidney. Seventeen Americans die each day while waiting for an organ.

Early xenotransplantation research focused on harvesting organs from primates - for example a baboon heart was transplanted into a newborn known as "Baby Fae" in 1984, but she survived only 20 days. Today, pig heart valves are widely used in humans, and pig skin is grafted on human burn victims. Pigs make the ideal donors because of their organ size, their rapid growth and large litters, and the fact they are already raised as a food source. —AFP

Giant coral reef found off...

Continued from Page 1

"To date, we know the surface of the moon better than the deep ocean," said UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay, adding that only 20 percent of the world's seabed has been mapped.

"The discovery of this reef in such a pristine condition is good news and can inspire future conservation," said Laetitia Hedouin, a marine biologist at French research agency (CNRS). "We think that deeper reefs may be better protected from global warming." Most of the world's known reefs have been found at depths of up to 25 m and the UN heritage body said the Tahiti reef could suggest there are more areas of healthy coral in the ocean's unmapped "twilight zone".

"This remarkable discovery in Tahiti demonstrates the incredible work of scientists who, with the support of UNESCO, further the extent of our knowledge about what lies beneath," said Azoulay. French Polynesia suffered a significant bleaching event back in 2019, but this newly discovered reef does not appear

to have been significantly affected. "These corals do not show signs of stress or disease," Hedouin told AFP.

Bleaching occurs when healthy corals become stressed by spikes in ocean temperatures, causing them to expel algae living in their tissues, leaving graveyards of bleached skeletons where vibrant ecosystems once thrived. Starfish can also ravage corals by eating them. Temperature sensors have been placed in the area as part of a program to analyze why the corals appear to be unaffected by climate change and to monitor its population dynamics.

Coral reefs cover only a tiny fraction of the ocean floor, but they are home to at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants. In October, the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network said dynamite fishing, pollution, but mostly global warming had wiped out 14 percent of the world's coral reefs between 2009 to 2018. Hardest hit were corals in South Asia and the Pacific, around the Arabian Peninsula, and off the coast of Australia.

Oceans absorb more than 90 percent of the excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions, shielding land surfaces but generating huge, long-lasting marine heatwaves that are pushing many species of corals past their limits of tolerance. A single bleaching event in 1998 caused by warming waters wiped out eight percent of all corals.—AFP

Local

Indonesia may not lift ban on domestic sector recruitment soon: Ambassador

Number of Indonesians in Kuwait dropped to 6,000 in 2021

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Indonesian population in Kuwait dropped from almost 70,000 in 2009 to barely 6,000 in Kuwait in 2021. Newly-designated ambassador of Indonesia to Kuwait Lena Maryana Mukti explained the reasons for this drastic fall in an interview with Kuwait Times. In 2009, the Indonesian government decided to stop sending domestic helpers to the Middle East including Kuwait, citing contract violations, abuse and mistreatment against their domestic helpers. Recently, Kuwait has been sending requests to renegotiate and resume the deployment of Indonesian domestic helpers, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, these requests have been put on hold. Some excerpts:

Kuwait Times: Kuwait has been trying to renegotiate with Indonesia on the redeployment of domestic helpers. What is the current situation in this regard? Can we expect a return of domestic helpers soon?

Mukti: We cannot expect domestic workers from Indonesia will come soon. The moratorium on the placement of Indonesian domestic workers is national policy that is not only applied to Kuwait, but to all Middle East countries. Our government is currently unable to consider the lifting of the moratorium for various reasons, including national politics, as the issue is regarded as very sensitive. The government initially imposed a moratorium on women going to the Middle East to work as domestic helpers in 2009. So far, Indonesia will continue to stand by its decision not to send domestic workers to the Middle East.

Kuwait Times: How is Indonesia fighting the coronavirus? What is the latest rate of vaccination and how do you see Indonesia's post-COVID recovery?

Mukti: Indonesia's coronavirus full vaccination rate is 43.04 percent. As of January 18, 2022, the number of con-



The newly-designated Ambassador of Indonesia to Kuwait Lena Maryana Mukti responds during the interview. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

firmed COVID-19 positive cases rose by 1,362 from the previous day to reach 4,273,783 cases. In this same period, the number of deaths rose by nine to 144,183, while the number of recovered patients rose by 564 to 4,120,036. Indonesia is currently implementing a more restrictive form of lockdown, wherein non-essential and non-critical commercial activities are not allowed. Domestic travel is restricted, while inter-regional travel is permissible only with a vaccination certificate or a valid negative COVID-19 test result.

Kuwait Times: Please tell us about your community in Kuwait. What is the total number of Indonesians before and after the pandemic?

Mukti: Based on Kuwait's ministry of interior data, our community in Kuwait is estimated at around 6,500 in 2019. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, this number is expected to decline. We estimate the current figure to be 5,000 to 5,500 people. We want to focus on skilled workers while we still have the moratorium. We have provided oil and gas workers too. Kuwait request-

ed medical doctors, but we are not able to provide them because we also need them, but we provided some medics including nurses. There are a few remaining domestic workers working at Kuwaiti houses, and some are working in the services sectors.

Kuwait Times: Can you tell us your priorities/goals as first woman ambassador of your country to Kuwait?

Mukti: I was a former member of the Indonesian parliament and am a political appointee. My mission is to work with Kuwait and our people. I presented my credentials and have been working now for almost a month in Kuwait. I invited HH the Amir to visit our country, since a high-level meeting took place a while ago. But we had several meetings on the level of ministers in 2019. We were supposed to have meetings in 2020, but due to the coronavirus, we put them on hold and are now looking for new dates. When Omicron subsides, we expect our minister of foreign affairs to visit Kuwait, inshallah, this year.

As a woman ambassador, my advocacy would be of course about the welfare

and well-being of women. I want to share our experiences in Indonesia, especially since we have the largest Muslim population in the world. We had issues of radicalism and pluralism, but we managed to be moderate as a nation. Issues about women are very close to my heart. I am happy that in Kuwait there are around eight women ambassadors. At the same time, I would like to see more women in the Kuwaiti parliament and Cabinet, as they only have a few.

Kuwait Times: Tell us about bilateral relations with Kuwait in all areas of concern - political, economic, trade and investment, culture, education and tourism.

Mukti: Indonesia and Kuwait have a long-established friendship since diplomatic relations were founded in February 1968. We lend support to each other, particularly in UN bodies, given our similar commitment to global peace, stability and security. We also share a similar interest in nurturing closer cooperation in priority areas in the future.

On September 2019, the two governments concluded the first Joint

Commission Meeting (JCM), during which both sides signed an MoU on visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports, an MoU on diplomatic capacity building and an MoU on research and higher education cooperation. The second joint commission session was planned to be held in Jakarta in 2020, but has been delayed due to the pandemic.

The economic relationship between the two countries is on the right track, although the pandemic does add more obstacles in terms of creating a stable rapport in trade and investment cooperation. The trade value has significantly declined due to the uncertainty in procuring raw materials and transportation disruptions. This resulted in slow demand for Indonesian products in Kuwait (due to the high cost of transportation), while Kuwait's businesses were also deeply impacted because of the pandemic.

In general, Indonesian promotion of its culture has been well-accepted by Kuwaitis. Cultural promotion is also used as an effort to promote tourism. This is because the summer vacation in Kuwait (June-August) is when most Kuwaitis spend their holidays abroad to avoid the extreme temperatures above 50°C. In 2020, promotional efforts were carried out through Indonesia's participation in three international events - Kuwait Aviation Show, Kuwait Market culture and friendship festival at Kuwait Zoo, and the Kuwait Unites Us cultural diversity festival in Hawally governorate.

In the field of education, since 2016, the Kuwaiti government has provided scholarships for two Indonesian citizens every year to study undergraduate programs, namely law and Arabic literature, at Kuwait University. The Kuwaiti government also provided seven Indonesian citizens with scholarships to study Arabic at the Kuwait University language center. Scholarship recipients are Indonesian citizens residing in Indonesia.

Central Circle Company signs exclusive contract with Bayer

KUWAIT: Central Circle Company announced the signing of an exclusive contract with Bayer Consumer Health, a giant among German pharmaceutical manufacturers, to market and distribute its products in Kuwait.

Central Circle CEO Dr Ziad Yousuf Al-Alyan said during a ceremony that Bayer Consumer is one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world and that Aspirin is one

of its most important products.

He said that signing the agreement is another achievement by Central Circle. "We are proud of this partnership while Central Circle will continue its efforts to bring in the best and most modern medicines, consumables, equipment and medical services for Kuwait medical sector both for government and private," he added.



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NEW YORK: Ambassador Al-Otaibi addresses the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). — KUNA

Kuwait condemns attacks on UAE

NEW YORK: Kuwait has affirmed its condemnation of Monday's terrorist attacks that targeted civilian installations in the United Arab Emirates. These offensives, carried out with drones unleashed by the Houthi militias, constituted explicit breach of the international and humanitarian laws, conventions, humanitarian values as well as a dangerous threat to the Gulf stability, said Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, the State of Kuwait permanent representative to the UN.

Ambassador Al-Otaibi, addressing a session of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the Middle East namely the Palestinian cause, affirmed the State of Kuwait solidarity with the UAE, supporting Abu Dhabi with respect of any steps it may take to safeguard its security and stability. The drones' attacks targeted a fuel storage facility and a spot adjacent to Abu Dhabi Airport, killing at least three people and wounding several others. The Kuwaiti envoy expressed condolences to the UAE for suffering victims of this terrorist offensive and wished quick recovery for the injured. Kuwait is keen on partaking in such debates within quarters of the UNSC "out of our belief in the significance of the Palestinian cause as a central issue for the Arab and Muslim nations," ambassador Al-Otaibi said.

He reiterated support for the UN efforts to restore stability to the occupied Palestinian territories, ensure delivery of humanitarian aid to victims of the Zionist entity's crimes and attacks on the Palestinian people. "It is rather regretful that we begin the new year from the point that closed the past year, where Zionist entity, the power undertaking the occupation, pursues its belligerent policy against the unarmed Palestinian people and its schemes to annex more Palestinian territories in the West Bank including East Jerusalem," he said further. Recent UN reports affirm that Zionist entity's settlement policy is continuing in the West Bank, where the Zionist authorities approve applications for building hundreds of new residential units in the illegal settlements, he said.

These reports have also warned of mounting violence perpetrated by the settlers against the Palestinian people, namely the elderly, the women and the children, seizing their properties and lands in addition to demolishing their houses without any retribution for these crimes. He affirmed the urgent need to halt such acts to avert re-eruption of violence, reminiscent to the events last year when 324 Palestinian were killed and 850 houses were destroyed, in addition to forcing 1,000 others from their houses. The crimes by the Zionist entity not only jeopardize any chance to resume negotiations, but also maintain the approach to Judaize Jerusalem and undermine the aspired two state settlement, thus depriving the Palestinians any opportunity to establish a viable, sovereign and independent state. —KUNA

Indian embassy to celebrate Republic Day virtually

KUWAIT: Celebrations of the Republic Day of India will be organized by the Embassy of India in Kuwait, with complete adherence to COVID-19 related protocol and guidelines on 26 January 2022. As there will be no physical gathering for the event at the embassy premises, Indian diaspora and friends of India in Kuwait are invited to join the celebrations of Republic Day virtually, given the prevailing circumstances, Indian embassy said in a press release.

Indian Ambassador Sibi George will unfurl the national tricolor at 9 am at the embassy premises and read out the message of President of India. "Please join us online for the 73rd Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 2022 from 0900 hrs onwards virtually. The event will be live streamed on embassy's social media handles," the release further said. All members of the Indian Community in Kuwait are invited to join the embassy to sing the National Anthem of India virtually at 9 am, the release further added.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait skyline is pictured on a cold morning yesterday. The minimum temperature in Kuwait is forecast to drop below zero during the weekend, especially in desert areas, Kuwait Meteorological Department said yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

'Bliss and Paper', a haven for book lovers in Kuwait

Bookstore cafe in downtown city encourages reading, writing and recycling



Fajer Ahmad poses for a photo at her bookstore Bliss and Paper. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Book lovers can enjoy reading at the cozy Bliss and Paper bookstore in the heart of Kuwait City. Located in Dasman Complex, Bliss and Paper welcomes visitors daily from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm. The store opened in August 2021.

Bliss and Paper encourages reading, writing and recycling. "We were a nonprofit organization for eight years. Initially we were located at Bayt Lothan, then at Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah. After that we moved here and changed the concept to a bookstore cafe, while remaining a community bookstore," owner Fajer Ahmad told Kuwait Times.

She has been collecting books since 2013. "I currently have around 11,000 books at this bookstore, apart from books in storage. Around 5,000 books available here are also displayed online. I also have rare books such as the first English translation of the Holy Quran by George Sale, and Carsten Niebuhr's book that first mentions the name of Kuwait," she said.

The main goal of Fajer is to recycle. "All the books that are available here are recycled. People donated these books and received 'credits' from us. They can use these credits to buy books, drinks or

snacks from us. Everything in our store is compostable and recyclable," she noted. "We pay more for packaging to make sure our disposables do not include plastic. This includes the straws and cups. Everything is zero plastic and zero waste. We don't throw anything. We even use the coffee waste to make scrubs," added Fajer.

The majority of books are in English and Arabic. "We have a few books in foreign languages, but they are rare, like maybe one or two books. We also sometimes receive obsolete books, such as how to use Excel 2000, for instance. So we either don't accept them or recycle them by using their pages to make artworks. We have also rejected some banned or offensive books. We have some vintage books that are not published anymore. We also have books that were never printed in Kuwait, although they include information about Kuwait in the 1950s or 1960s," Fajer explained.

"There is a special room for kids, as we focus on children and encourage them to read. We also rent our meeting room, which can accommodate up to six people. People can also rent the place for book launches, book reviews or discussions, TV interviews or photoshoots," stressed Fajer. Some people just come to read. "We encourage reading and



writing. On average, we have around 30 to 40 people coming during weekdays, and around 200 during weekends. Most people come in the evenings. During the daytime, most visitors are from this building (Dasman Complex)," she concluded.





Stay or go? Last Afghan Sikhs facing dilemma

Senate sinks Biden push for major voting rights reforms



This handout photograph released yesterday by Belarus' defense ministry shows Russian servicemen standing at attention upon their arrival for joint drills in Belarus. —AFP

Russia announces huge naval drills

Biden warns of 'disaster for Russia' if it invades Ukraine

Baltic states rush US-made arms to Ukraine

BERLIN: The United States has given the green light for Baltic nations to rush US-made weapons to Ukraine, with Lithuania yesterday saying it hoped to deter "aggressor" Russia. A State Department official in Berlin, where Secretary of State Antony Blinken is holding crisis talks on Ukraine, said Washington was "expediting authorised transfers of US-origin equipment from other allies".

"European allies have what they need to move forward on additional security assistance (to) Ukraine in the coming days and weeks," the official said. A source familiar with the authorizations said the approval was for urgent requests by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to assist Ukraine, a fellow former Soviet republic. The exact amounts and types of weapons were not specified but the Baltic nations' arsenals include Javelins - portable missiles capable of destroying tanks.

Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anusauskas confirmed that his country was sending defense and other aid to Ukraine in a bid to deter Russia from attacking. "History shows us that conceding to the aggressor eventually ends in a big war. We do not want this. Any country which is defending itself must have opportunities to do this," he told AFP. "Our decision will contribute to the implementation of a deterrence policy," he added.

His Latvian counterpart Artis Pabriks had on Wednesday signaled his country's intention to send Ukraine "both lethal and non-lethal defense equipment". "We are currently compiling a list of items that we can give away, but it will be published only after everything will be transported to Ukraine," he said. Estonia has said it plans to send "dozens" of Javelin anti-tank missiles and some 122mm howitzers.

The howitzers originally belonged to East Germany, then Germany and were bought by Finland in the 1990s. Finland and Germany would have to give their approval for Estonia to send them to Ukraine. Tens of thousands of Russian troops along with tanks and artillery have been deployed near the Ukrainian border since late last year, rattling the three Baltic nations, which are members of NATO.

President Joe Biden's administration has approved \$650 million in weapons to Ukraine since last year, \$200 million of it last month amid fears of war. Ukraine has voiced hope for military supplies as quickly as possible, with shipments from nearby countries especially valuable. Britain has also rushed anti-tank weapons to Ukraine. —AFP

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday it would hold huge naval drills across four seas, in a new bout of saber-rattling as tensions with the West soared to new heights over the threat that Moscow would march on Ukraine. The Russian defense ministry's announcement to deploy more than 140 warships and supporting vessels this month and in February to the Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic and Mediterranean followed an angry condemnation from the Kremlin of what it described as "destabilizing" remarks from US President Joe Biden.

The American leader had vowed a "severe" response to any invasion of Ukraine, as he assessed that Russian President Vladimir Putin will "move in" on the ex-Soviet nation. With tens of thousands of Russian troops massed on the Ukrainian border, fears are mounting that a major conflict could break out in Europe. In a bid to defuse the worst tensions between Russia and the West in decades, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is on a whirlwind diplomatic tour that took him to Berlin yesterday.

Blinken is huddling with his counterparts from France and Germany, as well as Britain's junior foreign minister, seeking a common front against Moscow, a day before his crunch talks with Russia's Sergei Lavrov. Moscow insists it has no plans to invade but has at the

same time laid down a series of demands - including a ban on Ukraine joining NATO - in exchange for de-escalation.

Washington has rejected Moscow's demands as "non-starters" and NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg this week insisted that the alliance "will not compromise on core principles such as the right for each nation to choose its own path". Upping the ante, Russia announced new war games on the seas involving "more than 140 warships and support vessels, more than 60 aircraft, 1,000 pieces of military equipment, and about 10,000 servicemen". They follow joint military drills Wednesday between Russian forces and those of ex-Soviet republic Belarus, which also neighbors Ukraine. A US official said the exercises could presage a permanent Russian military presence involving both conventional and nuclear forces in Belarus.

High price

The West has repeatedly warned Russia it would pay a "high price" of economic and political sanctions should it invade Ukraine. Hours before Blinken arrived in Berlin to coordinate the possible response to Russia, Biden sparked controversy as he appeared to indicate that a "minor incursion" might prompt a

smaller reaction from NATO allies. "It's one thing if it's a minor incursion, and then we end up having a fight about what to do and not do, etcetera," he said. But the White House moved swiftly to clarify the comments, with Press Secretary Jen Psaki vowing any Russian movement in Ukraine would face "severe" retaliation. Statements like that, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, "can facilitate the destabilization of the situation because they can inspire some hotheads in Ukraine with false hopes". With both sides' positions entrenched, a series of talks between Western and Russian officials in Geneva, Brussels and Vienna has failed to yield any breakthrough.

Dialogue preferred

NATO allies have signaled their willingness to keep talking but Moscow has demanded a written response on its proposals for security guarantees. On the Russian wish list are measures that would limit military activities in the former Warsaw Pact and ex-Soviet countries that joined NATO after the Cold War. But in Kyiv on Wednesday, Blinken said he would not present such a formal response at Friday's talks with Lavrov in Geneva.

Rather, the onus is on Putin to dispel fears that Moscow is planning an invasion of its pro-

Western neighbor. Ukraine has been fighting Moscow-backed forces in two breakaway eastern regions since 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine. More than 13,000 people have been killed, and the latest Russian troop build-up has also greatly rattled neighbours in the Baltics.

Washington said yesterday it has approved requests from the Baltic nations to ship US-made weapons to Ukraine. Britain has also said it would send defensive weapons to Ukraine as part of a package to help the country secure its borders. Kyiv has repeatedly pleaded with Germany to send armaments, a call that has so far been rebuffed. During her first visit to Ukraine on Monday, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Germany would "do its all to guarantee Ukraine's security", but again rejected the call for weapon shipments. In Berlin, the controversial gas pipeline Nord Stream 2, which is due to double supplies of cheap natural gas from Russia to Germany, could once again surface as a sticking point among allies. Amid the latest bout of tensions with Moscow, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has warned of consequences for the pipeline, which is operational but not yet in service as it awaits approval from Germany's energy regulator. —AFP

Can US, Russia find diplomatic 'off-ramp' on Ukraine crisis?

KYIV: The United States has called for a diplomatic solution with Russia to resolve a crisis over Ukraine, but in public at least, the two powers remain deeply at odds. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will meet Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Friday in Geneva as tens of thousands of Russian troops remain stationed on Ukraine's borders.

Blinken, on a solidarity visit to Kyiv on Wednesday, called on Moscow to choose the "peaceful path" on Ukraine, with a US official saying the talks in Geneva will explore "diplomatic off-ramps" with Russia. But Moscow has put forward unusually detailed draft security proposals to which Blinken said he will not formally respond, hoping instead to explore areas of cooperation.

Arms control path?

President Joe Biden's administration has said it is willing to look forward with Russia by taking up arms control or agreeing to greater transparency on military exercises. In initial talks last week in Geneva, Blinken's deputy, Wendy Sherman, proposed a return in substance to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, a Cold War deal that limited missiles in Europe.

Former president Donald Trump's administration withdrew from the treaty, accusing Moscow of violations. Blinken said in Kyiv there were "areas where clearly, if there is a will, we could make progress on a reciprocal basis to improve security for everyone". Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who met with

Sherman, appeared positive that Washington was discussing the treaty but regretted that the discussion was tied to Ukraine.

'Non-starter' on NATO

Ryabkov, addressing the Valdai Discussion Club, said Russia wanted legally binding guarantees that NATO will not expand to include Ukraine, a former Soviet republic that has faced a bloody pro-Russia insurgency since 2014. He called for the formal replacement of the NATO alliance's 2008 Bucharest declaration that opened a path for Ukraine as well as Georgia to join eventually.

"We are seeing a threat from Ukraine becoming more and more integrated into NATO even without becoming a formal member of the organization. This is what lies at the centre of Russia's security interests," he said. Blinken called slamming the door on NATO expansion a "non-starter", saying that "one nation can't simply dictate to another its choice."

Bill Taylor, a former US ambassador to Ukraine, doubted there was any way to resolve the differences on NATO. The Biden administration "has not blinked, despite all the pressure and temptation, and in my view they are not going to blink," said Taylor, now at the US Institute of Peace. "To do that would be to treat Ukraine not as a sovereign state," he told AFP. But he said the INF Treaty offered a way forward so long as Putin pulls back from invading. "If indeed he would like to have a conversation on his security concerns, the United States and NATO have both indicated that they are very willing."

A new way?

Despite US statements, few expect Ukraine or Georgia to enter NATO anytime soon, with Europeans in particular loath to commit to defending nations already in conflict with Russia. In a recent essay,



KYIV: Ukrainian military forces servicemen lay flowers to Memorial Bell at the ministry of defense yesterday as they take part in honoring the memory of Ukrainian servicemen who died on this day. —AFP

Thomas Graham, a top official under former president George W Bush, and academic Rajan Menon, suggested a formal moratorium in the accession of Ukraine or any other former Soviet republic for 20 to 25 years.

They wrote in Politico that such a deal would require "lots of imagination and skilled wordsmithing" and face plenty of opposition. But, they wrote, "Moscow may accept this compromise because it knows that NATO will never agree to an outright ban." Steven Pifer of the Brookings Institution in an essay noted that any change in the open-door policy would again require consensus - meaning all 30 NATO members would need to agree with Russia. But "a middle ground of 'not now but not never' might offer a way to kick this thorny can down the road. That is, if Moscow wishes to defuse the situation." —AFP

International

Senate sinks Biden push for major voting rights reforms

Democrats unable to overcome the so-called 'filibuster'

WASHINGTON: US senators dealt a death blow Wednesday to President Joe Biden's push to defend voting rights against what Democrats frame as an all-out assault by conservative states targeting racial minorities. Faced with a blockade from Republicans complaining of federal overreach, the ruling Democrats were unable to push through the Freedom to Vote Act and John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act passed by the House of Representatives last week.

"I am profoundly disappointed that the Senate has failed to stand up for our democracy. I am disappointed - but I am not deterred," Biden said in a statement posted to social media immediately after the vote. "We will continue to advance necessary legislation and push for Senate procedural changes that will protect the fundamental right to vote."

Democrats and voting rights activists have championed the measures as a necessary response to Republican efforts to restrict voting, especially among Black and Latino Americans. "I know this is not 1965. That's what makes me so outraged. It's 2022, and they're blatantly removing more polling places from the counties where Blacks and Latinos are overrepresented," New Jersey Democrat Cory Booker said on the floor of the Senate. "I'm not making that up. That is a fact."

Conservative states spent the last year leveraging ex-president Donald Trump's false claims of widespread election fraud to introduce a slate of regulations that make voting more difficult. The

legislation would have guaranteed the right to mail-in voting, ballot drop boxes and at least two weeks of early voting - as well as making Election Day a national holiday.

It also addressed "gerrymandering" - the partisan trick of redrawing congressional districts in the ruling party's favor - and would have required states with a history of discrimination to get federal clearance before changing election law. But all 50 Republicans voted against the reforms, arguing that restrictions such as limiting mail-in voting and insisting on voter identification were simply common sense.

Misplaced concern

"The concern is misplaced. If you look at the statistics, African American voters are voting in just as high percentage as America," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell told reporters ahead of the vote. "In a recent survey 94 percent of Americans thought it was easy to vote. This is not a problem. Turnout is up, the biggest turnout since 1900."

All 50 GOP senators vote against reforms

Democrats hold a technical majority of one in the evenly split Senate, with Vice President Kamala Harris able to act as a tiebreaker on 50-50 votes. With no Republicans breaking ranks, Democrats were unable to overcome the so-called "filibuster" - the 60-vote threshold required to take proposed legislation to a vote in the Senate. Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer tried to lower the bar to break filibusters specifically for



WASHINGTON: US Vice President Kamala Harris departs the Senate Chambers after presiding over a procedural vote on ending the voting rights legislation debate process at the US Capitol on Wednesday. —AFP

voting rights, a gambit known as the "nuclear option".

Schumer proposed re-instating the "talking filibuster", forcing Republicans to speak on the floor to sustain their opposition, and introducing a limited carve-out exemption from the 60-vote threshold. But that maneuver also fell short, as moderate Democratic senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten

Sinema sided with Republicans to vote no.

With the broad push to strengthen voting rights now in limbo, Democrats have the option of pursuing a narrower, cross-party effort to safeguard elections. This would likely include funding to help protect election officials from threats and tightening the process Congress uses to certify presidential elections every four years. —AFP

News in brief

CIA rejects 'Havana Syndrome'

WASHINGTON: The CIA has concluded that US diplomats suffering mysterious headaches and nausea in what has been dubbed "Havana Syndrome" were not targeted in a global campaign by a foreign power, reports said Wednesday. The reports said the CIA did not rule out foreign involvement in about two dozen cases that remain unexplained, which continue to be investigated. "In hundreds of other cases of possible symptoms, the agency has found plausible, alternate explanations," NBC sources told the network. —AFP

Breivik should be denied parole

OSLO: A Norwegian prosecutor yesterday called for neo-Nazi Anders Behring Breivik's parole request to be denied, insisting he is as dangerous now as when he killed 77 people in 2011 twin attacks. Breivik, 42, claims he has distanced himself from violence and wants to be paroled after serving the minimum court-ordered 10 years of his 21-year sentence, which can be extended as long as he is considered a threat to society. The hearing was held for security reasons in the gymnasium of the Skien prison where Breivik is incarcerated. —AFP

Belgian court jails trafficker

BRUGES: A Belgian court sentenced a Vietnamese man to 15 years in prison on Wednesday after convicting him of being the ringleader in the trafficking of 39 migrants found dead in a lorry. Vo Van Hong, 45, was found guilty of leading a cross-Channel people-trafficking operation that has been linked to a truck found full of corpses on an English industrial estate in Oct 2019. At least 15 of the 39 dead had passed through the Belgian-based trafficking network, which operated two safe houses in the Anderlecht district of Brussels for migrants heading to Britain. —AFP

Ex-pope accused of inaction

MUNICH: Former pope Benedict XVI failed to stop four clergymen accused of child sex abuse in the Catholic Church in Munich, the law firm that carried out a key probe said yesterday. The ex-pontiff - who was the archbishop of Munich and Freising from 1977 to 1982 - has "strictly" denied any responsibility, said lawyer Martin Pusch of Westpfahl Spilker Wastl, which was tasked by the church to carry out the probe. But the experts do not consider this credible, he added. Two of the cases involved clergymen who had committed several proven acts of abuse but were allowed to continue with pastoral duties, Pusch said. —AFP

Liberian stampede kills 29

MONROVIA: A stampede at a Christian prayer gathering in Liberia's capital Monrovia has killed at least 29 people, police said yesterday, adding that the death toll may rise. The disaster occurred on Wednesday night or during the early hours of yesterday morning, according to media in the West African country. Police spokesman Moses Carter told AFP the death toll was provisional and "may increase" because a number of people were in critical condition. Dixon Seebo, an elected representative from the poor suburb of New Kru Town where the stampede occurred, said that 11 children had been killed. —AFP

Russian female cosmonaut to travel to space

MOSCOW: Russia's sole active female cosmonaut, Anna Kikina, is due to travel to the International Space Station in September on a Soyuz rocket, the national space agency said yesterday. Kikina, a 37-year-old engineer, will be only the fifth professional woman cosmonaut from Russia or the Soviet Union to fly to space. Last year, the Russian space agency Roscosmos said "our beauty" Kikina would fly aboard SpaceX's Crew Dragon as part of a cross-flights deal between Roscosmos and NASA.

Yesterday, Roscosmos said that if the two countries finalize the deal, Kikina will fly to space with the Americans in August, while NASA's Francisco Rubio will travel on a Soyuz. But if the deal does not work out, she will travel to the ISS

Top court rejects Trump bid to block document release

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a bid by former president Donald Trump to block the release to a congressional committee of documents related to the Jan 6 attack on the Capitol. Citing executive privilege, Trump had sought to prevent the records held by the National Archives from being given to the panel investigating the assault on Congress by his supporters. Trump, who has been accused of fomenting the Capitol assault, had asked the nation's highest court to stay a ruling by a federal appeals court, which rejected his efforts to keep the documents secret.

But the Supreme Court, in an 8-1 vote, refused to issue a stay and upheld the lower court's ruling, in a significant setback for the former president. Justice Clarence Thomas, a conservative, was the only justice in favor of issuing a stay. The other five conservative justices on the court - three of whom were appointed by Trump - joined the three liberals in denying the request.

The leaders of the House Select Committee

UK's Johnson fights back after defection

LONDON: Allies of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson closed ranks yesterday after a day of high drama prompted second thoughts among some Conservatives about dethroning their embattled leader. One anti-Johnson plot by younger Tory MPs, livid at breaches of lockdowns by partying Downing Street staff, appeared to be fizzling out despite one senior backbencher telling him to his face to quit, "in the name of God". Wednesday's defection of Conservative Christian Wakeford to Labour served as a reminder of the high stakes at play, with the opposition party surging in opinion polls. "The prime minister is probably thanking Christian for what he did because it's made a lot of people think again, think twice," Tory MP Andrew Percy told BBC radio. "It's kind of made people a bit more relaxed, it's calmed nerves," he said. "I think people have recognized that actually this constant navel-gazing and internal debating is only to the advantage of our political opponents."

Before Wakeford's defection, the plotters appeared confident that they were close to the 54 letters needed to force

on a Soyuz rocket in September. The last Russian woman to fly to space was Elena Serova, who spent 167 days aboard the ISS from Sept 2014 to March 2015.

Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space when she travelled into orbit on June 16, 1963. Svetlana Savitskaya was the second woman in space, and the first woman to perform a spacewalk in July, 1984. In October, Russia also sent to space an actress, Yulia Peresild, who spent 12 days on the ISS shooting scenes for a movie. By comparison, more than 50 American women have travelled to space.

Roscosmos also said yesterday that three Russian cosmonauts - Oleg Artemyev, Denis Matveyev and Sergei Korsakov - will fly to the ISS in March. "For the first time in the history of the ISS, the Soyuz crew will include three Russian professional cosmonauts," the space agency said. A Roscosmos official said this was because a contract with NASA on joint flights was nearing its end. "Talks are currently underway to extend the contract," the representative said. —AFP

investigating the Jan 6 attack, Democratic Chairman Bennie Thompson and Republican Vice Chair Liz Cheney, applauded the decision. "The Supreme Court's action tonight is a victory for the rule of law and American democracy," they said in a statement. "Our work goes forward to uncover all the facts about the violence of January 6th and its causes."

Trump had sought to exercise his privilege as a former president to keep under wraps White House records and communications that might relate to the attack. In a filing with the Supreme Court, Trump's lawyers had argued that "a former president has the right to assert executive privilege, even after his term of office." They condemned the congressional records request as "strikingly broad" and accused the committee in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives of conducting a probe of a "political foe."

President Joe Biden waived executive privilege on the Trump records so they could be handed over to the committee and the appeals court decided that "the right of a former president certainly enjoys no greater weight than that of the incumbent". The appeals court said the public interest was greater than Trump's own in relation to the records. "In this case, President Biden, as the head of the Executive Branch, has specifically found that Congress has demonstrated a compelling need for these very documents and that disclosure is in the

a no-confidence vote in Johnson by Conservative MPs. But the secretive process remained on hold, with some rebels even withdrawing their letters in response to Wakeford joining Labour, according to reports. The right-wing Daily Mail newspaper said that against a backdrop of crisis at home and abroad, it was no time to be changing leaders.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is "poised to start a war" in Ukraine, and UK inflation is soaring, it said in a front-page editorial. "Yet a narcissistic rabble of Tory MPs are trying to topple (a) PM who's leading us out of Covid. In the name of God, grow up!"

Johnson unmasked

Critics accuse Johnson of lying to parliament about what he knew and when, with regard to boozy parties held in Downing Street in apparent breach of his own government's COVID rules over the past two years. While apologizing for the parties, he denies misleading the country, and insists that all sides should await the findings of an internal inquiry by senior civil servant Sue Gray.

On Wednesday, he indicated in parliament that Gray's findings could come out next week, as he defiantly vowed to fight on as leader to the next general election due in 2024. Health Secretary Sajid Javid agreed that any minister, "from the prime minister down", found to have broken the law



MOSCOW: This undated handout photo released yesterday shows female cosmonaut Anna Kikina posing for a picture at the Space Museum. —AFP

best interests of the nation," the court said.

The House Select Committee is scrutinizing the Jan 6 attempt by hundreds of Trump supporters to block congressional certification of Biden's Nov 2020 election victory. Documents that Trump hoped to block include emails, phone records, briefing materials and other records. The more than 770 pages include records of his former chief of staff Mark Meadows, his former senior advisor Stephen Miller and his former deputy counsel Patrick Philbin.

Trump had also sought to block the release of the White House Daily Diary - a record of his activities, trips, briefings and phone calls. Another trove of documents Trump does not want Congress to see includes memos to his former press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, a handwritten note on the Jan 6 events and a draft text of his speech at the "Save America" rally, which preceded the attack.

The congressional committee is looking into how the attack, which shut down the Congress, took place, and whether Trump and members of his circle had any part in encouraging it. It has already issued subpoenas for several key figures in Trump's orbit, including Meadows and one-time White House strategist Steve Bannon. On Tuesday, the committee issued subpoenas to former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani - a key figure in Trump's failed bid to overturn the 2020 election - and three other allies of the defeated ex-president. —AFP



TAUNTON: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson reacts during a visit to the Rutherford Diagnostic Centre in southwest England yesterday. —AFP

would have to resign. But Javid said he believed Johnson was secure in his job. "At the same time, people are right to be angered and pained about what they have seen, and they have heard. I share that anger and pain," he told BBC television yesterday. —AFP

International

Stay or go? Dilemma facing last of the Afghan Sikhs

India has offered exiled Sikhs priority visas, long-term residency

KABUL: The caretaker of the last Sikh temple in Kabul to regularly host open prayer surveys the cavernous hall where throngs once gathered in worship. Only a handful are left now. "Afghanistan is our country, our homeland," said Gurnam Singh. "But we are leaving out of sheer hopelessness." In the 1970s, Afghanistan's Sikh population numbered 100,000, but decades of conflict, poverty and intolerance have driven almost all of them into exile.

The Soviet occupation, subsequent Taliban regime and bloody US-led military intervention winnowed their numbers to just 240 last year, according to figures kept by the community. After the Taliban returned to power in August, opening the newest chapter in Afghanistan's dark history, a fresh wave of Sikhs fled the country. Today, Gurnam Singh estimates just 140 remain, mostly in the eastern city of Jalalabad and in Kabul.

Spiritual home

These remaining devotees trickle into the Karte Parwan Gurdwara temple for a recent prayer session on a wintry Monday. Men stand to one side, women the other - about 15 in total. Sitting barefoot on a floor covered with thick red rugs, they warm themselves around stoves and listen to a recitation from the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. In November, the temple had three copies, but two have since been sent to New Delhi for "safekeeping".

Sikhs have long faced discrimination in Muslim-majority Afghanistan. Poverty is rife and attacks from the Islamic State-Khorasan, the group's Afghan chapter, are a real threat. The overwhelming majority of Sikhs fleeing Afghanistan have landed in India, where 90 percent of the religion's 25

million global adherents live, mainly in the north-west region of Punjab.

Since the Taliban takeover, India has offered exiled Sikhs priority visas and the opportunity to apply for long-term residency. There is no sign yet that citizenship is on the table. Pharmacist Manjit Singh, 40, is among those who turned down the offer, despite his daughter having emigrated there with her new husband last year. "What would I do in India?" he asked. "There is no job or house there."

Among the remaining holdouts, the prospect of leaving is particularly wrenching: it would mean

“ Whatever joy or sorrow we felt, we shared it here ”

abandoning their spiritual home. "When this gurdwara was built 60 years ago, the whole area was full of Sikhs," said 60-year-old community elder Manmohan Singh. "Whatever joy or sorrow we felt, we shared it here."

Leaving home

From the outside, the temple is largely indistinguishable from other buildings on the street. But security here is markedly high, with body searches,



KABUL: This picture taken on Dec 31, 2021 shows an Afghan Sikh priest praying at the Karte Parwan Gurdwara. — AFP

ID checks and two fortified doors. In early October, unidentified gunmen forced their way inside and vandalized the sacred space. The incident had ugly echoes of the most scarring attack on the Afghan Sikh community.

In March 2020, members of IS-K assaulted the Gurdwara Har Rai Sahib in Shor Bazar, a former enclave of Kabul's Sikh community, killing 25. Since the attack, that temple - and the nearby Dharamshala Gurdwara, the capital's oldest Sikh house of worship at an estimated 500 years - have been abandoned.

Paramjeet Kaur was struck by shrapnel in her left eye during the IS-K attack, and her sister was among

those killed. In the weeks that followed, Kaur packed her bags and headed for Delhi, but "we had no work and it was expensive, so we came back", she said. That was in July, a few weeks before the Taliban returned to power.

Now Kaur, her husband and three children are fed and housed by Karte Parwan Gurdwara. Her children do not go to school, and Kaur never ventures beyond the walls of the temple, the only place where she feels safe. She thinks about leaving again, this time for Canada or the United States. "My son and daughters are still small," she said. "If we leave, we can make something of our lives." — AFP

News in brief

Taiwan VP to make US stopovers

TAIPEI: Taiwan said yesterday its vice president will transit in the United States on his way to the inauguration of Honduras' president-elect, a stopover seen by China as an affront to Beijing's claim on the island. Next week Vice President William Lai will lead a 26-member delegation to attend Xiomara Castro's inauguration and will stop in Los Angeles on the way, said presidential office spokesman Xavier Chang in a statement Thursday. "On return, (the delegation) will stop in San Francisco for the night," Chang added. — AFP

Residents return to Fukushima town

TOKYO: Five former residents of the last remaining uninhabited town near Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear plant returned yesterday to live there for the first time since the 2011 disaster. TV footage showed the returnees inspecting the buildings, with one testing a tap outside his house. "It's out! This is the first time in 10 years and 11 months that running water comes out," he said. Futaba, whose population of around 5,600 was forced to flee over radiation fears, had been the final deserted municipality in the Fukushima region. — AFP

Afghan activists go into hiding

KABUL: Several Afghan women's rights activists said yesterday they are going into hiding to escape a Taliban crackdown, just days after the hardline Islamists used pepper spray to break up a rally in the capital. At least one woman was arrested, in what appeared to be a series of raids Wednesday night. A self-shot video of a second woman in distress, warning of Taliban fighters at her door, circulated on social media. Another activist said the Taliban went to her house looking for her, but she was away with a relative at the time. — AFP

Snow falls on Chinese capital

BEIJING: Beijing was hit by a blanket of snow yesterday, as the Winter Olympics countdown clocked two weeks until the Chinese capital hosts the sporting extravaganza. Temperatures fell below minus nine degrees Celsius as commuters struggled to work yesterday morning, with snow dusting roads, buildings, and Olympics venues across the megacity of nearly 22 million. Although temperatures in Beijing regularly drop well below freezing in the winter months, the city is very dry which makes snowfall unusual. — AFP

US warship sparks Beijing warning

BEIJING: A US warship sailed through the South China Sea yesterday, sparking a warning from China's military as tensions between the superpowers remain high. The American navy said the USS Benfold "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law". The Southern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army said the US ship had "illegally" entered what Beijing regards as its waters. — AFP

India bids farewell to 'supermum' tiger

PENCH TIGER RESERVE, India: Indian animal lovers are in mourning over the sudden passing of a nationally famous tigress credited with repopulating a forest redoubt for her endangered kin. Collarwali, dubbed "supermum" by local press for giving birth to nearly 30 cubs, died peacefully at the weekend after an intestinal problem. Sombre conservation officers gently carried Collarwali's body onto a funeral pyre garlanded with flowers for her ritual cremation.

"The tigress was very popular at the reserve and with the local community," Alok Mishra, field director of the Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh state, told AFP. "Everyone knew about her." Collarwali earned her celebrity following for rejuvenating the local tiger population, and drew visitors from across India to the reserve, in

an area purported to be the inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's famed "Jungle Book" anthology.

Of the 29 cubs she gave birth to over her lifetime, 25 survived to adulthood. Her peculiar name - "With Collar" in English - came from a research project conducted in the nature park in her infancy. "She was the first tiger to get a collar at the reserve," Mishra said. "That was the reason she became very famous... the collar ensured that she was very well documented and well known."

India is home to around 75 percent of the world's remaining tigers, but hunting and habitat loss have slashed the population to dangerously low levels. Footage of Collarwali prowling her habitat was shared on social media after news of her death, along with an outpouring of heartfelt tributes. "Wildlife lovers and enthusiasts

Virus tracing highlights China inequality

BEIJING: The stark contrast between the lives of two coronavirus patients unearthed by Chinese contact tracers sparked a widespread debate yesterday over the country's entrenched wealth inequality. One patient recently infected in Beijing went skiing, shopped at Dior and watched live comedy. Another hauled construction waste through the night across China's capital, working more than a dozen odd jobs in two weeks while he searched for a missing son.

Chinese authorities regularly release semi-anonymous descriptions of COVID-19 patients' movements in the days leading up to their diagnosis as part of contact tracing efforts. Beijing is battling a fresh Covid outbreak just days before the start of the Winter Olympics, reporting six new locally transmitted cases over the past

week. The itinerary of a 44-year-old man surnamed Yue, who was found to have an asymptomatic infection on Tuesday, went viral for the life of hardship it revealed.

Yue, a native of Henan province, visited two dozen locations including construction sites for work from January 1 to January 17, often late at night, and ate out only once - at a budget noodle restaurant. An interview with Yue published by the state-run China Newsweek revealed that the man had come to Beijing to search for his missing adult son, and that he was working to support his younger son as well as his parents, who were unwell.

Yue said his wife worked for a kelp seller in Shandong province, earning only 10,000 yuan (\$1,577) each year, while he was able to make a similar amount doing odd jobs in Beijing in less than two months. Chinese media quickly dubbed Yue the "most exhausted man found by contact tracers", with many social media users pointing out that his plight was not uncommon among the country's millions of migrant workers. "He repre-



KARMAJHIRI, India: This screen grab from video taken on Jan 16, 2022 shows the carcass of 'Collarwali' tigress during its funeral ceremony at the Pench Tiger Reserve. — AFP

will understand how heartbreaking it is, when a majestic tigress goes into silence forever," one user wrote on Twitter. "RIP, Queen of Pench. You

lived long and majestically," said another. "You ruled the food chain and because of you an entire forest was alive." — AFP



BEIJING: A health worker takes a swab sample from a man to test for COVID-19 on a snowy day yesterday. — AFP

sents the majority of disadvantaged people struggling at the bottom of society," one user on the Twitter-like Weibo commented.

Others pointed out that Yue's case stood in stark contrast with the lifestyle of another COVID-19 patient

reported in Beijing last week. The earlier patient, an affluent office worker, had celebrated New Year's Day with a Peking duck lunch, shopped at a luxury boutique and visited a theatre the next day. She then went skiing the following weekend. — AFP

DPRK hints at restart of nuclear, long range missile tests

SEOUL: North Korea hinted yesterday it could resume nuclear and long-range weapons tests as it prepares for "confrontation" with Washington, its latest threat after a string of sanctions-busting missile launches. Pyongyang has not tested inter-continental ballistic missiles or nukes since 2017, putting launches on hold as leader Kim Jong Un embarked on a blitz of high-level diplomacy, meeting then-US president Donald Trump three times before talks collapsed two years later.

Since then, the nuclear-armed North has rebuffed US offers of talks while restarting some testing, including of hypersonic missiles, as Kim pursues his avowed goal of further strengthening

his military. When Washington imposed fresh sanctions last week, Pyongyang said it was a "provocation" and ramped up conventional weapons tests, vowing a "stronger and certain" response to efforts to rein it in.

"The hostile policy and military threat by the US have reached a danger line that cannot be overlooked any more," a report on a meeting of the country's Politburo in state media KCNA said Thursday. The North's top officials "unanimously recognized that we should make more thorough preparation for a long-term confrontation with the US imperialists," KCNA reported. This includes examining restarting all temporarily-suspended activities, the report added.

The potential resumption of tests of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles capable of hitting the continental United States come at a delicate time in the region, with Kim's sole major ally China set to host the Winter Olympics next month and South Korea gearing up for a presidential election in March.

North Korea bided its time during US President Joe Biden's first year in office, but with no offer for top-level talks, they've moved on, said Hong Min of the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul. "It's practically 2017 again," he said, referring to a year in which Pyongyang tested nukes and ICBMs as "little rocket man" Kim Jong Un exchanged barbs with "dotard" Trump. "With the North's announcement, it seems inevitable they'll conduct ICBM launches down the road," he said.

Ankit Panda of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace agreed that while nuclear testing was unlikely, "long-range missile testing is back on the table". Kim Jong Un is "reiterating a message he'd delivered back in late-2019: that US actions give him no reason to adhere to his self-imposed moratorium." Kim had put new long-range missile launches on his military modernization agenda last January but had always tied a return to such tests to US actions, Panda said. "The latest round of sanctions, unfortunately, appear to have precipitated this step," he added. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2022

5G launches in US without huge impact on airlines

Emirates to resume US flights after 'temporary' 5G reprieve

NEW YORK: Telecom giants AT&T and Verizon began 5G service in the United States without major disruptions to flights after the launch of the new wireless technology was scaled back. The firms spent tens of billions of dollars to obtain 5G licenses last year, but aviation industry groups have raised concerns about possible interference with airplanes' radio altimeters, which can operate at the same frequencies and are vital for landing at night or in bad weather.

Both AT&T and Verizon this week agreed to scale back the launch of 5G near airports following an outcry from US airlines, who had warned the roll-out would cause mass disruptions. Despite the scaling back, a handful of international carriers cut flights to the United States from their schedules Wednesday, but there were no mass cancellations and some companies planned to resume service the following day. By early morning local time Thursday, 473 flights through US airports had been cancelled, according to tracking website FlightAware, down from last week when there were no major disruptions.

Airlines that cut Wednesday flights included Air India, ANA and Japan Airlines, though all three said they would restore routes the following day. "Our Delhi to JFK flight left this morning at 7 AM (0130 GMT)," Air India's spokesman said, adding it would also be operating flights to San Francisco and Chicago.

ANA and Japan Airlines also said they were restoring service yesterday after assurances from regulators at Washington's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). "As the launch of the 5G service in the US has now been partially postponed, operation of ANA flights from January 20 will follow the normal schedule," ANA President Yuji Hirako said in a statement.

The FAA said Wednesday that it has now approved 62 percent of the US commercial fleet to perform low-visibility landings at airports with 5G-up from the 45 percent on Sunday. "Even with these approvals, flights at some airports may still be affected," the agency said.

"The FAA also continues to work with manufacturers to understand how radar altimeter data is used in other flight control systems. Passengers should check with their airlines for latest flight schedules," AT&T said Wednesday its high-speed service was available in "limited parts" of eight major metropolitan areas across the United States, while Verizon said it now provides 5G coverage to 90 million Americans.

Emirates said yesterday it will lift a suspension of flights to several US destinations in a "temporary reprieve" after the launch of 5G networks was delayed near American airports over safety fears.

Flights to six destinations will resume Friday, and on Saturday services to Boston, Houston and San Francisco will return to Boeing 777 planes after having been changed to Airbus A380s, the Dubai-based carrier said in a statement. The airline announced flight suspensions on Tuesday over concerns that the 5G mobile networks launched by AT&T and Verizon could interfere with altimeters, which measure altitude.

The telecom firms agreed to delay 5G services around airports as the super-fast networks opened without major disruption on Wednesday. "We welcome the latest development which enables us to resume essential transport links to the US to serve travellers and cargo shippers," Emirates president Tim Clark said. "However, we are also very aware that this is a temporary reprieve, and a long-term resolution would be required."



INGLEWOOD, US: Birds stand on a cellular equipment tower as an Alaska Airlines airplane lands at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in Inglewood, California on Wednesday. —AFP

US mobile operators AT&T and Verizon agreed Tuesday to a partial delay in activating their 5G networks following an outcry from US airlines, which warned of travel chaos.

Telecom giants spent tens of billions of dollars to obtain 5G licenses last year, but aviation industry groups raised concerns about possible interference with aeroplanes' radio altimeters, particularly in bad weather. —AFP

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka hikes interest rates

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's central bank hiked interest rates yesterday in a bid to tame rampant inflation and discourage consumer spending as the country suffers a foreign currency shortage and teeters on the brink of default. The island nation of around 22 million has seen shortages of food and fuel as well as electricity rationing, with rating agencies warning it might not be able to meet repayments on its debts. Inflation hit a record 12.1 percent last month.

The central bank raised the benchmark deposit and lending rates by 50 basis points each to 5.5 percent and 6.5 percent respectively. The hike was the first since August.

It said in a statement that the higher borrowing costs would encourage savings and discourage consumption, thereby reducing demand for imports at a time when the country's foreign reserves were under pressure. "We want to give a very clear message that... inflation was being dealt with," bank governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal told reporters.

The island's tourism sector and worker remittances, the government's main sources of income, have been battered by the pandemic.

It said the economy grew 4.0 percent last year, having suffered a record 3.6 percent contraction in 2020. Colombo insists it will honor obligations on its \$35 billion in external debt, and Cabraal again insisted that a bailout from the International Monetary Fund was unnecessary. "People have a fixation on the IMF... don't you have an idea of our programs?" he said. "Our programs have a huge amount of merit." —AFP

Turkey halts four-month streak of rate cuts

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank yesterday bowed to market pressure and halted a four-month streak of interest rate cuts that saw inflation soar and the currency collapse.

The bank left its policy rate at 14 percent two days after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan—a fervent opponent of high interest rates—said future reductions could come "gradually and without any rush".

Erdogan has been waging a "war of economic independence" designed to wean Turkey off its dependence on foreign capital inflows by boosting cheap lending and revving up exports. But the policies have seen the emerging country's economy spin dangerously out of control.

Turkey's annual inflation rate has soared to a 19-year high of 36 percent. The lira lost 44 percent of its value against the dollar and became the world's worst-performing emerging market currency last year.

And the central bank's net reserves—a gauge of both Turkey's economic health and ability to withstand a potential banking crisis—have dropped from \$21.1 billion (18.6 billion euros) in mid-December to \$7.9

billion on January 7. "The sharp falls in the lira risk entrenching inflation at very high levels," Jason Tuvey of Capital Economics said in a note to clients.

"And the weak lira could cause vulnerabilities in the banking sector to crystallize."

'Bad policy for longer'

Erdogan has cited Islamic rules against usury to justify his belief that high interest rates cause inflation. Economists almost universally agree that the opposite is true. Central banks hike rates in order to raise the cost of doing business when the economy is growing too fast. This helps bring down prices by reducing demand.

High rates also help support currencies by raising the return on local bank deposits and investments.

But Erdogan says Turkey has developed a "new economic model" for achieving sustainable growth.

The central bank blamed the spike in inflation from 21.3 percent in November to 36.2 percent last month to "distorted pricing behavior (caused by) unhealthy price formations in the



foreign exchange market". It also blamed outside factors such as high commodity prices and global supply chain bottlenecks caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The lira edged up slightly after the announcement to around 13.3 to the dollar.

Economists believe the bank would need to hike its policy rate substantially in order to solve Turkey's accumulating problems. "No change (means) bad policy for longer," emerging markets economist Timothy Ash of BlueBay Asset Management remarked after the rate decision.

Turks had been converting their liras into gold and dollars in order to shield themselves from price increases and an erosion of their purchasing power.

The government has tried to stem this tide by creating new bank deposits that effectively tie the value of the lira to the dollar. Erdogan said on Wednesday that the new scheme has attracted 163 billion liras (\$12.2 billion). Yet official data show that roughly 60 percent of all Turks' deposits are still held in foreign currencies. —AFP

China cuts lending rates, boosting property firms

BEIJING: China further reduced bank lending costs yesterday in the latest move to boost its stuttering economy, providing some much-needed support to the country's beleaguered developers.

Property firm shares and bonds surged on the fresh rate cut from People's Bank of China—the second in two months—days after Beijing reported slower growth in the final months of 2021. The slowing real estate industry has put downward pressure on growth, with several large companies including debt-laden development giant Evergrande defaulting in recent months. The central bank said it had lowered the one-year loan prime rate (LPR) to 3.7 percent, from 3.8 percent in December. It had reduced the LPR—which guides

how much interest commercial banks charge to corporate borrowers—in December, for the first time in 20 months, as the economy was threatened by the real estate crisis and coronavirus flare-ups. The launch of a regulatory drive last year to curb speculation and leverage had cut off avenues to crucially needed cash, sparking a crisis in the property sector.

But investors regained confidence amid expectations of regulatory easing with shares in Hong Kong-listed Agile Group up more than six percent and Country Garden climbing 7.4 percent.

Property developer bonds also surged yesterday on news of the rate cut, in what Bloomberg said was a record-breaking rally, highlighting the huge sums of money primed to flow into distressed securities if the property sector crackdown was eased. Yesterday's move comes after the world's second-biggest economy reported strong 8.1 percent growth in 2021, but with the first half of the year accounting for much of that growth.

The central bank also cut the interest rate on its one-year policy loans on Monday—the first drop in the key rate

for loans to financial institutions since early 2020.

'Targeted support'

China was the only major economy to expand in 2020, after quickly bringing the outbreak under control. But the country is now battling several localized virus clusters as it deals with the ongoing property market slump and fallout from a wide-ranging regulatory crackdown last year.

"Today's reductions to both the one-year and five-year Loan Prime Rates (LPR) continue the PBOC's efforts to push down borrowing costs," said Sheana Yue, China economist at Capital Economics.

She said the cuts mean "mortgages will now be slightly cheaper, which should help shore up housing demand." "Targeted support for property buyers does appear to be limiting one of the more severe downside risks facing the economy."

Hong Kong-listed China Aoyuan Group became the latest major developer to miss bond payments, saying in a filing it would be unable to pay two notes due yesterday and Saturday,



BEIJING: Property firm shares and bonds surged on the fresh rate cut from People's Bank of China—the second in two months—days after Beijing reported slower growth in the final months of 2021

amounting to \$688 million in total. Fitch Ratings also downgraded its rating for real estate giant Sunac China

Holdings, warning the developer would have to use its cash reserves to pay off debts maturing soon. —AFP

Business

Retirements common factor in US, UK labor shortage: IMF

World Bank chief contrasts Microsoft deal with poor countries' debt

WASHINGTON: An exodus of older workers is the "common thread" behind the baffling labor shortages faced by companies in the United States and Britain, the IMF concluded in a report released Wednesday. The "mismatch" between job openings and workers' willingness to do those jobs, especially low-paying positions, also plays a role, but pandemic aid payments were not a big factor keeping workers away, the International Monetary Fund found in its research.

However its report said the issue of women sitting on the sidelines due to difficulties with childcare and schooling amid the COVID-19 pandemic was a problem specific to the United States alone.

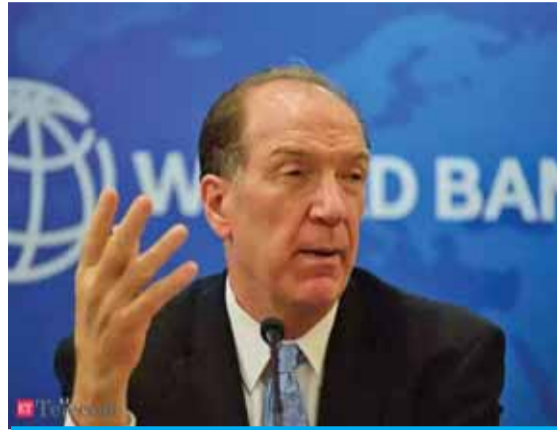
"We found that lower participation among older workers not returning to work is the common thread, and matters most. Mismatch plays a secondary role," authors Carlo Pizzinelli and Ipppei Shibata said in a blog post about the findings. "The fall in female participation is unique to the US, but quantitatively important," they said, noting that as of October 2021, the absence of mothers of children under five years old "accounted for around 16 percent of the total US employment gap with respect to pre-Covid levels." Contrary to the narrative often promoted in the United States, the researchers found "only a modest and temporary effect" from expanded unemployment aid.

The more important issue in both countries was that "the share of older workers not in the labor force rose markedly." In the United States, the exodus and early retirements of workers 55 and older combined with the "she-cession" of female workers, "may account for roughly 70 percent of the US employment gap compared with pre-COVID levels," the authors said. In the UK, the absence of older workers accounts for 35 percent of the shortage.

Both countries have been hit by a surge in employees leaving their jobs known as the "great resignation," but the majority of unfilled openings are concentrated in low-wage jobs, the report found. "Workers may have become more reluctant to take up jobs in low-skill occupations, which are traditionally associated with lower wages and poorer working conditions," the report said, although that explains only a small fraction of the employment gap.

Resolving the labor shortage and preventing persistent scars on both economies requires addressing the pandemic so workers can return to their jobs, the authors said. They also recommend "well-designed training programs to reduce risks of mismatch."

In the United States, they called for "expanded



WASHINGTON: World Bank President David Malpass on Wednesday drew a contrast between the deal and the amount of money rich nations have pledged to help poor countries facing higher debt loads.

childcare and preschool opportunities," measures US President Joe Biden has pushed for in legislation that is stalled in Congress.

After Microsoft announced it would spend tens of billions of dollars to buy a video game company, World Bank President David Malpass on Wednesday drew a contrast between the deal and the amount of money rich nations have pledged to help poor countries facing higher debt loads. "I was struck this morning by the Microsoft investment — \$75 billion in a video gaming company" compared to just \$24 billion over three years in aid for the poorest countries, Malpass said, referring to donations allocated in December by 48 high- and middle-income governments.

"You have to wonder, is this the best allocation of capital?" he said of the Microsoft deal in a discussion at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

"There has to be more money and growth flowing into the developing countries," Microsoft on Tuesday announced the purchase of US gaming giant Activision Blizzard, the firm behind hits like "Call of Duty."

Malpass has called on the richest nations in the Group of 20 to provide more debt relief to the world's least-developed countries that qualify for interest-free loans. A G20 debt service suspension initiative expired at the end of 2021, and this year alone, those countries must pay \$35 billion in debt service. "The debt payments are staggering," and it has become a "compounding" problem, Malpass said. —AFP

Bund yields go positive but what does it mean?

NEW YORK: Yields on 10-year German bonds passed into positive territory for the first time since May 2019 as surging inflation in the eurozone prompted speculation that monetary policy could be tightened. AFP looks at what prompted the shift, why it is important and what this spells for the global economy.

What is the Bund?

The Bund is the shorthand name for German government bonds—a play on the German word for "federal". Like all governments, Germany issues bonds to raise money to pay for its spending. Bunds are seen as a safe haven for investors to turn to in times of instability, because Europe's largest economy is considered to be a reliable borrower. "The quality of the credit is the best in the world", because it is "without risk" says Patrick Barbe from investment manager Neuberger Berman.

Why was it negative?

A bond generates a negative yield when investors are willing to pay more for it than its face value plus the returns it is offering. Investors are willing to do this in times of great economic uncertainty when they feel other investments may lose value, and central banks buying bonds to stimulate economies also pushes down yields on bonds.

German government bonds entered negative territory in May 2019, as the ECB was rolling out its stimulus program to ward off the threat of a recession in the eurozone.

Yields for 10-year German bonds went as low as minus 0.91 percent in March 2020 just as the coronavirus pandemic was taking hold across the continent. But the indicator, which move inversely to the price paid for the bond, has risen sharply in recent weeks as central banks around the world wind down their stimulus programs and move towards raising interest rates.

Investors have more optimistic expectations about the economy even as the coronavirus pandemic continues. After turning positive on Wednesday, yields for the benchmark German bond climbed as high as 0.02 percent, before easing back.

Why does it matter?

Rising bond yields mean rising borrowing costs for governments, making it more expensive for them to finance their spending. The higher yield for German bonds could make them more attractive for investors, potentially changing their strategies and having a knock-on effect in other bond markets.

Investors could be tempted to "pull their capital" out of bonds from more highly indebted countries, such as Italy, putting pressure on their borrowing costs, says Oliver Eichmann from asset manager DWS. Higher yields could also herald an end to the super low mortgage costs that have helped fuel a housing market boom over the last years.



What does this mean for the economy?

Rising Bund yields reflect rising confidence that the eurozone economy will "come out of the crisis without too much damage", says Ludovic Subran, chief economist at Allianz. It also shows that investors are placing larger bets on the need for central banks to act to tackle rising inflation. The European Central Bank, which handles monetary policy in the eurozone, has already announced a stepwise reduction in its stimulus program. But higher yields could be a harbinger for a faster tightening of monetary policy. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 20 JANUARY 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1052	1044	1055	1036	19	21,363,657	-8	-0.76%	4.71%	1044	1057	22.6	2.18	1.8%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	307	296	309	296	13	24,866,662	-10	-3.27%	6.09%	294	303	23.8	1.38	1.6%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	226	225	227	223	4	14,193,033	-1	-0.44%	3.21%	222	227	79.1	0.98	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	271	260	273	260	13	22,432,629	-11	-4.06%	3.59%	256	267	19.7	1.18	1.6%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	900	910	919	900	19	43,967,505	11	1.22%	9.38%	900	919	35.7	3.98	1.0%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	833	828	840	823	17	2,650,835	-4	-0.48%	4.81%	826	835	4.8	0.00	105.0%	0.08
204	National Investments	Financial Services	246	261	263	243	20	34,222,030	16	6.53%	19.18%	248	267	8.3	1.10	3.8%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	157	169	172	155	17	95,482,580	14	9.03%	19.01%	168	178	38.5	2.09	2.2%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	124	125	128	121	7	56,817,406	2	1.63%	5.93%	123	131	NM	0.76	0.0%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	185	183	187	180	7	32,886,646	-2	-1.08%	2.23%	181	187	28.2	1.33	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	831	820	839	816	23	3,367,676	-7	-0.85%	3.40%	814	829	18.2	1.87	0.7%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	310	303	312	300	12	15,272,906	-6	-1.94%	7.07%	295	312	6.0	1.09	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	887	921	930	886	44	1,870,780	40	4.54%	5.74%	914	929	32.5	0.93	5.4%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	882	930	948	882	66	4,187,360	46	5.20%	9.15%	915	935	26.4	2.19	5.8%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	375	375	388	371	17	5,453,880	0	0.00%	8.07%	374	382	NM	1.02	4.0%	0.76
603	Agility	Industrials	1,010	983	1,015	980	35	13,825,992	-25	-2.48%	4.02%	981	991	2.2	1.06	0.9%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	603	585	603	594	9	15,485,388	-8	-1.33%	-1.68%	593	599	13.6	2.17	3.4%	1.34
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,240	3,215	3,240	3,199	41	1,648,953	-34	-1.05%	-0.28%	3200	3229	7.0	3.51	12.4%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	223	217	226	217	9	4,962,219	-6	-2.69%	-0.46%	212	222	NM	0.69	0.0%	0.88
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	287	281	290	279	11	141,766,092	-4	-1.40%	1.08%	278	282	19.3	2.17	1.3%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	286	284	290	282	8	10,213,961	-2	-0.70%	3.65%	278	286	21.6	2.81	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	594	594	598	590	8	2,539,409	2	0.34%	0.85%	593	596	18.5	1.67	2.9%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	376	376	381	373	8	2,615,336	0	0.00%	1.62%	375	378	NM	1.57	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	227	226	229	226	3	4,155,398	-2	-0.88%	-0.88%	222	227	19.2	4.01	4.0%	0.62
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,005	2,024	2,035	2,005	30	553,027	-2	-0.10%	0.20%	2020	2032	25.9	7.20	2.0%	0.62

* As of end of week closing

Business

Al-Shall Weekly Economic Report

Managing Kuwait oil sector requires agility, ability and high professionalism

Reports by rating agencies stress need to adopt a disciplined fiscal policy

KUWAIT: The current government's program contained limbering the public sector as a priority, which is a repeated goal in the development plans and programs of the recent governments. It remained a good goal though what has been achieved so far is the opposite. The country's financial and economic conditions have changed fundamentally so that achieving that goal is no longer an option but an obligation. The oil sector is the most important and largest sector within the public sector and it has been exposed to the largest swelling and sagging process and high costs, in its staff and benefits and in its losing investments around the world. The most serious consequence of its slackness is losing its best leaders as a result of the wrong early retirement scheme to replace them with others, besides the high cost of producing a barrel of oil to more than five times for reasons unrelated to productivity in less than two decades so that the cost of producing a barrel in one day of the pandemic was equal to the Kuwaiti oil price in the market.

The sector has a history of handing over a political gift to buy the loyalty of this political faction or that. The sector has job quotas granted to that deputy (member of parliament) or influential person and the end result for such policies is the sector's underdevelopment and corruption. The sector has huge unsuccessful investments beginning with "Santa Fe" in the 1980s, passing through the Dutch refineries, the retail gas stations in Britain, the Southern Gas, and the planned embezzlement of its Kuwait Oil Tankers Company, and recently ending with the Vietnam Refinery investments and the "Polypropylene Company" jointly with a Canadian company. The sector was left with nothing but lamenting over the treasure it had lost due to the failure of the "K Dow" deal, a deal which had it been achieved would have scored the largest loss that the sector suffered from deals such as the Vietnam refinery and the Canadian company.

There are still some who believe that the K Dow deal is a deal to buy half of Dow Chemical while in fact it is a miserable deal to buy 40 old factories from Dow Chemical including a factory in Italy with equal ownership with Dow Chemical that was established in 2004, and lost its capital one and a half times, in addition to a commitment to repay about \$130 million after 6 years of participation and partnership although the internal rate of return (IRR) when the study was approved was 16 percent-18 percent. In an official justification for the Dow Chemical Company for its offer to sell 40 old factories to Kuwait, ie less than half of the old factories it owns, the company's management stated the following: "It -Dow Chemical- desires to move strategically from a traditional industry whose production market is crowded and its profit margin is low, to an advanced petrochemical industry in which competition is limited and the profit margin is high." Therefore, its objective in the sale was to raise funds to buy out "Rohm and Haas" completely, an advanced petrochemical company. According to the New York Times of 06/02/2009 about Dow Chemical's overpaying a 74 percent premium for the purchase of "Rohm and Haas" in July 2008. The newspaper stated that it paid these sums because it believed that the Kuwaitis were guaranteed and would secure the necessary financing.

It is untrue that the opposition to the deal started from Kuwait. The professional and financial opposition started from Kuwait Investment Office (KIO) in London and its three advisors in the text of a memorandum called "Call Report". A team of KPC leaders participated in the London meeting, and they were six, plus the KIO team in London, plus "Morgan Stanley", "Credit Suisse" and "Deutsche Bank". On 16/17 October 2008, the attendees unanimously opposed the deal and expressed 6 valid reasons for their objection. Even when it was later objected to in Kuwait and the possi-

bility of its rejection became greater, the deal-supporting team agreed in late November 2008 to compensate Dow Chemical by 30 percent of its value in the event of rejection. It was during a global financial crisis unknown in 80 years and compensation in normal situations shall not exceed 10 percent. The approval of that compensation is subject to a big question mark.

The purpose of recalling the sector's history is not to regurgitate the past but rather painful experiences that could be overcome in the past due to the boom in the oil market and the expectations of further prosperity for it in the future. This is no longer the case and it has become necessary to reduce the barrel production costs: it is also necessary to read the history of the huge, costly and losing sector investments and work to prevent their recurrence. In the future, and according to the scenarios of long-term oil price forecasts, managing the oil sector requires agility, ability, prudence and high professionalism. The difference between potential oil prices in the market and the barrel-production cost, if practices continue as they are, will narrow with dire consequences on the public finance. Possible scenarios are examples provided by the latest Standard & Poor's report. It expects average oil prices in 2022 and 2023 at \$65 and \$55

replacement of assets between the two reserves or stopping deductions in favor of the Future Generations Reserve are all funds lost in vain, and all that occurred after Fall of 2014 until our present time.

The report confirms Kuwait's sovereign rating at (A+), i.e. confirmation of last July 2021's rating with the continuation of the negative outlook on the future. Sovereign rating is subject to revision in the short-term (12-24 months). It may be reduced if Kuwait does not succeed in finding a solution for its inability to finance the general budget. The rating may also modify the future outlook to stable if the government succeeds in passing the public debt law or withdrawing from the reserves of future generations. The agency's report adds what it means to adopt a disciplined fiscal policy. The scarecrow used by the agency is its estimates that the budget deficit rate for the years until 2025 will reach about 12 percent of the GDP volume. It estimates that the GDP will reach \$140 billion in 2024. That is, the average annual fiscal deficit figure will be \$17 billion or \$84 billion for the accumulated deficit during those years, which in its estimation is perhaps the highest in the world for the countries it classified. Treatment by a decision or a law is a goal that the government is likely to achieve after the recent political settlements. Passing the two laws may

continued deterioration of its credit rating, and the dispute is about the timing and not the outcome. With the passage of time, the ability to find effective solutions to treat its financial conditions will erode, which means its transition to an economic situation that threatens its stability. The third conclusion is to take its right and difficult choice, albeit late, to transfer the influence of factors beyond its control to a gradual transition to take the initiative in developing its ability to influence the course of its policies, and this will not be achieved unless the institutions of decision-making authority in the state, or the Cabinet at least, adopts a unified rescue mission.

Monthly report of State's financial administration accounts

In its monthly follow-up report to the State's financial administration until the end of December 2021 as published on its website, the Ministry of Finance mentions that total collected revenues until the end of the 9th month of the current fiscal year 2021/2022 reached KD 12,983 billion, or 18.8 percent higher than total estimated revenues of KD 10,929 billion for the entire current fiscal year.

In details, actual oil revenues until 31/12/2021 reached KD 11.471 billion, higher by 25.7 percent than the estimate oil revenues for the entire cur-

price for the remaining three months of the current fiscal year and partly on the government's promise to achieve 10 percent savings in expenditures.

Significant public holdings in Boursa Kuwait 2021

Al-Joman Center published details of the declared holdings of several public institutions. We calculated the positive performance impact of the Boursa over the portfolios of the four most important public institutions within the limits of their declared ownership. The increase in value is governed by price movement and ownership interest.

The largest value of the declared properties was for the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) whose ownerships in nine listed companies at the end of 2020 and 2021. Its ownership value in these companies increased from KD 2.147 billion to KD 2.685 billion at the end of 2021. In other words, their investment value increased by 25.1 percent or by KD 538.4 million, which is slightly lower than the rise in All-Share Market index of Boursa Kuwait at 27 percent. Kuwait Finance House (KFH) achieved the greatest increase by KD 438.5 million, followed by Kuwait Investment Company that contributed the second-highest increase at KD 67.2 million of that value, then Warba Bank the third-highest increase at KD 45.5 million, while "Zain" decreased by KD 12.8 million.

The contribution of the Public Institution for Social Security to the value of its investments in Boursa Kuwait was not far from the KIA's contribution, but it was broader and included 32 companies in 2021 versus 34 companies in 2020, after selling its total shares from Inma Holding Company and Mazaya Holding Company. The value of the Public Institution's investments at the end of 2020 was KD 1.759 billion and their capital value increased by 34.1 percent, which is higher than the rise of ASM index, reaching KD 2.358 billion at the end of 2021, increasing by KD 599.6 million. To summarize, the prices of 30 companies within its portfolio increased while 2 companies' prices decreased. The largest increase in the value within its portfolio was achieved by Agility Public Warehousing Company by KD 125.9 million, followed by Ahli United Bank (Bahrain) by KD 118.5 million, then KFH that increased by KD 103.6 million.

The third significant contributions of public institutions were by the Public Authority for Minors Affairs. Value of its declared contributions in three companies at the end of 2020 reached KD 555.4 million, and by the end of 2021 it reached KD 739.9 million in two companies after selling their total shares from National Real Estate Company, with an of 33.2 percent increase. The investment in KFH increased in its capital value by KD 190.9 million or by 35 percent.

The fourth contribution is to the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation, which has only two declared contributions and one of which is major. Value of its investments at the end of 2020 reached KD 384.7 million versus KD 518.8 million at the end of 2021, a 34.8 percent increase or by KD 134 million in its capital value, including KD 132.9 million from KFH.

This means that the net increase in investments value of the four parties in the shares of the companies listed on Boursa Kuwait amounted to KD 1.456 billion, and about 81.6 percent of that increase came from four companies, namely "KFH", "AUB - Bahrain", "NBK" and "Agility".

Weekly performance of Boursa Kuwait

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was less active, where the traded value, traded volume, number of transactions and the general index (AlShall Index) decreased. AlShall Index (value weighted) closed at 655.7 points as of last Thursday, showing a decrease by 2.8 points or by 0.4 percent compared with its level last week. While it remained higher by 32.9 points or by 5.3 percent compared with the end of 2021.

The following tables summarize last week's performance of Boursa Kuwait

Description	Week 03 20/01/2022	Week 02 13/01/2022	Difference %
Working days	5	5	
AlShall index (30 Companies)	655.7	658.5	-0.4%
Boursa All Share Market Index	7,364.5	7,389.5	-0.3%
Value Trade (KD)	326,072,518	401,089,270	
Daily average (KD)	65,214,504	80,217,854	-18.7%
Volume Trade (Shares)	1,459,018,600	1,903,349,587	
Daily average (Shares)	291,803,720	380,669,917	-23.3%
Transactions	53,251	66,865	
Daily average (Transactions)	10,650	13,373	-20.4%

Description Sectors	Value Traded KD	% of Total Market
AHLI UNITED BANK (B.S.C)	40,330,559	12.4%
KUWAIT FINANCE HOUSE	39,998,453	12.3%
NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	22,279,711	6.8%
AAYAN LEASING & INVESTMENT CO.	20,912,295	6.4%
GFH FINANCIAL GROUP (B.S.C)	16,864,072	5.2%
Total	140,385,090	43.1%
Description Sectors	Value Traded KD	% of Total Market
BANKS SECTOR	125,852,931	38.6%
FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR	119,654,126	36.7%
INDUSTRIALS SECTOR	27,724,725	8.5%
REAL ESTATE SECTOR	26,436,977	8.1%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR	10,218,255	3.1%

ALSHALL INDEX	Week 03 20/01/2022	Week 02 13/01/2022
Increased Value (# of Companies)	12	28
Decreased Value (# of Companies)	16	2
Unchanged Value (# of Companies)	2	0
Total Companies	30	30

respectively, down from an average of \$71 in 2021. Its estimates for the parity price of Kuwait's budget until 2025 are \$85-90 per barrel.

Standard & Poor's report

We have repeatedly mentioned that credit rating reports are financial reports and it is good for any country to obtain a high rating, and vice versa. But they are warning reports and their audience is different and their interest is financial and short-term, but their economic component and for our oil countries in particular is just a frame. Therefore, it is necessary to correctly read the content of the report to give it its due attention. But considering the work to improve the classification according to financial indicators and not according to the criteria of economic sustainability is incorrect, as the potential damage to the economy if misreading and behaving wrongly cannot be corrected. The Public Debt Law or the regular withdrawal from the Future Generations Reserve without essential reform to the financial and economic policies is an unjust conduct towards the country. The conclusive example is what happened to the general reserve and the funds borrowed from the world market or

succeed in improving the rating because it achieves the interest and goal of the agency's report audience. But its price is high for the future of the local economy and may require illegal government decisions in favor of some representatives. Despite the agency's strong criticism of the inability of successive governments and the backwardness of their reform measures, the agency kept the July rating constant for justifications related to two exceptional variables outside the ability of the local public administration to influence, namely, the rise in oil prices and its production and the volume of Future Reserve Generations after its recent gains.

The foregoing means that Kuwait faces three conclusions. The first is that it is vulnerable to being affected by factors beyond its ability to control, and will be affected positively or negatively if they improve or decline. If the oil market conditions and the size of its sovereign fund improve, its management will exploit it to deepen the imbalances in the economy by buying more time with miserable financial and economic policies. If they decline, all the consequences and risks of these imbalances will surface. The second conclusion is that the continuation of the situation as is means the inevitability of the

rent fiscal year in the amount of KD 9.127 billion and 88.4 percent out of total collected revenues. Average Kuwaiti oil price scored \$73.8 per barrel for the first 9 months of the current fiscal year 2021/2022. In addition, an amount of KD 1.511 billion has been collected from non-oil revenues, a monthly average of KD 167.944 million. The budget estimate for the entire current fiscal year is KD 1.802 billion. This means that what has been received, if it continues at this rate will be more by KD 213.236 million than the estimated amount for the entire fiscal year.

Expenditures allocations for the current fiscal year were estimated at KD 23.048 billion. According to the report, KD 10.651 billion were spent until 31/12/2021 and an amount of KD 3.015 billion have been obligated as spent, totaling the actual expenditures and the like at KD 13.665 billion, with a monthly expenditures average at KD 1.518 billion. Though the report concludes that the budget recorded a KD 682.422 million deficit at the end of the 9th month of the current fiscal year, we publish it without endorsement, noting that the monthly expenditure average will increase significantly by the end of the fiscal year. The deficit figure will basically depend on the average oil

Business

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

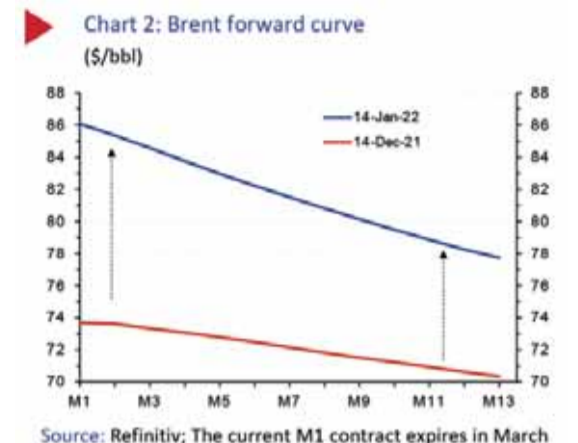
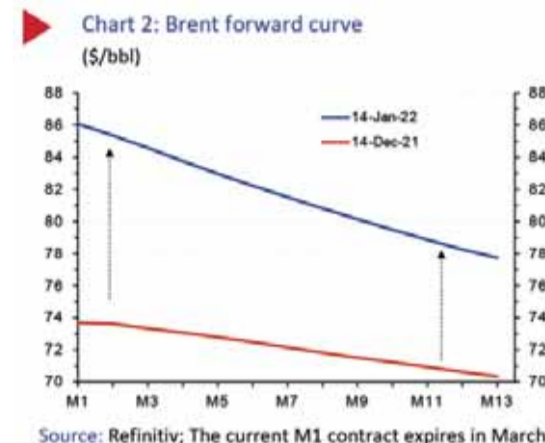
Oil rally extends into New Year on resilient demand, tighter supply

Traders, investors bullish over medium term oil market outlook

KUWAIT: The New Year kicked off with oil prices rallying further on tighter supplies, following supply outages in Libya and Kazakhstan, and increased optimism about the prospects for oil demand amid a more infectious but ostensibly less severe Omicron variant. Geopolitical risk, with Russia's troop build-up on the Ukrainian border, and a weaker US dollar also supported oil's recent surge. Brent crude, the international benchmark, has followed up its gain of 50 percent last year with a further rise of more than 10 percent so far in 2022, to settle at \$86.1/bbl in mid-January, a shade off its post-2014 high set last October. Brent has recouped all its losses since last November's Omicron-induced sell-off.

In the futures market, Brent's 'backwardated' forward curve, where near-term prices are higher than future prices, has shifted upwards and steepened, a sign of current supply tightness. The rally has been underpinned by the return of substantial financial inflows to the oil market, only some of which has been motivated by inflation hedging concerns.

Oil traders and investors are increasingly adopting a more bullish view of the near-to-medium term oil market outlook based on the expectation that (i) in the short term, new virus variants will only have a transient impact on oil demand and (ii) in the medium term, oil demand has further room to grow, especially in sectors where renewable energy substitutes for fossil fuels are either still undeveloped and/or economically unfeasible. It is in this context that the narrative of oil production lagging



consumption due to chronic underinvestment or mismanagement is gaining more traction. Markets are now pricing in the erosion of OPEC+ spare capacity once supply cuts are fully unwound and demand tops 2019 levels, which is likely this year.

Supply-side constraints have been evident in the inability of OPEC+ members, especially the African producers, to fulfill their quotas in line with the restoration of OPEC+ output at the monthly rate of 400 kb/d. Aggregate production figures compiled by Bloomberg show that in December, OPEC+ pumped below target (-625 kb/d) for the seventh consecutive month. Using

OPEC data, November's OPEC-10 output of 23.5 mb/d was the fourth in a row that fell short of target (-570 kb/d). Sufficient OPEC+ spare capacity to reach even OPEC+ baseline levels resides in only a handful of oil producers, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE and Russia. Therefore, unless members with spare capacity open the taps to compensate, the group's target of restoring 3.4 mb/d of withheld supply by mid-year may not be reached.

The implications for demand-supply balances have been playing out in January's oil rally, which has so far confounded expectations of downward price pressure

and stock builds. Consensus forecasts of oversupply for IQ22 have been downgraded, but for 2022 as a whole, inventory increases (+1.0 mb/d) are still expected based on supply (+5.0 mb/d to 101 mb/b) exceeding demand (+3.0 mb/d to 100 mb/d).

With higher Iranian output looking less likely this year due to continued impasse at the nuclear negotiations, increased non-OPEC supply, led by a more price-responsive and less capital-disciplined US shale, is the major downside risk to oil prices. It could be the difference between prices at current levels and prices in the \$65-\$75/bbl range.



KIBUYE, Rwanda: Cyprien Bigirimana, a maintenance technician, seen inside the barge extracting methane gas on Lake Kivu, at the KivuWatt power plant in Kibuye, Karongi District, in the Western Province of Rwanda. — AFP

Peril and promise: Gas from 'killer lake' powers Rwanda

KIBUYE, Rwanda: The engineers aboard the floating power station on Lake Kivu could only watch nervously as the volcano in the distance erupted violently, sending tremors rumbling through the water beneath them. It was not the lava shooting from Mount Nyiragongo last May that spooked them, but the enormous concentrations of potentially explosive gases within Kivu, one of Africa's great Rift lakes lying between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Flanked by rolling green hills tumbling into glassy waters, Kivu is not quite the picture of tranquility it seems, according to Francois Darchambeau from KivuWatt, a company that extracts gas from the lake's waters for electricity.



KIBUYE, Rwanda: A passenger boat is seen on Lake Kivu in Kibuye, Karongi District, in the Western Province of Rwanda. — AFP

Thousands of years of volcanic activity has caused a massive accumulation of methane and carbon dioxide to dissolve in the depths of Kivu-enough to prove monumentally destructive in the rare event they were released. If triggered, a so-called limnic eruption would cause "a huge explosion of gas from deep waters to the surface" resulting in large waves and a poisonous gas cloud that would put the lives of millions at risk, said Darchambeau, environmental manager at KivuWatt.

"This is what we call a killer lake," the limnologist, or an expert in freshwater systems, told AFP. Only three such lakes exist in the world: Kivu, and Lakes Nyos and Monoun in northwest Cameroon. The latter two experienced limnic eruptions in the 1980s, and the bigger disaster at Nyos suffocated more than 1,700 people in a toxic release of carbon dioxide. But these

catastrophes occurred in a rural area, whereas some two million people would be "at risk" of such a similar disaster involving Kivu, said Darchambeau. In both Rwanda and DR Congo, many live in fear of the lake's harmful potential, and stories abound of swimmers disappearing into its depths after being asphyxiated or pulled under.

World first

The lake, however, poses both peril and promise. KivuWatt, which says this is the only project of its kind anywhere in the world, saw an opportunity to tap these abundant gases for energy generation.

A 20-minute speedboat ride is required to reach KivuWatt's unique floating platform, a compact tangle of pipes and buoys as high as a multi-storey building moored in the Rwandan part of Kivu.

With a deafening roar, the facility pumps water saturated with carbon dioxide and methane from around 350 meters (1,150 feet) to the surface. As it rises, the water and gas separate as the pressure changes. "It is like opening a bottle of soda," said KivuWatt director Priyasham Nundah, who described the project as "halfway between a thermal and a renewable energy plant". The extracted methane is sent through a pipeline to a second facility located onshore in Rwanda, where the gas is transformed into electricity. The carbon dioxide is pumped back into the lake at a precise enough depth to ensure the delicate balance is not upset.

The company says it hopes that removing methane could over time reduce pressure within the lake, possibly lowering the risk of a limnic eruption.

'It was frightening'

But fears of such a disaster were reawakened when Nyiragongo—an active volcano north of Kivu in DR Congo—roared to life in early 2021. The lava flow killed 32 people and destroyed hundreds of homes, as earthquakes shook the region. A second wave of lava pushed deep into the earth under the lake itself. From their station, KivuWatt's engineers watched the sky turn red and angry.

"It was very frightening," said Nundah. "When the rates of earthquakes and the frequency of earthquakes started to rise... no one could really say what would happen." A shutdown was considered—but the engineers held their nerve. Suspending operations would have serious consequences for Rwanda: KivuWatt produces around 30 percent of the annual electricity consumed in the East African nation.

American company ContourGlobal, which owns KivuWatt, launched the Lake Kivu venture in 2015 and for a time considered expanding its capacity from 26 to 100 megawatts. Another company is exploring the possibility of launching its own 56-megawatt gas extraction venture on the lake. There are no plans in the short term for such a project on the Congolese side. How long it will take to deplete these vast gas reserves will depend on the pace of extraction, said Martin Schmid, a researcher at the Swiss Institute for Water and Environmental Research. "Just with KivuWatt alone it will take, I don't know, centuries to have really a reduction of methane in the lake," he said. — AFP

American, United Airlines report loss on COVID drag

NEW YORK: American Airlines reported another quarterly loss yesterday after the latest COVID-19 surge dented demand at the end of the year, but said consumers were booking more trips for the spring. The big US carrier echoed rivals Delta Air Lines and United Airlines in citing the Omicron wave of Covid-19 as a recent drag that has depressed bookings early in 2022.

But American has seen an uptick in reservations beyond the next 60 days, Chief Executive Doug Parker said. "It does feel like the consumer has the confidence at being able to travel," Parker said on CNBC, while acknowledging "the results would have been better were it not for Omicron."

The carrier reported a loss of \$931 million for the fourth quarter, compared with a \$2.2 billion loss in the same three months of 2020. Revenues more than doubled to \$9.4 billion compared with the same period a year earlier. But in October–December 2019, before COVID-19 hit shutting down travel, American had revenues of \$11.3 billion. The latest quarter started buoyantly, with airlines seeing increased bookings as COVID-19 vaccinations became widespread and most of the US economy reopened. But hopes dimmed as the Omicron variant surfaced as a major worry, delaying an industry comeback, especially in highly profitable business travel.

"Over the past year, we have experienced periods of high travel demand countered by periods of decreased demand due to new COVID-19 variants," Parker said in a statement.



ARLINGTON: In this file photo, American Airlines planes sit on the tarmac at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

Biden says fight to lower inflation will 'be a haul'

WASHINGTON: Lowering the record rate of US inflation will "be a haul," President Joe Biden said Wednesday, but he insisted the price increases will subside if supply chain snarls and component shortages are resolved. "The inflation has everything to do with the supply chain," the president said at a press conference. "People see it at the gas pump, the grocery stores and elsewhere."

He said provisions in his Build Back Better spending proposal, which is stalled in Congress, would improve the situation, but "it's going to be hard and take a lot of work." The US economy saw consumer prices spike to a multi-decade high of seven percent last year as a surge in demand from consumers and businesses ran up against shortages of labor and crucial supplies like semiconductors as well as global shipping delays.

Biden's approval rating has fallen as inflation has accelerated, prompting the White House to announce moves to address price fixing and concentration in industries, including slaughterhouses, to lower meat prices, increase semiconductor production and release oil reserves to reign in gas prices.

Biden also said the Federal Reserve has a "critical job in making sure that the elevated prices don't

"This volatility has created the most challenging planning environment in the history of commercial aviation." American's forecast implies lower-priced leisure travel will remain a disproportionately large share of its travel volume. The airline projected first-quarter capacity would be down eight to 10 percent from pre-pandemic levels, while revenues would be off 20 to 22 percent. The company's share price rose 1.2 percent to \$17.52 in pre-market trading.

Meanwhile, United Airlines reported another quarterly loss Wednesday on the lingering drag from COVID-19 but offered an upbeat outlook on a travel comeback later in 2022 and in future years. The US carrier acknowledged that it is beginning 2022 "with a scaled-back schedule" following the latest uptick in virus cases, but will "nimble ramp up" capacity later in the year, according to a news release. "While Omicron is impacting near-term demand, we remain optimistic about the spring and excited about the summer and beyond," said United Chief Executive Scott Kirby.

United reported a fourth-quarter loss of \$646 million, about a third of the loss from the year-ago period, but far from the \$641 million profit in the 2019 period.

Revenues were \$8.2 billion, more than twice the level in 2020 but a 25 percent drop from the figure in the 2019 quarter. The period covered by the release started buoyantly, with airlines seeing increased bookings as COVID-19 vaccinations were rolled out and most of the US economy reopened.

But hopes dimmed later in the quarter as the Omicron variant surfaced as a major worry, prompting thousands of flight cancellations over the holidays because US carriers temporarily lost airline staff who were infected. United projected its first-quarter capacity will be down 16 to 18 percent compared to 2019 levels. It also expects 2022 capacity to be below the level of 2019. Shares of United fell 1.4 percent to \$43.79 in after-hours trading. — AFP

become entrenched." After providing "extraordinary support" to the economy, "It's appropriate as... Fed Chairman (Jerome) Powell has indicated, to recalibrate the support that is now necessary," Biden said.

The Democratic president nominated Powell, a Republican, to serve a second term at the head of the independent central bank, which is poised to raise interest rates as soon as March and as many as four times this year to rein in price increases. But Biden said "the best thing to tackle high prices is a more productive economy with greater capacity to deliver goods and services to the American people."

He has argued Build Back Better, which would channel more than a trillion dollars to improving American social services and fighting climate change, would also rein in inflation, but it lacks the votes of crucial Democratic lawmakers in the Senate. — AFP



WASHINGTON, US: US President Joe Biden answers questions during a news conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP



Taylor Sheridan, Kelly Reilly and Kevin Costner attend the premiere of Paramount Pictures' "Yellowstone" at Paramount Studios in Hollywood.



File photo shows (L-R) Actor Kevin Costner, producer/writer Taylor Sheridan, and actors Kelly Reilly, Luke Grimes, Cole Hauser, Kelsey Asbille, and Gil Birmingham of 'Yellowstone' speak onstage during the Paramount Network portion of the 2018 Winter Television Critics Association Press Tour at The Langham Huntington, Pasadena. — AFP photos

'Yellowstone': From 'red state' to 'every state' TV hit

With its gun-totin' heroes, elegiac shots of rodeo horses and disparaging jokes about Californians, "Yellowstone" might appear to be a television show aimed squarely at America's conservative heartland. But the Kevin Costner-fronted Western, which blends soapy melodrama with brutal vigilante violence, has become a rare crossover hit, bridging the stark cultural divisions of the United States.

The show follows the wealthy Dutton family, which owns a Montana ranch "the size of Rhode Island" and must protect it by any means necessary from corporate developers, greedy politicians and displaced Native Americans. In its first seasons, "Yellowstone" cultivated a devoted fanbase in rural and smaller urban markets, benefiting from cross-marketing with NFL broadcasts in regions where live TV still rules over streaming.

But by the fourth season's premiere in November, a whopping 11 million people across the country tuned into cable TV

channel Paramount Network—numbers higher than "Game of Thrones" at the same stage.

"Just because it's in Montana and there are ranchers, people say it's a red-state show," Keith Cox, the network's president of development and production, told AFP, referring to states that typically vote Republican. "Now we're seeing it's just an every state show." This month, the show was finally even recognized by Hollywood, where it received its first nomination from the Screen Actors Guild.

'Throwback'

So, how did a series about land rights, livestock officers and bucking broncos win a foothold among the coastal urban elites? Costner—a bona fide if ageing movie star in his first multi-season TV role—is evidently a key draw.

As the show has gained popularity in liberal circles, it has increasingly been talked up as a frontier version of HBO's critically adored "Succession"—another

drama about a wealthy, warring family, set mainly in New York.

But while both shows center on seemingly omniscient patriarchs with political connections, private helicopters and petulant offspring, they preach very different values. The nihilistic, amoral and selfish siblings vying to betray their father on "Succession" are off-putting to many Americans, said Mary Murphy, associate professor of journalism at University of Southern California.

Despite its wall-to-wall media coverage, "Succession" drew just 1.7 million to its latest finale.

By comparison, "Yellowstone" is essentially the story of a man "who uses all his simple connections with people to keep the land safe," said Murphy. "The people who watch it, they feel reassured about a simpler way of life," she added, pointing to the "insecurity" of the pandemic-affected time we live in.

According to Murphy, "Yellowstone" is a "throwback" that evokes American val-

ues and reflects on "how America was built"—themes that resonate across the coasts and middle America. It also benefits from a sense of authenticity in representing the everyday world of ranchers, rodeos and cowboys, even if the violence and scandal are exaggerated to keep the plot moving.

Creator Taylor Sheridan ("Sicario"), a horse-riding, ranch-owning Texan, wrote every episode himself. "This is his world and he knows it best," said Cox. "Hollywood can't come in and fake it."

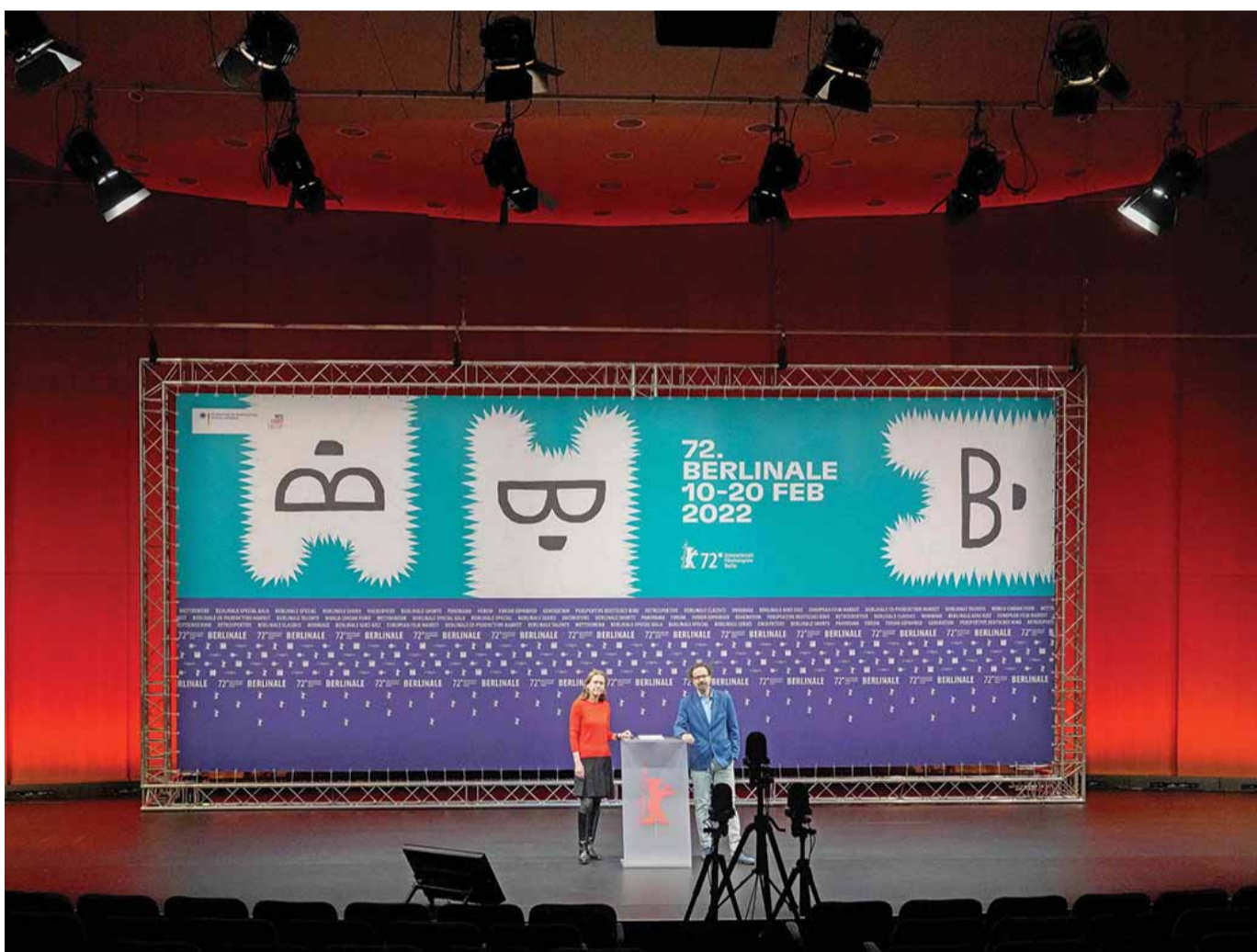
'Anti-woke?'

Still, "Yellowstone" has been embraced by some on the right as a celebration of "red state" values, and a rejection of supposedly "woke," politically correct Hollywood dramas. When yuppie coastal transplants in Montana's rapidly gentrifying cities condemn his vast domain and his cattle herds' massive carbon footprint, Costner's ranch owner John flags their hypocrisy and his family's long steward-

ship of the land. But according to Cox, the show never "takes a stance." "It doesn't like outsiders moving in and raising prices and taking away the tradition of the ranchers," he said. "But I feel like this show is not waving a flag for either side... Anti-woke? I think it's just real."

Cox, whose family hail from conservative bastion states including Missouri and Kentucky, said he has "never spoken to my cousins so much" since the show first aired. "They haven't watched a lot of my other shows. This one they're obsessed with, and it's brought us together."

And while it has taken them a little longer, many of the Hollywood executives he meets at industry lunches who previously refused to watch "Yellowstone" are now ardent fans. "It's very funny. A lot of my peers poo-pooed it or dismissed it," said Cox. "And suddenly, they're in." — AFP



The artistic director Carlo Chatrian (R) and managing director Mariette Rissenbeek, of the International Berlin Film Festival Berlinale pose for photographers during a media event. — AFP

Berlin filmfest to go forward in person as COVID surges

The Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year, will take place next month as an in-person event, organisers confirmed Wednesday, just as the Omicron wave is expected to peak in Germany.

Surprising some observers expecting it to go online for the second year running, the Berlinale announced a programme with 18 films in competition. It includes new movies from France's Francois Ozon and Claire Denis, "Carol" screenwriter Phyllis Nagy and previous winner Paolo Taviani of Italy.

Expecting thousands of guests from around the world, festival directors Mariette Rissenbeek and Carlo Chatrian told a virtual news conference they had come up with a plan with state health authorities for its 72nd edition.

It includes a shorter programme,

requirements for participants to be vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19 and smaller audiences to keep participants safe. "We have decided to go with an in-person festival because we really believe that the collective experience is at the centre of a film festival," Chatrian said.

Berlinale, which ranks along with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top cinema showcases, is set to run between February 10 and 20. But the screenings for reporters, critics and industry participants have been curtailed to seven days, followed by four days of movies for the general public.

Cinemas and theatres are still open in Germany but most large events and fairs across the country have been cancelled to try to curb the spread of the virus.

'We need cinema'

The announcement came as Germany's daily toll of new COVID-19 cases topped 100,000 for the first time, with Health Minister Karl Lauterbach predicting the current wave of infections to crest in "mid-February".

Prestigious US festival Sundance, which has a long-standing partnership with the Berlinale, will start Thursday as an entirely virtual event. German Culture Minister Claudia Roth said last week that the government had signed off on the live event to give the battered sector a boost.

"We want the festival to send a signal to the entire film industry, to cinemas and moviegoers, and to culture as a whole," she said. "We need cinema." Ozon, one of France's most acclaimed directors, will open the festival with "Peter von Kant" starring Isabelle Adjani, a remake of a classic Rainer Werner Fassbinder movie.

Denis, one of seven women directors in competition, will premiere "Both Sides of the Blade" starring Juliette Binoche and Vincent Lindon.

Nagy will present "Call Jane" starring Elizabeth Banks and Sigourney Weaver about a group of abortion rights activists in 1960s America. And Taviani, who won the Berlinale in 2012 with his late brother Vittorio with "Caesar Must Die", will unveil "Leonora Addio" about the murder of a Sicilian immigrant boy in Brooklyn.

Indian-born American director M. Night Shyamalan ("The Sixth Sense") will head up the jury selecting the winners of the Golden and Silver Bear top prizes. The festival will also award an honorary Golden Bear for lifetime achievement to French screen legend Isabelle Huppert.

Last year the Berlinale, which was staging a two-part hybrid event, awarded the top prize to Romanian pandemic-era satire "Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn". — AFP

Former Vogue creative director Andre Leon Talley dies at 73

Influential fashion journalist Andre Leon Talley, the first Black creative director of Vogue, died Tuesday in New York at the age of 73, with figures from fashion and entertainment paying tribute. "It is with great sadness we announce the passing of Andre Leon Talley," a statement posted on his official Instagram account said, without specifying the cause of death.

"Mr Talley was the larger-than-life, long-time creative director at Vogue during its rise to dominance as the world's fashion bible. "Over the past five decades as an international icon (he) was a close confidant of Yves Saint Laurent, Karl Lagerfeld, Paloma Picasso, Diane von Furstenberg and he had a penchant for discovering, nurturing and celebrating young designers."

Born in Washington in 1948, Talley was largely raised by his grandmother in Durham, North Carolina and was interested in fashion from an early age. "Every Sunday I would walk across the railroad tracks into the affluent part of Durham and buy Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, and go back to my grandmother's house, read my magazines.

"I was allowed to retreat from the bullying and the sexual abuse into a beautiful world," he told The Guardian in a May 2020 interview. Talley studied French at university, going on to earn a master's at prestigious Brown University and then entered the world of fashion journalism.

After stints with Andy Warhol's Interview magazine, Women's Wear Daily, W, and a brief spell at The New York Times, Talley joined Vogue as fashion news director in 1983, the same year as its now editor-in-chief Anna Wintour.



File photo shows Vogue Editor-at-Large Andre Leon Talley arrives at the Saint-Roch church in Paris, to attend the funeral mass held by father Roland Letteron for fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent. — AFP

It was the start of a three-decade association with the fashion bible, serving as creative director, contributing editor and later editor-at-large until his departure in 2013. "I scorched the Earth with my talent and I let my light shine," he told The Guardian in his 2020 interview.

'A beacon of grace'

A flamboyant and towering figure in fashion, Talley nurtured Black designers and lobbied for more diversity on the runway. Besides his fashion journalism, Talley served as a judge on "America's Next Top Model" and also appeared in episodes of "Sex and The City" and "Empire."

He wrote three books, including his 2020 best-selling memoir "The Chiffon Trenches" in which he detailed his famous falling out with powerful Vogue chief Wintour. "Like many decades-long relationships, there were complicated moments," Wintour said in a statement. "But all I want to remember today, all I care about, is the brilliant and compassionate man who was a generous and loving friend."

Other top figures from the worlds of fashion and entertainment also paid tribute. "Goodbye darling Andre... no one saw the world in a more elegant and glamorous way than you did," veteran designer von Furstenberg said on Instagram.

"No one was more soulful and grander than you were. The world will be less joyful. I have loved you and laughed with you for 45 years. I miss your loud screams... I love you sooooo much," she said. Oscar-winner Viola Davis posted a photograph of herself and Talley on Twitter, saying: "RIP Andre Leon Talley. Rest well King."

"Slave Play" playwright Jeremy O. Harris was also among those paying tribute. "For a little black gay boy who reached for the stars from the south there were few people I could look up to up there amongst the stars who looked like me just more fab except for you Andre," Harris tweeted. "For a generation of boys Andre Leon Talley was a beacon of grace and aspiration. RIP." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A dog looks out of the enclosure at SuperWoof, a luxury dog hotel, in Cape Town.



An employee tends to dogs in a room dedicated to small size dogs at SuperWoof.



An employee shaves a dog in the grooming room at @Frits, a dog hotel, in Cape Town. Wealthier South Africans take their dogs to doggy daycares or fancy dog hotels while they are away. — AFP photos

South Africa's luxury dog hotels give paws for thought

Three dachshunds lay claim to a big bed, while an agitated mongrel yaps constantly and a miniature schnauzer appears disgruntled despite soothing Bob Marley tunes playing over the stereo. It's just another morning at SuperWoof, a luxury dog hotel in South Africa's city of Cape Town, where the wealthy check in their canines for some serious pampering.

Should the dogs feel like a sundowner later, drinks are available in little bottles of ChamPaws—a cocktail of water with a dash of rose petal and South Africa's famous rooibos tea. Opposite the dog hotel is a night shelter for Cape Town's many homeless—a pervasive legacy of apartheid. And a short distance down the road, a makeshift tented camp has mushroomed on the curb. But for wealthier South Africans, doggy daycares or fancy hotels are where they leave their furry babies while away on overseas vacation, or if they are just unavailable for one reason or another.

SuperWoof competitor AtFrits is located in a rapidly gentrifying district. Situated near the colourful houses of the Bo-Kaap district, this home-away-from-home for dogs is surrounded by hipster cafes, art galleries and sushi restaurants.

'Presidential suite'

Inside, dogs can stay in the budget section of the hotel, where they hang out together, or have a private "presidential suite." These are decked out with baroque chandeliers and exquisite wallpapers, with canine portraits in faux-gilt frames on the walls. One suite has a tongue-in-cheek name: "K9 Nkandla"—a nod to ex-president Jacob Zuma's massive rural homestead, which the scandal-plagued ex-leader notoriously upgraded using millions of dollars in public funds. Dogs have been a divisive topic in South Africa.

They were used by apartheid police to crack down on protesters during the liberation struggle. Some politicians complain that whites care more about their pets than the majority of their impoverished black compatriots. "If a person can afford to keep their dog in such circumstances that's their business," said Hassan Khan, who works at The Haven District 6 feeding centre next to SuperWoof. Tilana Kruger, a 35-year-old property broker, recently moved to Cape Town from Johannesburg and regularly drops off her beagle at AtFrits.

"He can't wait, he literally jumps out the car," she told AFP by phone. Whether luxu-



A general view of the dog park called Muizenbark, inside the facility of @Frits, a dog hotel.

ry dog hotels should exist in a country with such high levels of poverty and inequality remains a moot point. A stay in the most expensive of AtFrits' rooms costs 535 rand (\$35) a day. The government puts the national poverty line at 890 rand a month.

AtFrits owner Yanic Klue argues that that she is doing her bit to fight poverty by creating employment.

"I have 37 staff I give an income to," she said. She donates 10 percent of the hotel's earnings towards helping stray dogs,

including sterilisation. She also runs a non-profit project teaching women in South Africa's impoverished townships to sew dog clothes for the hotel's shop.

Doggy chakras

South Africa's strict lockdown at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic depressed demand for dog hotels because people worked from home and didn't go on vacation. But with the economy re-opening, owners are returning to the office, and many dogs are now experiencing separation anxiety.

The hotel offers a range of therapies for suffering hounds, including gemstone therapy and reiki, a Japanese relaxation technique, said Klue. Dogs "also have chakras and they also get blockages," she explained, referring to the belief that the body has points through which energy flows, providing harmony.

And for those equally anxious owners who want to check in on their pups while they are away, cameras in all the hotel rooms mean they can watch their pet's antics any time... on "Petflix." — AFP



Farmer Robert Tomlinson harvests forced rhubarb by candlelight on his farm in Pudsey, near Leeds in northern England. — AFP photos

In UK 'rhubarb triangle', spring arrives in January

Robert Tomlinson picks rhubarb stalks by candlelight in the dark, carrying on a century-old family tradition that survives today despite the challenges posed to his business by Brexit and climate change.

For four generations, Tomlinson's family have been cultivating "forced rhubarb" in the winter months at their farm in Pudsey, northern England, and are profiting from a resurgence in the plant's popularity.

Hundreds of bright pink stems of the "Harbinger" variety reach for the ceiling after they were brought into sheds from fields to be finished off indoors.

The temperature is kept heated to around 14 degrees Celsius (57 degrees Fahrenheit), and it is almost completely

dark. With this mildness in the air, "we are tricking them into thinking it is spring", Tomlinson, 41, said as he walked around his plants, which benefit from a government-protected designation of origin.

In the absence of stronger light, the plants cannot produce chlorophyll and sugar grows in the stalk rather than the leaf, "so you get a far more tender, sweeter stick than you do in summer with outdoor rhubarb". The stems can therefore be harvested in winter, when few fresh fruit and vegetables are produced in Britain, and command a higher price than free-range rhubarb, which is typically picked from May. "You can hear them growing, it makes just like a pop," says Tomlinson, whose farm lies in a part of Yorkshire known as Britain's "rhubarb triangle" because of its concentration of growers.

His great-grandfather started growing the plant, which originated in Asia and Russia, in the late 1880s. Until the 1960s, its tangy taste was popular in Britain.

Duck a la rhubarb

But rhubarb then fell out of fashion and many growers gave up. Today there are only 10 left in Yorkshire, according to



Forced rhubarb which has been harvested by farmer Robert Tomlinson by candlelight awaits checking and packing on his farm in Pudsey, near Leeds in northern England.

Tomlinson, down from a peak of more than 200. In recent years, however, chefs have embraced rhubarb with relish.

They include Tom Cenci of the 26 Grains group, which manages two high-end restaurants in London which use mostly British produce. "The recipes are endless," he said, before sauteing a few pieces of forced rhubarb in orange juice, adding sugar and a little ginger.

Forced rhubarb grown indoors "has a slightly sweeter taste", and outdoor rhubarb can be more "stringy". Cenci recommends pairing it with fish or duck.

Forced rhubarb is also used in drinks, from flavoured soda to gin, sparkling wine and syrups. Tomlinson says the wide array of uses has helped him weather the closure of UK restaurants during successive pandemic lockdowns. Foreign demand has also helped, from restaurants and hotels in Paris, Berlin, Zurich and even New York, he said.

'Rising costs'

But owing to new customs checks since Britain left the EU's single market, "it is far more expensive to send it to Europe now".

And like other British farmers, the rhubarb grower is struggling with labour shortages. "Costs have gone up. There are so many jobs out there that pay a lot more money," Tomlinson said. His wife Paula assists, as do his children aged 13 and 14 on weekends. Milder weather brought about by climate change is another headwind. The plants need a period of cold in the autumn "to re-energise before we fetch them in the sheds" for indoor harvesting.

But Tomlinson remains rooted in a longer view of the business dating from his great-grandfather's time. "The way in which we are growing is almost identical as it was back then because there is no other way to do it. "So, I will go on picking by candlelight, by hand," the farmer said. "There are no machines to do it." — AFP

Ancient Afghan minaret in danger of 'collapse' after quakes

An 800-year-old minaret considered one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in Afghanistan was damaged by two earthquakes this week and is in danger of collapse, an official has said. The Minaret of Jam, a UNESCO world heritage monument in the central province of Ghor, was in desperate need of repair even before Monday's quakes, but provincial official Abdul Hai Zaeem told AFP the 65-metre (213-foot) structure had weakened further.

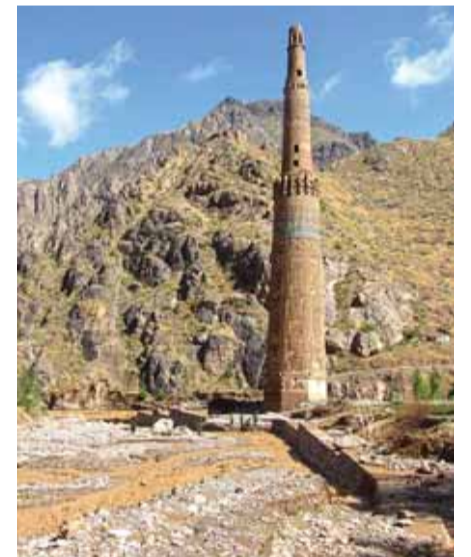
"Some of the bricks have come off and the minaret itself has tilted more," Zaeem, head of Ghor's information and culture department, said late Wednesday. "If proper attention is not given, it is possible that the minaret will collapse."

Monday's twin quakes killed at least 22 people and destroyed hundreds of homes in western Badghis province, with the tremors felt across the country. "Although an earthquake did occur a few days ago... there is no evidence at the moment to support the theory that the minaret has become fragile," UNESCO said in a statement to AFP. "Nevertheless, we have asked our contacts in the province of Ghor to verify this." Built in the 12th Century during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin, the Minaret of Jam has weathered earthquakes, floods and harsh desert storms and the years have taken their toll.

In 2002, the minaret and its archaeological remains became the first site in Afghanistan to be added to UNESCO's World Heritage List. Built on an octagonal base, it has an interior double staircase and is elaborately decorated. Its date of construction is given as around 1190.

It sits in a rugged, inaccessible valley

along the Harirod river, well off Afghanistan's tourist track even in the 1960s, when the country was a magnet for hardy Western travellers. Archeologists backed by UNESCO have tried previously to repair the minaret, but its remote location-in the heart of territory controlled by the Taliban even before they took power in August-meant security was always an issue.



File photo shows Afghan men working at a site near the Minaret of Jam. An 800-year-old minaret considered one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in Afghanistan was damaged by two earthquakes this week and is in danger of collapse, an official said. — AFP

The last UNESCO mission to the site was in 2019 and at that time they said it faced no risk of collapse. Last year, agency head Audrey Azoulay called on the Taliban to help preserve Afghanistan's cultural heritage, including the minaret.

Shortly before their first stint in power came to an end in 2001, the Taliban destroyed two giant centuries-old Buddha statues carved out of a cliff face in Bamiyan, sparking global outrage. They have promised a softer version of rule this time around, and Taliban fighters now guard what remains of the statues. — AFP



Sub-standard forced rhubarb, which was harvested by farmer Robert Tomlinson by candlelight.



File photo taken on May 22, 2019 and released by the Information and Culture Department of Ghor province shows Afghan men working at a site near the Minaret of Jam following floodwaters in the Shahrak District of Ghor Province. — AFP photos

Sports

Norwegian Kilde leads racers in pre-Olympic Kitzbuehel test

'Slope is so difficult, I always had to dig deep to get the best out of myself'

KITZBUHEL, Austria: As a warm-up for the Beijing Olympics, it does not get any tougher: The men's World Cup downhill in Kitzbuehel, the most prestigious course on the circuit, but also widely regarded as the most testing.

Just weeks out from the February 4-20 Winter Games, skiers will take to the thigh-trembling 3.3km-long Streif course on the Hahnenkamm mountain in the knowledge that nothing can be held back on a piste where the vertiginous start sees them reach 100km/h in the first five seconds.

The 82nd running of the downhill, which made its debut in 1931, will see racers reaching motorway-coasting speeds of 140km/h while negotiating sections that have an 85-percent gradient, meaning any thoughts about potential gold in Beijing are temporarily put on the back burner.

The course falls, snakes and rolls, sending competitors barrelling through a wide variety of terrain, in parts propelling them in the air, only for them to quickly re-align for icy traverses that severely test technical ability and mastery of well-honed equipment. "This slope is so difficult, I always had to dig deep to get the best out of myself," said retired Swiss racer Didier Cuche, who holds the record of five downhill wins on the mountain named after a rooster's comb. "I always had my back against the wall and needed to get everything right at the right moment."

Then into play comes the so-called "risk management": How much a racer is able to push himself, much like a Formula One driver, in the knowledge that one slight error might mean hurtling into some of the 15km of nets and fencing down the course. "On the Streif, the fine tuning has to be somewhere between 90 and 100 percent and adjusted to your own ability and what the hill allows," argues Cuche.

"You can then move within this percentage range without exceeding the risk limit because as soon as

you make a mistake, the race is over, or you fall—and that hurts."

Highlight of the season

There have been some gruesome crashes over the years. Sliding bodies, flailing skis and helicopter evacuations have become a regular feature and quickly silence the crowd. COVID-19 restrictions mean a maximum of 1,000 spectators this year, a far cry from the 90,000 Kitzbuehel normally welcomes, a heady mix between champagne-drinking glitterati



There have been some gruesome crashes over the years

and young locals revelling in an alcohol-fuelled rite of passage. Their absence from the unashamedly voyeuristic spectacle will deprive all racers of the gladiatorial baying, the meek silence after a crash and the subsequent raucous applause should the crash victim be able to refind his footing.

"May this sports festival be held in an orderly and safe manner and distract us a little from everyday worries after spending almost two years in the clutches of the pandemic," says race committee chairman Michael Huber.

After downhill training runs until today, skiers will compete in a first downhill on Friday, before taking on a slalom tomorrow-when heavy snow is forecast, and a second downhill on Sunday.



WENGEN, Switzerland: Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde competes during the men's FIS Ski World Cup Super G event in Wengen, Switzerland. —AFP

"Kitzbuehel is the highlight of the year for us downhill skiers," Austrian Vincent Kriechmayr, who won in Wengen last week, told ORF television.

"This is simply the most difficult descent of the whole year. The Streif is also a legendary route in other respects. You can't leave anything to chance. You have to be in top shape there. "I don't know what's in store for me at the Olympic Games, but

Kitzbuehel is the downhill run that you want to win as an Austrian."

Kriechmayr and his teammate Matthias Mayer are among a group of favourites for downhill victory that also includes in-form Norwegian Aleksander Aamodt Kilde, the Swiss duo of Marco Odermatt and Beat Feuz, and the Italian pairing of Christof Innerhofer and Dominik Paris. —AFP

Never say die Spurs delight Conte with Leicester late show

LEICESTER: Antonio Conte said he saw the spirit he is trying to implement at Tottenham after Steven Bergwijn scored twice deep into stoppage time to stun Leicester with thrilling 3-2 win on Wednesday. The Foxes looked set to snatch victory against the run of play as Patson Daka and James Maddison struck either side of Harry Kane's first-half equaliser.

However, Bergwijn, who had not scored a Premier League goal this season, came off the bench to turn the game on its head in a dramatic finale. Instead of suffering Conte's first league defeat since taking charge in November, victory lifts Spurs above north London rivals Arsenal into fifth and within a point of fourth-placed West Ham with three games in hand.

"I think we showed today that we don't want to give up. Never," said the Italian. "The players know very well what our philosophy must be. We must fight to the end and try to also get a result." The match had been rescheduled at Leicester's request after they were unable to field a side in December due to a combination of coronavirus cases and injuries.

Brendan Rodgers' men remain severely depleted with four players away at the Africa Cup of Nations on top of a long injury list, but were seconds away from a win that would have ignited their own hopes of European football next season.

"That was a great opportunity tonight, but you have to see that through," said Rodgers. "I don't think Tottenham won the game, we presented them the three points." Tottenham were fresh after their derby clash against Arsenal had been called off on Sunday against their will.

Kane looked better for the rest, but the England captain will wonder how he did not register at least



LEICESTER, England: Tottenham Hotspur's Dutch midfielder Steven Bergwijn (L) scores his team's second goal during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Tottenham Hotspur at King Power Stadium in Leicester. —AFP

a hat-trick. His first effort was brilliantly cleared off the line by Luke Thomas as it arrowed towards the bottom corner.

Kane then thundered the crossbar with a header from a corner and Lucas Moura forced Kasper Schmeichel to full stretch. But completely against the run of play, Leicester went in front when Daka, deputising for the injured Jamie Vardy, got the break of the ball inside the box and slotted beyond Lloris at his near post.

Kane finally got his 18th goal in 17 appearances against the club where he spent a short loan spell earlier in his career on 38 minutes as he raced onto Harry Winks' through ball, cut inside Caglar Soyuncu and rolled in off the inside of the post.

Seconds later, Kane should have scored again when

he blasted well over with just Schmeichel to beat.

Leicester posed more of a threat on the counter-attack after the break and Maddison should have done better when he fired straight at Lloris. The midfielder thought he had the final say when he exchanged a one-two with Harvey Barnes and got the aid of a huge deflection off Japhet Tanganga to wrong-foot Lloris 14 minutes from time.

But the defensive frailties that have dogged Leicester's season reappeared in stoppage time. Bergwijn pounced to fire home after Matt Doherty's effort was blocked by Soyuncu five minutes into stoppage time. Straight from the kick-off, Youri Tielemans gave away possession cheaply and Kane played Bergwijn through once more to round Schmeichel and fire in off the post. —AFP

Malaysia's top badminton player quits national team

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian badminton ace Lee Zii Jia, ranked seventh in the world, has quit his country's national team to play as an independent, reports said yesterday. Lee has been held up as the heir to Malaysian legend Lee Chong Wei, rising rapidly up the rankings and scoring a breakthrough victory at the prestigious All England Open last year.

But the 23-year-old has performed poorly in recent months. He lost to China's Chen Long at the Olympics and retired with an injury in the world championship quarter-finals. After weeks of speculation, Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) president Norza Zakaria confirmed that Malaysia's top player had quit the body earlier this month.

"We see Zii Jia as an asset and we tried to persuade him (to stay) because we have groomed him since he was 13," he was cited as saying by The Star newspaper. "Now that he has reached this stage, winning the All England, we certainly didn't want to lose him because he has a bright future." "However, he told us that he's no Lee Chong Wei and he cannot cope with the pressure," added Norza. BAM did not immediately respond to requests for comment. It was not clear why Lee cut ties with the body, and there was no immediate comment from the player, but he could face sanctions.

Previously, BAM banned Tan Chun Seang from playing in Asian countries for two years after he quit the national team. However world number one Viktor Axelsen of Denmark voiced support for Lee's decision. "If a player... feels it's best for him to follow another path where he is more independent as a player, then that is what he should do," tweeted the Olympic gold medalist. "It's his career and his life after all." Badminton is one of the few sports in which Malaysia performs well internationally. Three-time Olympic silver medalist Lee Chong Wei, who retired in 2019, was one of the greatest players of his generation. —AFP

Kohli beats Tendulkar mark as India's top away ODI run-scorer

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli became India's leading run-scorer in away one-day internationals as he hit an energetic half-century against South Africa just days after his shock exit as Test skipper. Kohli broke Sachin Tendulkar's India record for most runs in away ODIs during his 51-run knock in the first of the three matches on Wednesday, although the tourists lost by 31 runs.

Kohli has now scored 5,108 runs, surpassing Tendulkar's 5,065. He also overtook Australian great Ricky Ponting's 5,090 to become the second highest behind Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara (5,518) in away 50-over matches. Kohli, 33, announced he was giving up the Test captaincy on Saturday having already quit as Twenty20 skipper last year and been sacked from ODI leadership duties soon afterwards. Kohli was India's most successful Test skipper with 40 wins in 68 matches during a seven-year tenure. —AFP



Virat Kohli

Olympic champ Rutherford fails in Winter Games bid

LONDON: Former Olympic long jump champion Greg Rutherford has failed in his attempt to win medals at both the summer and winter Games after missing the cut for Britain's bobsleigh team for Beijing.

The 35-year-old, who won gold at the 2012 Olympics in London, made his international bobsleigh debut as part of a four-man crew at a World Cup race in Germany in January. However, a poor campaign meant Lamin Deen's team failed to make either the official qualification places or one of the potential reallocation slots for the Games.

Brad Hall will pilot Britain's only four-man sled in China, accompanied by his regular crew of Greg Cackett, Nick Gleeson and Taylor Lawrence, with Ben Simons also travelling as reserve. Hall's team will head to Beijing as genuine medal contenders after a season in which they have claimed three World Cup podium finishes and fourth place in the overall rankings.

"We said at the start of the season that we wanted to be competing with the best in the world on a consistent basis and we've shown that we can do that," said Hall. "The boys have regularly been among the best starters in the world, too, and we're heading to Beijing full of confidence."

Hall will team up with Gleeson in the two-man event while Mica McNeill will pilot the women's crew. Rutherford, whose debut was delayed by a shoulder injury, only had his first run on a full track in Austria in November.

"A massive day in my life and on this incredible bobsleigh journey.... It's official. I can now call myself bobsledder," he posted on Instagram after his first training run. The former athlete was aiming to become just the seventh Olympian to win a medal at both a summer and winter Games. The 2022 Winter Olympics start on February 4 and run until February 20 at venues in and around Beijing. —AFP

Bavuma, Van der Dussen centuries help South Africa beat India

PAARL, South Africa: Temba Bavuma and Rassie van der Dussen hit centuries to set up a 31-run win for South Africa in the first one-day international against India at Boland Park in Paarl on Wednesday. South Africa made 296 for four after winning the toss and batting on a slow pitch. India were on target for the first half of their reply but lost wickets in clusters and finished on 265 for eight.

South African captain Bavuma made 110 off 143 balls but admitted that he struggled to time the ball consistently. He settled for playing a supporting role to a dazzling Van der Dussen, who hit a career-best 129 not out off 96 deliveries and was named man of the match.

"It seemed like he was batting on a different wicket," said Bavuma. "The energy and intensity he brought really gave our innings impetus. My focus was to try and partner him for as much as I can." Van der Dussen said his confidence had been boosted by being involved in two high-pressure run chases in the Test series won by South Africa last week.

Van der Dussen and Bavuma finished off the Test series with an unbeaten stand of 57 last Friday and carried that form through to the one-day game, putting on 204 for the fourth wicket off 190 balls. The partnership came after South Africa struggled to 68 for three in the 18th over. —AFP

Sports

Egypt make Cup of Nations last 16 as six teams advance

Ivory Coast, Mali, Gambia, Malawi and Cape Verde qualify without kicking a ball

YAOUNDE: Seven-time champions Egypt clinched a place in the Africa Cup of Nations last 16 on Wednesday by defeating neighbours Sudan 1-0, a result which sent five other countries including Ivory Coast through as well. Nigeria finished Group D with a third successive win as they beat Guinea-Bissau 2-0, leaving runners-up Egypt to face the winners of Group E in the next round, and a potential clash with the Ivorians.

Mohamed Abdelmonem's header at a corner 10 minutes before half-time in Yaounde sent the Pharaohs through and eliminated Sudan, and also saw Ivory Coast, Mali, Gambia, Malawi and Cape Verde qualify without kicking a ball. "I think Egypt deserved to win this game without any doubt given the opportunities we created and the football we played," said Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz.

"Our sin was not to score the second goal. If you score the second goal the game is finished. I will say it very clear, if I'll be able to win all the games 1-0 till the end I will be happy."

Egypt's victory guaranteed Cape Verde and Malawi will qualify as two of the four best third-placed sides. Ivory Coast lead Group E with four points and can finish no lower than third regardless of their result Thursday against reigning champions Algeria.

The same applies to Gambia and Mali in Group F. Both nations have four points from two games. Three-time former winners Nigeria continued their fine start to the competition by sweeping aside Guinea-Bissau courtesy of second-half goals from Umar Sadiq and captain William Troost-Ekong.

Three in a row for Nigeria

Nigeria caretaker coach Augustine Eguavoen made eight changes to his team with top spot already secure, but it was Kelechi Iheanacho-the match-winner against Egypt-who supplied the cross for Sadiq to tap in on 56 minutes.

Moses Simon came off the bench and played the main role in Nigeria's second goal, twisting past two defenders in the box before hammering a shot against the crossbar. Troost-Ekong turned in the rebound from close range, with an initial offside decision against the defender overturned by VAR.

The Super Eagles will stay in Garoua to play a third-placed team in the last 16 on Sunday. Cape Verde will take on Sadio Mane's Senegal in Bafoussam on January 25, while Malawi will meet Morocco on the same day in Yaounde after reaching the knockout rounds for the first time.

The remaining three slots will be determined later after the final round of matches in Group E and Group F. Algeria, whose 35-match unbeaten run was ended by Equatorial Guinea, must beat Ivory Coast in Douala to avoid a shock early exit after picking up just one point from two games.

The Equatoguineans are second in the section going into their game with Sierra Leone, who held Algeria 0-0 in their opener and then snatched an injury-time equaliser to draw 2-2 with Ivory Coast.

Tunisia could be without 12 players including skipper Wahbi Khazri against surprise Group F leaders and debutants Gambia because of COVID-19. The Carthage Eagles, the 2004 winners, will qualify for the last 16 unless they suffer a defeat by six goals or more. —AFP



YAOUNDE, Region du Centre: Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah (R) challenges Sudan's defender Mazin Mohamedein Alnour Mohamed (L) during the Group D Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2021 football match between Egypt and Sudan at Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo in Yaounde. —AFP

Man Utd back on track but grumpy Ronaldo mars win

LONDON: Ralf Rangnick defended Cristiano Ronaldo after the Manchester United star's petulant reaction to his substitution cast a shadow over their 3-1 win at Brentford on Wednesday. Rangnick's side were indebted to David de Gea for a superb first-half display that kept Brentford at bay before United finally sprang to life in west London. Anthony Elanga put United in front early in the second half before Mason Greenwood and Marcus Rashford wrapped up their first win in three Premier League games. But it was Ronaldo's grumpy response to Rangnick's decision to haul him off in the 71st minute that could prove the evening's lasting image.

Shaking his head and muttering to himself, Ronaldo appeared to say something to Rangnick as he brushed past him. Angrily throwing his coat to the floor, Ronaldo pointed at his chest while his team-mates on the bench nervously looked away. Rangnick initially ignored Ronaldo before sitting next to him and

patting the Portugal forward on the leg as he attempted to placate him. The 36-year-old's strop will raise fresh questions about his willingness to fit into Rangnick's system after his latest underwhelming display.

However, Rangnick refused to criticise Ronaldo when asked about his behaviour. "It's normal, he's a striker and wants to score goals. He came back from a little injury and for me it is important to bear in mind we have another game in a few days' time," Rangnick said. "We were 2-0 up, the same as at Aston Villa. I decided to defend that lead this time and it was the right decision to switch to a back five." United at least avoided another embarrassing result after losing at home to Wolves and letting a two-goal lead slip in a draw at Aston Villa in their previous two league games.

They sit seventh in the table, two points adrift of the top four as they chase qualification for next season's Champions League. "I wouldn't say a strong conversation but obviously we had to change a few things; first half we were not good in all aspects of the game," Rangnick said of his half-time message to his players.

"We gave away almost every second ball. In the second half we were more



LONDON: Brentford's English-born Jamaican defender Ethan Pinnock (L) tackles Manchester United's Swedish striker Anthony Elanga during the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Manchester United at Brentford Community Stadium in London. —AFP

urgent, we were attacking them high up the pitch."

Ronaldo, back after missing two matches with a hip problem, was nearly gifted an early goal when debutant keeper Jonas Loss dropped a cross at the forward's feet, but the Bees were able to scramble clear.

Thomas Frank's fired-up team went

close through Bryan Mbeumo, whose low shot forced a fine save from De Gea. Brentford were well on top and Mads Bech Sorensen saw his strike deflected into the side-netting off Bruno Fernandes. Ivan Toney tore through United's defence, setting up Mathias Jensen for a shot that was well saved by De Gea. —AFP

Atletico dumped out of Copa by Real Sociedad

MADRID: Atletico Madrid's season went from bad to worse on Wednesday as they were knocked out of the Copa del Rey by Real Sociedad. A comfortable 2-0 victory for La Real sent them through to the quarter-finals while Atletico are left needing to beat Manchester United in the Champions League last 16 to have any chance of rescuing their season.

Diego Simeone's team are effectively out of the La Liga title race already given they sit 16

points behind Real Madrid and they were beaten by Athletic Bilbao last week in the semi-finals of the Spanish Super Cup.

The Copa del Rey appeared their only realistic chance of silverware left but instead they were convincingly beaten at the Reale Arena, where goals from Adnan Januzaj and Alexander Sorloth were enough to put the Basque side through.

"Last season was magnificent and this season is proving to be very difficult," said Simeone. "The opportunities are there, we have the league and the Champions League." Atletico Madrid have now managed only two victories in their last eight games in all competitions. In the league they have registered just one clean sheet in seven.

"The only way to improve is to help the players, to give them confidence and peace of mind at

this time when the situation is complicated," Simeone said. "The dynamics are not good but let's think positively. I am an optimist and I believe in my players."

Januzaj and Atletico's Yannick Carrasco both hit the post early on before Januzaj gave Real Sociedad the lead in the 33rd minute when he somehow wriggled in front of three Atletico defenders to head in off the post.

More sloppy defending then gifted the hosts a second as Felipe disastrously tried to turn on the ball when he was Atleti's furthest man back, and Sorloth robbed it off him before going through to finish.

Real Sociedad join Mallorca, Rayo Vallecano, Cadiz, Valencia and Real Betis in the quarter-finals, with Real Madrid facing Elche and Barcelona playing at Athletic Bilbao. —AFP

Dembele must leave before end of January

MADRID: Barcelona director of football Mateu Alemany said Ousmane Dembele must leave before the end of January after the French international made it clear he does not want to stay at the club. Dembele, who joined from Borussia Dortmund in 2017 in a deal worth 140 million euros (\$158.9 million), will be able to leave for free when his contract expires in the summer.

Barca have been desperate to avoid that happening and with debts of over a billion euros, could at least pocket a fee for the 24-year-old if he is sold in the current transfer window. "With Ousmane and his agent we began conversations around July so it's been six months and a bit," Alemany said yesterday.

"We've talked, we've talked, we've talked. Barca has made different offers. "We've tried to find a way for the player to continue with us but these offers have been systematically rejected by his agents and today, January 20, eleven days before the last period of his contract ends, it seems obvious to us that the player does not want to continue at Barcelona and he is not committed to Barca's future project."

"In this scenario he and his agents have been informed that he must leave immediately because we want players committed to this project and therefore we hope that a transfer will take place before January 31."

Dembele has been left out of Xavi Hernandez's squad to face Athletic Bilbao in the Copa del Rey last 16. "The sporting consequence of all this, as agreed by our coach, is that we do not want to have players who are not committed to the project and who do not want to be at Barca," Alemany said.

"The club is obviously not the one that should decide this, it is the coach, and he has decided it. "But he has all our support and we understand it perfectly. It seems to us absolutely the correct approach."

Xavi said on Wednesday "we cannot wait any longer" and that "either the player renews or we look for an exit for the player, there is no other possibility." He also said he is "not contemplating" leaving Dembele sitting in the stands until the summer. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Sam Pattakumadathil Joseph s/o Pattarumadathil Kunjachan Joseph, holder of passport no. R8279158, resident of Pattarumadathil House Kottarcavu, Mavelikara, Alappuzha, Kerala 690101. Do hereby declare that I am changing my name to Sam Pattarumadathil Joseph for all purposes. (C 1410). 21-1-2022

I Reshma Irfan Mansuri holder of Indian passport no. S6180160 issued at Ahmedabad (Gujarat) India on 10/09/2018 and expiry date 09/09/2028 & Civil Id no. 286050116411 has changed my name from Reshma Irfan Mansuri to Reshma Mohammed Abdul Kaleem (given

name) and Mansuri (surname).

IBALU KRISHNAMUMARI w/of BALU KAILASAPATHI (Old name) Kakarivaripalli, Penagalur Mandal, YSR Kadapa District, A.P, have changed my Passport (H8635625) nae correction as BALU KRISHNA KUMARI W/o BALU KAILASAPATHI (New name). (C 1409) 20-1-2022

This is to inform in general public that I, Mohammad Rizwan Khan, S/o Abdul Rahman Khan, R/o H.No.89, Ward-6, Nr Masjid, Nanus, Valpoi, Sattari, Goa, hereby changed my name from Mohammad Rizwan to Mohammad Rizwan Khan & I further state that I have changed my father name from Abdul Rahaman to

Abdul Rahaman Khan in my passport. Hence after in all my dealings & documents I will be known as Mohammad Rizwan Khan. (C 1406) I have changed my old name Kutbuddin to my new name as Kutbuddin Panwala Vide Gazette No.P-2143485 Dated 21/Dec/2021. (C 1405) 18-1-2022

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Medvedev tames showman Kyrgios

Weary Murray dumped out of Australian Open



MELBOURNE, Victoria: Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return against Australia's Nick Kyrgios during their men's singles match on day four of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

MELBOURNE: Daniil Medvedev tamed Nick Kyrgios to surge into the Australian Open third round yesterday and avoid joining Garbine Muguruza and Emma Raducanu on the list of high-profile casualties. Also out on a day of shocks was former world number one Andy Murray, losing to Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel in straight sets, as the Grand Slam roared into life on day four.

Second seed Medvedev is the highest seed left in the men's draw and the favourite after the deportation of reigning champion Novak Djokovic on the eve of the tournament. But the 25-year-old Russian faced a stern test of his title credentials—and temperament—in the face of an unpredictable but talented Kyrgios, who revved up the home crowd in their prime-time evening showdown.

The 26-year-old Australian beat Medvedev, the reigning US Open champion and last year's losing finalist in Melbourne, in their only two previous clashes.

It was a madhouse inside Rod Laver Arena with showman Kyrgios dealing out all his assortment of unplayable serves and tweeners before a partisan home crowd, while embroiled in a running battle with the chair umpire.

But calculating Medvedev dealt with it all to ease through 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 and will now face Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp in the third round. Medvedev was not happy with some of the antics of the crowd. "I came to win this match and I am happy that I was able to do so," he said.

"It's not your choice when you get booed between first and second serves, it's not easy, I just had to stay calm." Greek fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, chasing a maiden major, also fought his way through 7-6 (7/1), 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 over former world number one junior Sebastian Baez of Argentina.

"I'm glad I overcame that obstacle today. Lots of fighting, a little bit of swearing, but I'm glad to be in the

third round," said Tsitsipas, who is next up against the talented but moody Frenchman Benoit Paire.

There was to be no fairytale run for Britain's three-time major champion Murray, going down 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 to 120th-ranked Daniel, who moves into the third round of a Slam for the first time. The 34-year-old Murray, who had career-saving hip surgery in 2019 and thought that he may never return to the Australian Open, appeared weary after emerging from a five-set epic in the first round. Safely through round two was fifth seed Andrey Rublev, who will now face Marin Cilic, the 27th seed from Croatia who lost the 2018 Australian Open final to Roger Federer. Australian wildcard Chris O'Connell pulled off an upset with a straight-sets win over 13th seed Diego Schwartzman of Argentina.

Suffering Raducanu out

There were more shocks in the women's draw, with third seed Muguruza, US Open champion Raducanu

and sixth seed Anett Kontaveit all suffering upsets. The 19-year-old Raducanu, the 17th seed but making her debut in Melbourne, struggled with blisters on her serving hand as Montenegro's Danka Kovinic defeated the Briton 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

WTA Finals winner Muguruza is also out, losing 6-3, 6-3 to 61st-ranked veteran Alize Cornet. "I am a bit of a dinosaur on the tour," said Cornet, who turns 32 on Saturday. Kontaveit, seen by many as a serious title contender after a breakout 2021, committed 27 unforced errors as she was stunned 6-2, 6-4 by fast-rising Danish teenager Clara Tauson.

But second seed Aryna Sabalenka lives to fight another day, just after coming from a set down for the second successive match to beat China's world number 100 Wang Xinyu. The Belarusian has struggled with her serve since arriving in Australia and totted up 19 double faults—six in the opening game alone—before managing to drag herself through 1-6, 6-4, 6-2. —AFP

Sixers' Embiid scores 50, Nuggets' Jokic 49 in NBA wins

LOS ANGELES: Philadelphia center Joel Embiid and Denver Nuggets big man Nikola Jokic lit up the NBA on Wednesday, underscoring their MVP credentials in leading their teams to victory. Embiid matched his career high with 50 points in a display of ruthless efficiency that fueled the 76ers' 123-110 victory over the Orlando Magic.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic scored 49 points in a triple-double that also featured 14 rebounds and 10 assists, powering the Nuggets to a 130-128 overtime triumph over the Los Angeles Clippers. Jokic scored 37 points in the second half and overtime.

The Serbian star handed out his 10th assist of the contest with 2.2 seconds left in overtime when, facing a double team himself, he lofted a cross-court pass to Aaron Gordon for a tie-breaking three-pointer. Gordon's fourth three-pointer of the game made it 130-127 and proved to be the game-winner. The Clippers made it 130-128 with a free throw after Denver reserve Davon Reed received a technical foul for coming onto the court after Gordon's basket.

But Clippers guard Reggie Jackson couldn't get his three-pointer to fall at the buzzer. Jokic notched his 10th triple-double of the season, connecting on 16 of 25 shots from the field, including three of five from three-point range.

Embiid was even more efficient, connecting on 17 of 23 shots from the field and putting up his half-century in just 27 minutes on court. "Fifty in 27, that's the most impressive part," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said.

"That was easy, quick, efficient and determined."

Embiid made eight of 10 shots in scoring 23 points in the third quarter. His step-back three-pointer with 25 seconds left in the third put Philadelphia up 92-80 and took his tally to 47 points—two more than the rest of his teammates combined to that point.

His dominant effort helped the Sixers, trailing by 10 at halftime, out-score the Magic 47-23 in the third and take a 94-80 lead into the fourth quarter. "I was feeling great," said Embiid, who also pulled down 12 rebounds and blocked three shots.

Embiid played less than a minute in the fourth quarter, scoring three points—all on free throws—to take his tally to 50 then remaining on the bench as the Sixers led all of the final frame. He joined Hall of Famers Wilt Chamberlain and Allen Iverson as the only 76ers with multiple 50-point games.

"I thought even tonight I was making fadeaways all over the place and getting to the free-throw line," Embiid said. "But at the same time I was still moving the ball. "These guys have a lot of trust in me, and they're also looking for me," Embiid added of his teammates. "It doesn't matter any time in the game, the ball is always going to find me."

Nets hold off Wizards

Dallas star Luka Doncic and Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving both posted season-highs to lead their teams to victory. Irving helped the Nets thwart a late Wizards rally in Washington to escape with a 119-118 victory, their first since star Kevin Durant was sidelined by a knee sprain on Saturday.

Irving's 30 points were his most since he rejoined the team this month despite his decision not to be vaccinated against COVID-19, which means he can't play home games because of New York's vaccine mandate. In Dallas, Doncic scored 41 points with 14 rebounds and seven assists in the Mavericks' 102-98



WASHINGTON: Montrezl Harrell #6 of the Washington Wizards goes to the basket against the Brooklyn Nets during the first half at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC. —AFP

victory over the Toronto Raptors.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Lakers' struggles continued with a 111-104 loss to the Indiana Pacers. Pacers guard Caris LeVert scored 22 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter. Domantas Sabonis scored 20 points with 12 rebounds and 10 assists and Malcolm Brogdon chipped in 19 points for the Pacers.

LeBron James scored 30 points and pulled down 12 rebounds but it wasn't enough against a Pacers team that notched just their second win in 12 games. Fueled by LeVert, the Pacers overpowered Los Angeles in the fourth quarter and the Lakers' fourth defeat in five games will likely turn up the heat on coach Frank Vogel. —AFP