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Cold snap leads to rise in sales of braziers at Souq Safafer



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Deadly fighting between IS, Kurdish forces in Syria



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'Bat Out of Hell' singer Meat Loaf dies at 74



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Man United leave it late to beat West Ham





Omicron ‘sub-variant’ throws up new coronavirus questions

Vaccine misinformation left children vulnerable to Omicron



MUMBAI: A civil authority worker sprays disinfectant inside a classroom yesterday ahead of the reopening of schools closed as a preventive measure to curb the spread of COVID-19. — AFP

PARIS/WASHINGTON: Scientists are keeping a close watch on a recently-discovered sub-variant of the Omicron version of the COVID-19 virus to determine how its emergence could affect future pandemic spread. The initial Omicron variant has become the dominant virus strain in recent months but British health authorities have notably identified hundreds of cases of the latest version, dubbed BA.2, while international data suggest it could spread relatively quickly.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) identified more than 400 cases in Britain in the first ten days of this month and has indicated the latest variant has been detected in some 40 other countries, accounting for a majority of most recent cases in some nations including India, Denmark and Sweden. The UKHSA indicated Friday it had designated the BA.2 sub-lineage as a variant under investigation (VUI) as cases of it were on the increase even if, in Britain, the BA.1 lineage currently remains dominant.

The authority underlined that “there is still uncertainty around the significance of the changes to the viral genome,” which required surveillance as, in parallel, cases in recent days showed a sharp rise in BA.2 incidence notably in India and Denmark. “What surprised us is the rapidity with which this sub-variant, which has been circulating to a great extent in Asia, has taken hold in Denmark,” French

epidemiologist Antoine Flahault told AFP.

Scientists must evaluate how the virus, which has engendered the worst global health crisis in a century, continues to evolve and mutate. Its latest incarnation does not possess the specific mutation used to track and compare BA.1 against Delta, the previously dominant strain. BA.2 has yet to be designated a variant of concern – but Flahault says countries have to be alert to the latest development as scientists ramp up surveillance.

Flahault, director of the University of Geneva’s Institute of Global Health, says the watchword is not panic but “vigilance” as “for now we have the impression (BA.2 case) severity is comparable to” classic variant Omicron cases. “But there are numerous questions on the table” and a need to monitor properties of the new variant on the block. “Very early observations from India and Denmark suggest there is no dramatic difference in severity compared to BA.1,” tweeted Tom Peacock, a virologist at Imperial College, London, adding the latest variant should not call into question the effectiveness of existing vaccines.

French Health Minister Olivier Veran said Thursday that BA.2 did not look as if it would prove a game-changer as variants appear on the scene “fairly regularly”.

Continued on Page 6

Adding peanuts to children’s diet can help avoid allergy

PARIS: Including peanuts in children’s diets early in life could help stave off allergies against the legume, which can be fatal and affect swathes of youngsters globally, according to a new study Friday. Researchers found that introducing peanut products to babies and infants, and gradually increasing exposure, led to greater tolerance for the common allergen. The peer-reviewed study, published in *The Lancet*, involved 146 peanut-allergic children aged between zero and three over two-and-a-half years.

Of the group, 96 were given peanut protein powder every day, with the dose increasing progressively to the equivalent of six peanuts. The other children received a placebo of oat flour. Twenty of the children who received peanut powder showed allergy remission, meaning no allergic reaction occurred six months after the therapy ended. One child in the placebo group showed remission.

Six months after the treatment, the children in remission could tolerate a dose equivalent to 16 peanuts. An additional 20 children who received peanut powder were considered ‘desensitized’, meaning they had a higher allergic threshold but were not considered in remission. These children could tolerate a dose equivalent to between six and 12 peanuts six months after the treatment ended.

The youngest children in the study experienced remission the most often, and the best results were in those under 12 months. “Very early interventions may provide the best opportunity to achieve remission”, said co-author Stacie Jones. Peanut allergies affect two percent of children in Western countries, according to the study, and can last a lifetime. Affected children must avoid eating peanuts and have self-injectable adrenaline available to fight allergic shocks, which can be fatal if they are accidentally exposed.

Exposure can even occur when a child hugs someone who has just consumed peanuts. “There are no treatment options, resulting in a considerable burden on allergic children and their caregivers to avoid accidental exposure,” said co-author Wesley Burks. “In severe cases, this can restrict peanut-allergic children’s freedoms, particularly when it comes to navigating daycare or schools and public spaces where access to a safe diet is in jeopardy,” he added. — AFP

Coalition denies air strike on Yemen prison

SAADA, Yemen: The Saudi-led coalition yesterday denied carrying out an air strike on a prison in Yemen’s rebel-held north that aid groups said killed at least 70 people. Claims the military coalition ordered the raid, which reduced buildings to rubble and left rescuers scrabbling for survivors with their bare hands, were “groundless”, the alliance said.

The attack, which coincided with a coalition strike on the Yemeni port of Hodeida that killed three children and knocked out the impoverished country’s Internet, was condemned by the United Nations secretary-general. But “these claims adopted by the militia are baseless and unfounded”, said coalition spokesperson Turki Al-Malki, referring to the Iran-backed Houthi insurgents.

The latest violence in Yemen’s intractable, seven-year war came after the Iran-backed Houthis on Monday claimed their first deadly attack on Abu Dhabi, capital of coalition partner the United Arab Emirates. The Houthis took the war into a new phase by claiming the drone and missile attack that killed three people, the first deadly assault the UAE has

Continued on Page 6

Pakistan proud of pig-to-human heart transplant pioneer

KARACHI: Friends and former classmates of the Pakistan-born surgeon behind the world’s first pig-to-human heart transplant say they earmarked him for greatness from his medical school days. Karachi-born Muhammad Mansoor Mohiuddin made headlines last week as the co-founder of the US university program that successfully transplanted the heart of a genetically modified pig into a gravely ill American man.


While hailed as a medical breakthrough, the procedure also raised ethical questions – particularly among some Jews and Muslims, who consider pigs to be unclean and avoid pork products. None of that worried Mohiuddin’s friends and former colleagues in Pakistan, who remember him as an ace student with a passion for medicine. “He would be so interested, always there, always available and always ready to get involved in surgery,” said

Airbus cancels Qatar Airways order in feud


PARIS: Airbus has taken the extraordinary step of cancelling a multibillion-dollar order of 50 planes from Qatar Airways, a major customer, in an escalating feud over the airline’s grounding of A350 aircraft. The Qatari company, one of the Gulf region’s “big three” carriers, has grounded nearly half of its 53-plane A350 fleet over degradation of exterior fuselage surfaces.

The airline has taken the dispute to the High Court

in London and stopped accepting further deliveries of the wide-body aircraft from the European firm until the problem is resolved. An Airbus spokesman told AFP on Friday that the aircraft maker has “terminated” a contract with Qatar Airways for 50 single-aisle



SAADA, Yemen: This image grab from video made available on Friday shows destruction at a prison in this Houthi rebel stronghold after it was hit in an air strike. — AFP




Muhammad Mohiuddin

Muneer Amanullah, a specialist who attended Karachi’s Dow Medical College with Mohiuddin in the 1980s.

College vice-chancellor Muhammad Saeed Qureshi said pride in Mohiuddin’s achievement had flooded the campus.

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A321neo aircraft, “in accordance with our rights”.

It is usually airlines that cancel orders when they no longer need them or cannot afford them anymore. The order was worth more than \$6 billion at catalogue prices, though airlines are usually charged less for large purchases. Qatar Airways said in a statement that it had been adhering to all of its contractual obligations with Airbus. “It is therefore a matter of considerable regret and frustration that Airbus has taken the apparent decision to expand and escalate this dispute,” the airline said.

The two companies had their first hearing on the A350 dispute in court on Thursday. Qatar Airways demanded \$618 million in compensation, plus \$4 million more per day for each day the A350 planes have

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Kuwait lauds UN Security Council condemnation of Houthi attacks

UNSC condemns terrorist attacks in Abu Dhabi, Saudi cities

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the statement issued by the UN Security Council to strongly condemn the terrorist attacks by the Houthi militias on facilities in sisterly UAE. The statement of the Council reaffirms the seriousness of the Houthi militias' behavior, threatening peace and security in the region, the Ministry said in a press release. It also shows the importance the Council attaches to the Yemeni cause, the Ministry noted, urging the Council to double effort to force the Houthi militias into responding positively to the ceasefire calls and the UN envoy's efforts to resume political consultations among the Yemeni parties. A political solution to the Yemeni crisis should be consistent with the three reference points, namely the GCC initiative and its executive mechanisms, the outcomes of the national dialogue conference and the UNSC Resolution 2216, it stressed. The Ministry renewed Kuwait's support to all efforts by the international community aiming to reach a political settlement to the crisis.

Heinous attacks

The UN Security Council on Friday condemned in the strongest terms the heinous terrorist attacks in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on January 17, as well as in other sites in Saudi Arabia. In a press state-

ment, the members of the Security Council expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims of the Houthi attacks and to the Governments of India and Pakistan, and they wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured. The members of the Security Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes



GCC chief welcomes UN statement

one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

They underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice. They also urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively

with the Government of the United Arab Emirates and all other relevant authorities in this regard. The members of the Security Council reiterated that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed. They reaffirmed the need for all States to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

GCC chief welcomes statement

Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf welcomed the statement issued by the UN Security Council. The statement affirms once again the importance the international community attaches to the Yemeni crisis caused by the Houthi militias through their coup against constitutional legitimacy in the country, Dr Hajraf said in a press release. He renewed the firm stance of the GCC prioritizing a political solution to the crisis based on the three reference points, namely the GCC initiative and its executive mechanisms, the outcomes of the national dialogue conference and the UNSC Resolution 2216.

Dr Hajraf, highlighting the need of implementing the Riyadh agreement on Yemen, urged the Houthi militias



to respond to the calls for ceasefire and the UN initiatives to resume political consultations without preconditions. He commended the UN envoy's efforts to restore security and stability to Yemen, address the worsening humanitarian situations, lift the sieges on cities and ensure humanitarian access to impoverished populations. — KUNA

Kuwait's integrity and anti-corruption strategy

By Khalid Yousef Al-Muzaini

Kuwait has undertaken many important steps in combatting corruption. These include signing the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and establishing Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha) in 2016. Among others, Nazaha was mandated with developing a comprehensive, national strategy to promote integrity and combat corruption.

In 2019, Kuwait Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy 2019-2024 was launched during Kuwait's first international anti-corruption conference "Integrity for Development." This important event was held under the patronage of the His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Nazaha worked with the United Nations in developing the strategy. Its goal is to further integrity, transparency, accountability, and the rule of the law in the public/private sectors and society at large.

Nazaha also ensured that all relevant parties participate in the development of the strategy. In fact, it held intensive consultations with stakeholders from the public sector, private sector, and non-governmental organizations. In these consultations, the stakeholders shared their views, input, and aspirations. As for its methodology, the strategy consists of 4 main pillars and a total of 13 priorities and 47 initiatives.

The four pillars represent the focus areas of the

strategy. There are the Public Sector, Private Sector, Society, and Specialized Bodies. In every pillar, the priorities highlight the areas that need to be developed, and the initiatives include specific actions to be taken. Furthermore, the strategy is an action-oriented document. For every initiative, it identifies benchmarks, completion dates, and implementation bodies.

Additionally, a national committee has been formed with the participation of all relevant parties to facilitate the implementation of the strategy. Coordination and collaboration have been on-going in a national scale in order to implement the initiatives in the strategy.

Kuwait Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy has made the national efforts to fight corruption more effective and efficient. For the full text of the strategy (available both in Arabic and English) and progress reports, please visit Nazaha's website, www.nazaha.gov.kw.

- Khalid Yousef Al-Muzaini is the Director of Planning and Monitoring Office at Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha)



Khalid Yousef Al-Muzaini

Counterfeit perfumes, purses confiscated



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said its inspectors confiscated a large quantity of counterfeit perfumes and purses carrying logos of

major international brands before they could enter the market. Further legal action will be taken against the violators, it added in a statement.

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Local

Cold snap leads to rise in sales of braziers at Souq Safafeer

Cold wave may last till end of January: Meteorologist



KUWAIT: Braziers of various shapes and sizes are displayed at the Souq Safafeer in Kuwait City. —Photos by Ben Garcia



By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: With the drop in temperature in the past few days, there's been a huge increase in the sales of braziers at the tin market in Kuwait City. According to a sales attendant at Souq Safafeer, demand has risen by almost 70 percent. "In the past few days, brazier sales have gone up by about 70 percent. This is good because we usually only sell a few units," said Taher. Taher's workshop is opposite the shop where he displays his finished products. "I have hired extra workers to help make the braziers. I can sell around 15 to 20 units daily, which will help me recover from the days without customers," he added.

The increase in demand was seen only last week, when the temperature dropped to a minimum of 2 degrees Celsius in the desert. "Kuwaitis and expats are buying our braziers. Most of them need it for camping or for the garden to warm them up," Taher added.

Kuwaiti Meteorologist Adel Saadoun said last week frigid temperatures could last for more

days. Hamad, a customer at the souq, said he needed a new brazier to replace the old one he had bought two years ago. "I searched for it in my storage, but I couldn't find it. Maybe my wife threw it away, so I bought a new one, since we have plans to go to the desert during the weekdays during my off," he said.

Souq Safafeer is located in Sharq Industrial Area, where one can find several items made of metal or wood. The souq is a collection of various shops and workshops, with its origins dating back to the 1950s. Workers make metal and tin braziers, storage lockers and boxes, fences, stove hoods, pots and other items on site. The shops also take custom orders and deliver within a few days.

The current cold wave affecting Kuwait may continue until the end of January, Saadoun said in a statement yesterday, noting that the minimum temperature could drop below zero on some days, especially in open areas. Saadoun

Temperature could drop below zero



had warned last week of the hazards of leaving burning charcoal inside closed tents while camping in the desert. "I want to caution everyone against using coal for heating. The problem is when they are in the desert, they do not know the danger it poses to the environment and individuals' wellbeing. If they light the charcoal and go to sleep, the carbon monoxide produced by the coal can kill them, so I advise campers to avoid using charcoal for heating," Saadoun said. "Always wear comfortable jackets and head covers to protect your body," he added.



KUWAIT: A group of the retirees meets some MPs.

Retirees gather to demand their rights

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: A group of retired citizens have formed an unofficial group to fight for their demands, which they see as their right. 'Rights of retirees' is the slogan of the group, which includes retirees from various public institutions, oil companies, the army and others.

The group was formed around six months ago, and currently has 12 members. "Over 5,000 people, mostly retirees, are following us on social media, and we speak on behalf of around 160,000 retired citizens," Mohammed Al-Aryan, a former employee at the ministry of planning who retired in 2020, told Kuwait Times.

The group has already met several MPs, who promised to highlight the demands of retirees in the National Assembly. "We are a peaceful group that fights for our rights quietly on social media and meets with officials rather than protesting at Irada Square. Due to the huge number of our followers, it's not right to let them gather for a protest, because if any of them says something wrong, we may lose all our demands," Aryan explained.

"The idea of our grouping started around five years back, when a former officer at the ministry of defense retired. He along with other officials didn't receive their indemnities. More retired citizens then started to communicate on social media to exchange ideas. The pandemic limited our activities, but around six months back, we gathered and activated the subject again," explained Aryan.

The group has nine main demands:

Distributing cash dividends annually depending on annual profits but not less than 25 percent, and this is the most important demand of the retirees. Annual increase of KD 50 instead of the present KD 30 every three years.

Return to the fund of the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS), which should belong to retirees. Equity among all retirees in getting indemnities, as the law was issued recently and is only applicable to those who retired after the law.

Refund of replacement loan interest and cutting the interest rate to two percent that is paid to PIFSS. The monthly deduction for the loan should be between five and 15 percent depending on the retiree's preferences. This application should be open and not limited to only once, and should be between 5 and 20 times the complete salary depending on the retiree's preferences.

Establishing a fund for insolvent retirees, for which a fund will be established from PIFSS' funds, which will be supervised by elected members of retirees at PIFSS. The minimum salary should be KD 1,800 when an employee retires. A number of retirees should be appointed in committees of PIFSS depending on their experience.

The high cost of living led to their demands. "We all notice the price hikes of most products including food, cars and electronics, especially after the pandemic. We have prepared alternative solutions for some demands. We are not presenting dreams but realistic demands. In fact, even if one of our demands is realized and approved by the parliament, we will consider it a success," concluded Aryan.

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News in brief

Amendments on
parliament's agenda

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's session today is scheduled to examine several proposals amending several legislative procedures and systems. One of the proposed amendments focuses on legal procedures concerning citizenship. MPs also proposed the establishment of a new entity within the plenary court for administrative disputes. The draft proposals will be up for vote during Sunday's session. The National Assembly held its last session of January 13th with the meeting approving amendments to the media and audio media law, the printing and publication law, and the criminal trial law.

Kuwait, India
discuss relations

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday received phone call from Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs of India, discussing bilateral relations between two countries. During the phone call, the two friendly countries discussed ways to strengthen and develop the existing strategic partnership in various fields as well as latest regional and international developments.

US renews commitment
to Gulf states' defense

WASHINGTON: The United States has reaffirmed commitment to helping Gulf partners improve their capabilities to defend against threats from Yemen and elsewhere in the region. This commitment was renewed Friday by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a phone call with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud. The US Secretary also condemned the January 17 Houthi attack on both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that struck civilian sites in the UAE, including Abu Dhabi's international airport, and killed and wounded civilians, according to a statement by the State Department Spokesperson Ned Price.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An aerial picture taken yesterday shows the Liberation Tower in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Gulf exercise
enhances cooperation:
Kuwaiti official

RIYADH: The 'Arab Gulf Security 3' exercise bolsters cooperation and experience exchange on the joint GCC level, said Brigadier General Abdullah Al-Ateeqi, chief of the supreme committee of the Kuwaiti force partaking in the drill. The joint drill, launched in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia on January 15, also enhances the unification of tasks and concepts to raise the forces' readiness to face any emergencies, threats and risks, he said in a statement yesterday.

He lauded the Kuwaiti force' capabilities participating in the drill, along with its GCC counterparts, that show the high level of the Gulf security coordination through holding such joint drills. The exercise features some security forces from GCC member states, with the aim of boosting cooperation and preparedness of the security apparatuses so as to confront all threats and risks facing the region. —KUNA



Company House Museum, portal into Qatar's oil history



DOHA: The Company House, located in the Msheireb Museums area in the Qatari capital Doha, takes visitors and tourists through the country's oil and natural gas history. The museum houses a variety of displays from vehicles and tools used on oil and natural gas endeavors to personal belongings of previous employees of the company. The museum also offers a collection of photographs documenting the history of the company. —KUNA

Kuwait daily COVID
cases drop, patients
in ICUs increase

KUWAIT: Kuwait's daily COVID-19 infections continued to drop as the country registered 4,148 new cases yesterday, compared to 4,809 on Friday. Furthermore, Kuwait recorded 4,991 recoveries yesterday to add to 4,299 announced a day before. On the other hand, Kuwait reported two deaths yesterday, while cases in ICUs increased from 48 on Friday to 58 yesterday. Total cases in hospitals stood at 330; down from 333 the previous day, while active cases dropped from 45,339 to 44,494. The percentage of daily new cases to new tests increased from 14.6 percent to 15.5 percent, while recovery rate reached 90.5 percent, according to the health ministry's bulletin. Total infections and recoveries hit 493,107 and 446,128 respectively as of yesterday, Health Ministry's official Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Deaths went up to 2,485, he added. Swab tests hit 6,634,114 with 26,836 new tests carried out in the same period, Dr Sanad further noted.





Fists fly in Honduran Congress ahead of new president's inauguration

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Monk who brought mindfulness to West dies in Vietnam

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Deadly fighting between IS, Kurdish forces in Syria

Jihadists 'seized weapons found' in detention centre

HASAKEH, Syria: Fighting raged for a third day yesterday between the Islamic State group and Kurdish forces in Syria after IS attacked a prison housing jihadists, with the violence killing nearly 90, a monitor said.

The assault on the Ghwayran prison in the northern city of Hasakeh is one of IS's most significant since its "caliphate" was declared defeated in Syria nearly three years ago. "At least 28 members of the Kurdish security forces, five civilians and 56 members of IS have been killed" in the violence, said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

IS launched the attack on Thursday night against the prison housing at least 3,500 suspected members of the jihadist group, including some of its leaders, said the Observatory.

The jihadists "seized weapons they found" in the detention centre and freed several fellow IS fighters, said the Britain-based monitor, which relies on sources inside war-torn Syria for its information.

Hundreds of jihadist inmates had since been recaptured but dozens were still believed to be on the loose, the Observatory said. With the backing of US-led coalition aircraft, Kurdish security forces have encircled the prison and are battling to retake full control of surrounding neighbourhoods, which jihadists have used as a launching pad for their attacks.

The Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) yesterday said "fierce clashes" broke out in neighbourhoods north of Ghwayran, where it carried out raids and killed more than 20 IS fighters. It said it seized explosive belts, weapons and artillery held by jihadists.

'Fat target'

The battles have triggered a civilian exodus from

neighbourhoods around Ghwayran, with families fleeing for a third consecutive day in the harsh winter cold as Kurdish forces closed in on IS targets. "Thousands have left their homes near the prison, fleeing to nearby areas where their relatives live," Sheikhmous Ahmed, an official in the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration, told AFP.

IS has carried out regular attacks against Kurdish and government targets in Syria since the rump of its once-sprawling proto-state was overrun in March 2019.

Most of their guerrilla attacks have been against



Fierce clashes broke out in neighbourhoods

military targets and oil installations in remote areas, but the Hasakeh prison break could mark a new phase in the group's resurgence.

IS said in a statement released on Friday by its Amaq news agency that its attack on the jail aimed to "free the prisoners". It was not immediately clear whether the prison break was part of a centrally coordinated operation — timed to coincide with an attack on a military base in neighbouring Iraq — or the action of a local IS cell.

Analyst Nicholas Heras of the Newlines Institute in Washington said the jihadist group targeted the prison to bolster its numbers. The Islamic State



HASAKEH, Syria: Syrians flee their homes in the Ghwayran neighbourhood in the northern city of Hasakeh yesterday, on the third day of fighting between the Islamic State (IS) group and Kurdish forces in Syria after IS attacked a prison housing jihadists in the area. —AFP

group "wants to move beyond being the terrorist and criminal network that it has devolved into, and to do that it needs more fighters," he told AFP.

"Prison breaks represent the best opportunity for ISIS to regain its strength in arms, and Ghwayran prison is a nice fat target for ISIS because its overcrowded," he said, using another acronym for IS.

'Comprehensive strategy'

The prospect of a repeat of the attack remains

very real, said Colin Clarke, research director at the New York-based Soufan Center think tank.

"The SDF needs a comprehensive strategy to deal with this threat," he said. The Kurdish authorities have long warned they do not have the capacity to hold, let alone put on trial, the thousands of IS fighters captured in years of operations.

According to Kurdish authorities, more than 50 nationalities are represented in a number of Kurdish-run prisons, where more than 12,000 IS suspects are now held. — AFP

US, Russia promise to work to ease Ukraine tensions

GENEVA: Washington and Moscow's top diplomats on Friday agreed to keep working to ease tensions over Ukraine, with the United States promising a written response to Russian security requirements next week and not ruling out a presidential meeting.

As fears grew that Russia could invade its pro-Western neighbour, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken renewed warnings of severe Western reprisals as he met with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Geneva. Russia's foreign ministry said later that, in his talks with Blinken, Lavrov had warned of "the most serious consequences" if Washington ignored Moscow's security demands.

Russia has massed tens of thousands of troops on the Ukrainian border, denying it plans to invade but demanding security guarantees, including a permanent ban on the country joining NATO. Blinken told reporters no major breakthroughs had been expected but he believed the two sides were "now on a clear path" to understanding each other's concerns and positions.

Speaking separately, Lavrov told reporters "Blinken agreed that we need to have a reasonable dialogue, and I hope emotions will decrease." He added that another meeting could be held between the two, but that it was "premature" to start talking about another summit between Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, who met in Geneva last June. Blinken did not rule out fresh talks between the leaders, after Biden twice warned Putin by tele-



KYIV: People form a symbolic human chain on a bridge across the Dnieper river in Kyiv, to mark the Day of Unity of Ukraine, yesterday. Ukraine marks the 103rd anniversary of the unification of eastern and western Ukraine in 1919. — AFP

phone of consequences for any Ukraine invasion.

'A disaster for Russia'

Biden bluntly assessed on Wednesday that Putin is likely to "move in" on Ukraine and warned of a "disaster for Russia" if he did. The United States has announced large-scale NATO naval exercises in the Mediterranean beginning on Monday and with the participation of the aircraft carrier USS Harry Truman. US officials have insisted the maneuvers had nothing to do with Ukraine. But the announcement of the naval drills came a day after Russia announced its own all-out naval exercises, with more than 140 warships and about 10,000 soldiers taking part in January and February in maneuvers that will take place in the Atlantic, the Arctic, the Pacific and the Mediterranean. In Kyiv, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted that he welcomed the fact that diplomacy "remains active." — AFP

"Central African forces and the Russians are committing a massacre," the source told AFP, declining to be identified. "There have been summary executions and we are talking about 50 deaths," the person said.

'Grave abuses'

Albert Yaloke Mokpeme, spokesman for the CAR presidency, told AFP that he had "no knowledge of this attack." But in mid-2021, UN experts deployed to CAR expressed strong concerns over reports of "grave human rights abuses" by Russian mercenaries who are contracted to support government forces.

The Wagner group is reputed to be close to the Kremlin, and critics say it takes orders from the Russian Ministry of Defense. Russia, though, has rejected criticism and claimed at the time that the group involved only "instructors" for the CAR military.

Moscow has said it has some 1,135 "unarmed trainers" in the country. But local independent groups, France and the United Nations say at least some are from the Wagner group, which now has an armed presence in several African countries including Libya and Mali. At the last meeting of the UN Security Council on the conflict in the Central African Republic, the United States demanded that Moscow investigate the abuses blamed on the Russians. — AFP

UN probing alleged killings by CAR forces, Russia paramilitaries

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations said Friday that it is investigating the alleged killing of dozens of people in the Central African Republic last week by CAR forces and mercenaries of the Russian private military company Wagner.

More than 30 civilians were reportedly killed, some by stray bullets, in the January 16-17 operation near the town of Bria that targeted the Union for Peace rebel group, according to UN officials speaking anonymously.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said that the UN mission known as MINUSCA in the country received reports of the incident, involving CAR troops and "other security personnel." "We are currently confirming the number of casualties and displacement," Dujarric said.

He said that MINUSCA had dispatched a human rights team accompanied by security personnel to the incident area, and that it "continues to assess the situation, ensuring necessary measures to be taken to protect civilians." A military source in the country suggested the fighting could still be ongoing.

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- Non-compliant and incomplete applications will be excluded, and such exclusion shall itself be a formal apology without the need to notify the applicant.
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23 January 2022

International

Fists fly in Honduran Congress ahead of new president's inauguration

President-elect announces 20 members expelled from Libre

TEGUCIGALPA: Lawmakers exchanged blows in the Honduran Congress Friday as a dispute among members of president-elect Xiomara Castro's party turned violent. Legislators from her leftist Libre party protested after 20 rebel members proposed Jorge Calix, one of their cohorts, as provisional congress president.

Castro loyalists claimed this violated a pact with Libre's coalition partner. Amid cries of "traitors" and "Xiomara!", angry Libre legislators forced their way to the podium while Calix was being sworn in, causing him to flee under a hail of punches and much pushing and shoving.

It was the first sitting of the 128-member Congress since elections last November. Following an emergency party meeting later on Friday, the president-elect announced that the 20 members had been expelled from Libre, calling them "traitors" and "corrupt".

The crisis began late Thursday when Castro called her party's 50 legislators to a meeting to ask them to support Luis Redondo of the Savior Party of Honduras (PSH) as congress president. The 20 rebel members did not attend.

On Friday, Libre leader Gilberto Rios told AFP that the 20 are backed by groups that wish to stop Castro's promised anti-corruption campaign, including people in "organized crime" and "drug trafficking." Castro won elections on November 28

to become Honduras' first woman president and end 12 years of National Party rule.

She won as part of an alliance between Libre and the PSH, to which the presidency of Congress was promised. Castro accused the dissidents of "betraying the constitutional agreement" and "making alliances with representatives of organized crime, corruption and drug trafficking."



Castro accuses dissidents of 'betraying the constitutional agreement'

Her husband Manuel Zelaya, a former president who was deposed in a 2009 coup supported by the military, business elites and the political right, is a senior Libre party official. Castro is to be sworn in on January 27 along with other senior officials, including the congress president, at a ceremony attended by international guests including US Vice President Kamala Harris. — AFP



TEGUCIGALPA: Deputy for the Libertad Refundacion (LIBRE) party Rassel Tome (L) tries to assault deputy Jorge Calix (2-R) after his election as President of the Provisional Board of Directors of the National Congress, at the Legislative headquarters in Tegucigalpa. — AFP

Germany to send field hospital to Ukraine as war fears grow

BERLIN: Germany will send a field hospital to Ukraine, Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht said on Saturday, while once again rejecting Kiev's calls for weapons delivery as fears of a Russian invasion grow.

Berlin has already delivered respirators to Ukraine and severely injured Ukrainian soldiers are currently being treated in Bundeswehr hospitals, the minister told Welt am Sonntag newspaper. "In February, a complete field hospital will be handed over, including the necessary training, all co-financed by Germany with 5.3 million euros (\$6.0 million)," Lambrecht said. "We are standing on Kiev's side. We must do everything to de-escalate the situation." "Weapons deliveries would not be helpful at the moment—that is the consensus within the government," she added.

Russia has massed tens of thousands of troops on the Ukrainian border, denying it plans to invade but demanding security guarantees, including a permanent ban on the country joining NATO. Echoing Western allies, Lambrecht said Moscow's demand to decide which state joins NATO was a "red line" for the alliance. "There is no Russian veto-right for membership to NATO. Every sovereign nation that shares our values is free to apply for membership. —AFP

Chile's president unveils woman majority cabinet

SANTIAGO: Chile's leftist president-elect Gabriel Boric, whose victory at the polls last month unsettled the markets, on Friday named the country's Central Bank governor as his finance minister in a young, diverse and woman-majority cabinet.

Mario Marcel, an independent politician and former member of the Socialist Party, with which he maintains strong ties, had held various roles under center-left governments from 1990 to 2008. Now 62, he was appointed Reserve Bank governor by Socialist former president Michelle Bachelet for a five-year term that started in late 2016 and continued under her center-right successor Sebastian Pinera.

Marcel was the favorite of the markets, which view his appointment as a sign of moderation in the economic reforms Boric had vowed to implement. Boric, painted by his detractors as a "communist," succeeded in mobilizing record turnout in the December 19 vote, and garnered nearly 56 percent of votes cast, compared to 44 percent for

ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast.

In a leftist coalition that includes Chile's Communist Party, Boric campaigned on promises of creating a "welfare state," increasing taxes and social spending. Kast, in turn, had pledged to protect the neo-liberal economic model left behind by dictator Augusto Pinochet-credited with Chile's relative wealth but blamed for a yawning gap between rich and poor.

Investors reacted nervously to Boric's victory, with the SP IPSA index closing 6.18 percent down the day after the election, while the Chilean peso ceded 3.4 percent to the US dollar to reach an historic rate of 876.

Increasing taxes

Marcel will take over amid expectations of an economic slowdown after growth of about 12 percent in 2021 due in large part to government grants to help with the coronavirus fallout, and individual withdrawals from private pension funds.

Chile's central bank has been increasing interest rates to halt infla-



SANTIAGO: Chilean President-elect Gabriel Boric (C) poses for a picture with his ministers during the presentation of his government cabinet at the Natural History Museum in Santiago. —AFP

tion, and grants will stop, too. Marcel will also have the tough task of implementing Boric's plan to increase taxes to fund social projects. Analyst Marcelo Mella of the University of Santiago said choosing Marcel was a nod to the markets, as he "has credibility on the right and in the private sector."

This was a good starting point, Mella added, "for making the very difficult decisions the president will

have to make this year."

With a 24-member cabinet of whom a third are independents, Boric is seeking to expand the reach of his leftwing political coalition in a Congress divided near 50-50 between the left and right. "The general outlook is a positive one in terms of breaking down the walls the president needs to break for a majority project with parliamentary backing," said Mella. —AFP

Omicron 'sub-variant' throws up new...

Continued from Page 1

But he indicated he would reserve judgment. "What we know for now is that (BA.2) more or less corresponds to the characteristics that we know of Omicron" mark one.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic took a deadly toll on adults in the United States for two years while largely sparing children from adding to the dire statistics. But the rapid spread of the Omicron variant led to record pediatric infections and hospitalizations in the country, and anti-vaccination misinformation that tells parents the shots are dangerous is adding to the risk.

The chances of young people dying from COVID-19 remain low. The shots greatly reduce the odds of severe illness, and vaccinated mothers may pass protection to their babies, but vaccine hesitancy pushed online leaves both parents and children vulnerable. From worries that the shots were developed too quickly, to false claims that the jabs can impact future fertility, physician Wassim Ballan of Phoenix Children's Hospital said combating misin-

formation has become part of his job.

Only 27 percent of children aged five to 11 have received a first dose of the vaccine in the United States. Hospitalizations reached a pandemic high of 914 children per day this month, up dramatically from the previous peak of 342 in Sept 2021. The first week of Jan 2022 saw Texas Children's Hospital in Houston report 12 babies in intensive care with COVID-19.

Babies are too young for the COVID-19 shot, but Kathryn Gray, attending physician of maternal-fetal medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said research increasingly shows that vaccination during pregnancy leads to antibodies safely being transferred to the baby, offering limited protection. Expectant mothers have also shown hesitancy to get the shot after they were excluded from initial clinical trials.

The initial lack of data continues to be exploited in vaccine-opposed messaging on social media. Posts on Facebook and Twitter claimed that stillbirths rose following the push to vaccinate pregnant people, even though going unprotected against the disease is the greater risk. Epidemiologists Carla DeSisto and Sascha Ellington from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said data from 1.2 million US births showed "no evidence the rate of stillbirths is higher overall during the pandemic." — AFP

cross-species organ donation.

"We were working on this model for 18 years," Mohiuddin said. "Those 18 years were dotted with different phases of frustration - as well as breakthroughs - but finally we have done it." The surgery is not without controversy, however, especially given Mohiuddin's Islamic faith. Pigs are considered unclean by Muslims and Jews - and even some Christians who follow the Bible's Old Testament literally.

"In my view, this is not permissible for a Muslim," said Javed Ahmed Ghamdi, a prominent Islamic scholar, in a video blog where he discussed the procedure. But another Islamic scholar in Pakistan gave the procedure a clean bill of health. "There is no prohibition in sharia," Allama Hasan Zafar Naqvi told AFP, calling it a "medical miracle". "In religion, no deed is as supreme as saving a human life," added Mohiuddin.

In Karachi, the surgeon's fellow alumni feel their former colleague may now be destined for even greater glory - medicine's top prize. "I think... the whole team is in for it, in for the Nobel Prize," said vice-chancellor Qureshi. — AFP

Pakistan proud of pig-to-human heart...

Continued from Page 1

"There was exhilaration that this has been done by a graduate from this college," he told AFP. Mohiuddin was quick to share the limelight with a team of 50 from the University of Maryland Medical School. "They were all experts of their respective fields," he told AFP by phone. "They are the best surgeons, the best physicians, the best anesthetists, and so on."

While the prognosis for the recipient of the pig's heart is far from certain, the surgery represents a major milestone for animal-to-human transplants. About 110,000 Americans are currently waiting for an organ transplant, and more than 6,000 patients die each year before getting one, according to official figures. To meet demand, doctors have long been interested in so-called xenotransplantation, or

Coalition denies air strike on...

Continued from Page 1

acknowledged inside its borders and prompting threats of reprisals.

The Internet blackout, which went into its second day yesterday according to web monitor NetBlocks, complicated rescue work and media reporting as information slowed to a trickle. Unverified footage released by the Houthis revealed gruesome scenes at the bombed-out prison facility, as rescue workers scrambled to dig out bodies and mangled corpses were placed in piles.

Eight aid agencies operating in Yemen said in a joint statement that the prison in Saada, the rebels' home base, was used as a holding center for migrants, who made up many of the casualties. They said they were "horrified by the news that more than 70 people, including migrants, women and children, have been killed... in a blatant disregard for civilian lives". Hospitals were overwhelmed as hundreds of casualties flooded in, aid workers said. "It is impossible to know how many people have been killed. It seems to have been a horrific act of violence," said Ahmed Mahat, Doctors Without Borders' head of

mission in Yemen.

Meeting on Friday, the UN Security Council unanimously condemned the "heinous terrorist attacks" on Abu Dhabi, but the council's Norwegian presidency also denounced the strikes on Yemen. In a later statement, the UN chief Antonio Guterres "reminds all parties that attacks directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure are prohibited by international humanitarian law". US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called for "all parties to the conflict to de-escalate" and "abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law".

Iran yesterday also condemned recent air strikes on Houthi-held areas, warning they have "made the path to achieve a just peace in the country even more difficult," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said. Saudi Arabia accuses regional rival Iran of providing military support to the Houthis, especially missiles and rockets, claims that Tehran denies. Khatibzadeh said there was a lack of "serious determination to advance the political settlement of the Yemeni crisis", warning it would lead to the "destruction of the country and instability in the region."

The Houthis have warned foreign companies to leave the "unsafe" UAE, a veiled threat of revenge attacks after Friday's strikes. "We advise the foreign companies in Emirates to leave because they invest in an unsafe country and the rulers of this country continue in their aggression against Yemen," warned Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree. — AFP

Airbus cancels Qatar Airways

Continued from Page 1

been kept idle, a source close to the matter said. Airbus said it cancelled the A321neo orders because Qatar Airways failed its contractual obligations by refusing to take deliveries of A350 planes.

The aerospace giant has acknowledged the existence of paint degradation, which can expose a metallic mesh that protects aircraft from lightning strikes. But Airbus says the issue poses no air safety problems. The aerospace giant has said the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) confirmed its findings that the paint-related issue had "no airworthiness impact on the A350 fleet".

The row erupted in August last year when Qatar Airways announced that its country's aviation regulator ordered the grounding of 13 A350 planes due to

the fuselage issue. There are now 21 airplanes sitting on the tarmac. Airbus was supposed to deliver 23 more A350 planes to the airline but Qatar Airways has refused to accept them since last summer.

Other airlines have found similar paint issues with their A350 planes, but Qatar Airways is the only one to have grounded aircraft. "Qatar Airways' number one priority remains the safety of its passengers and crew," it said in its Friday statement. "For this reason, all affected aircraft remain grounded, and we are unable to accept delivery of further aircraft tendered for delivery by Airbus."

It released a video showing widespread flaking of paint from the fuselages of several aircraft, exposing the metallic mesh underneath, saying "these defects are not superficial". Airbus said last month that it was ready to seek independent arbitration to settle the dispute. In an unusually stern statement about a client, Airbus said at the time that the "attempt by this customer to misrepresent this specific topic as an airworthiness issue represents a threat to the international protocols on safety matters". — AFP

International

Taleban say Oslo talks with West will ‘transform atmosphere of war’

Taleban take steps for meeting the demands of the Western world

KABUL: The Taleban’s first official talks with the West on European soil since seizing power in Afghanistan will help to “transform the atmosphere of war” after a two-decade insurgency against NATO forces, the group’s top spokesman told AFP yesterday.

The hardline Islamists stormed back to power in August as US and foreign troops began their final withdrawal from the country following a stalemate on the battlefield. No country has yet recognised the Taleban’s government-notorious for human rights abuses during a first stint in power between 1996 and 2001 when they were ousted by a US-led invasion.

“The Islamic Emirate has taken steps for meeting the demands of the Western world and we hope to strengthen our relations through diplomacy with all the countries, including European countries and the West in general,” Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP yesterday.

The Taleban want to “transform the atmosphere of war... into a peaceful situation.” Talks between the Taleban and Western officials will open in Oslo today on human rights and humanitarian aid as a poverty crisis deepens.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated drastically since the Taleban’s takeover. International aid came to a sudden halt and the United States has frozen \$9.5 billion (8.4 billion euros) in Afghan central bank assets held overseas.

Hunger now threatens 23 million Afghans, or 55

percent of the population, according to the United Nations, which says it needs \$5 billion from donor countries this year to address the humanitarian crisis in the country.

The visit from today to Tuesday will see meetings between the hardline Islamists, Norwegian authorities and officials from a number of allied countries including Britain, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy and the United States, the Norwegian foreign ministry statement said.



Hunger now threatens 23 million Afghans

The Taleban delegation is also expected to meet Afghans from civil society, including women leaders and journalists, at a time when the freedoms of those living in Afghanistan are being increasingly curtailed.

“These meetings do not represent a legitimisation or recognition of the Taleban” Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt said Friday. “But we must talk to the de facto authorities in the coun-

Their sentences were also read out on state media’s nightly news. The junta has sentenced dozens of anti-coup activists to death as part of its crackdown on dissent but Myanmar has not carried out an execution for decades.

‘Tip off’

Phyo Zeyar Thaw-whose real name is Maung Kyaw-was arrested at an apartment in the commercial hub Yangon following a “tip-off and cooperation from dutiful citizens,” according to the junta. The former lawmaker-who also goes by the name Phyo Zeyar Thaw-was in possession of two pistols, ammunition and an M-16 rifle, it said at the time.

He had been accused of orchestrating several attacks on regime forces, including the brazen shooting on a commuter train in Yangon in August that killed five policemen. A hip-hop pioneer in Myanmar whose subversive rhymes irked the previous junta, he was jailed in 2008 for membership in an illegal organisation and possession of foreign currency.

He was elected to parliament from Suu Kyi’s NLD in the 2015 elections that ushered in a transition to civilian rule. Kyaw Min Yu, who rose to prominence during Myanmar’s 1988 student uprising was arrested in an overnight raid in October.

Part of the so-called 88 Generation movement



JALALABAD: In this photograph taken on December 12, 2021, Taleban head of the Nangarhar intelligence services Dr Bashir (C) walks inside the provincial intelligence compound in Jalalabad. The Taleban promised to bring peace, but fear reigns above all in the eastern city of Jalalabad. —AFP

try. We cannot allow the political situation to lead to an even worse humanitarian disaster.”

The Taleban delegation, led by foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, was due to leave for Oslo. Ali Maisam Nazary, the foreign relations chief for the National Resistance Front (NRF) — an opposition

group that bills itself as the last bastion against total Taleban control-condemned Norway over the talks. “We all must raise our voices and prevent any country from normalizing a terrorist group as the representative of Afghanistan,” Nazary, who is based in Paris, tweeted on Friday. — AFP

Myanmar sentences lawmaker from Suu Kyi’s party to death

YANGON: A Myanmar military tribunal sentenced a member of Aung San Suu Kyi’s ousted party to death for terror offences on Friday, the junta said, ramping up a crackdown on the toppled leader’s party. The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since the February coup, with more than 1,400 killed in a subsequent crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

Junta opponents-including allies of Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy-have gone into hiding across the country, and “People’s Defence Forces” have sprung up across the country to take on the military.

Phyo Zeyar Thaw, a member of the NLD arrested in November, was sentenced to death for offences under the anti-terrorism act, the junta statement said. Prominent democracy activist Kyaw Min Yu-better known as “Jimmy”-received the same sentence from the military tribunal, the statement added, carrying pictures of both men.

Monk who brought mindfulness to West dies in Vietnam

HANOI: Vietnamese monk-turned-peace-activist Thich Nhat Hanh, a hugely influential Buddhist credited with bringing mindfulness to the West, has died aged 95. The Zen master, whose reach within Buddhism is seen as second only to the Dalai Lama, spent nearly four decades in exile after being banished from his homeland for calling for an end to the Vietnam-American War.

Thich Nhat Hanh “passed away peacefully” at the Tu Hieu Temple in the city of Hue, Vietnam’s Buddhist heartland, his Zen teaching organisation, the Plum Village Community of Engaged Buddhism, said. “We invite our beloved global spiritual family to take a few moments to be still, to come back to our mindful breathing, as we together hold Thay in our hearts,” the organisation said on Nhat Hanh’s Twitter account, using the Vietnamese word for teacher.

Before his return to Vietnam in 2018, he set up retreats around the world and wrote over 100 books including on mindfulness and meditation-a cornerstone of a \$4.2 trillion global wellness industry espoused by Oprah Winfrey, Arianna Huffington and tech billionaire Marc Benioff.

Religious freedom, peace

Born in 1926, Thich Nhat Hanh was

ordained aged 16 and went on to found a youth school which trained volunteers to build clinics and infrastructure in villages blighted by war. In the early 1960s he travelled to the United States, where he taught at Columbia and Princeton universities, but after one trip in 1966 to meet US civil rights icon Martin Luther King-who joined his calls to end the Vietnam-American War-he was barred from returning home.

Believing that war was fundamentally wrong, the monk refused to take sides in the conflict and was consequently persecuted by the governments of both North and South Vietnam. Thich Nhat Hanh spent the next 39 years in France, but continued to advocate for religious freedom around the world.

In 1967, King nominated Thich Nhat Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize, telling the committee in a letter: “this gentle Buddhist monk from Vietnam is a scholar of immense intellectual capacity”. “His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity.”

He also continued to help his fellow Vietnamese. As the war came to an end, many fled the country by boat, facing perilous conditions on the ocean as they attempted to reach sanctuary overseas. Thich Nhat Hanh was able to

rare since the beginning of the pandemic due to virus curbs and fears of infection. But public anger over corruption has previously led to mass demonstrations and election upsets, with the multi-billion-dollar IMDB scandal contributing to the longest-governing coalition’s downfall in 2018.

Azam, a key investigator into the former regime’s looting of the IMDB state fund, has been under scrutiny for weeks over allegations of improper proxy trading after he admitted to letting his brother use his account. Azam has denied any wrongdoing, while Malaysia’s securities regulator said this week that he had control of his account at the time of the trades, clearing him.

But that has not appeased the public. “We have come because we cannot allow the practice of corruption to continue,” Mohamad Zawawi Ishak, 29, told AFP as a crowd massed in front of a city train



HUE, Vietnam: File photo shows highly-revered Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (C), in wheelchair, arriving with a group of monks at the Tu Hieu Pagoda in Hue. — AFP

save more than 800 people after he hired two large boats.

Such action was part of his belief in “engaged Buddhism”, a term which he coined, according to John Powers, a professor of religious studies at Australia’s Deakin University. “One of the problems historically with Buddhism is that Buddhists have been really good about talking about compassion... but (they) have not been that great at putting it into practice,” Powers said.

But Thich Nhat Nanh believed “it’s not enough to sit on a cushion and meditate... and that’s become a real cornerstone of a lot of modern Buddhism”. He was permitted by authorities to see out his final days at the Tu Hieu temple, but was closely monitored by plainclothes police who kept vigil outside his gated compound. Since his return to Vietnam, hundreds flocked to his pagoda to join the monk on his outings around the temple’s lush gardens. — AFP

station at about 11:00 am (0800 GMT).

“In the fight against corruption, whoever is corrupt, we have to fight,” Sivaranjani Manickam, 41, said the government was encouraging more corruption by not punishing Azam. “Anger is making us come out to the streets today to protest,” she said.

Police closed several major roads city-wide as dozens of officers, including some in riot gear, tailed the crowd before rally-goers dispersed peacefully less than two hours later. A MACC veteran of over 36 years, Azam was appointed head of the anti-graft department in 2020 in the midst of efforts to claw back pilfered funds.

That same year, ex-leader Najib Razak was convicted of corruption and given a 12-year jail term. He is awaiting a final appeal at the country’s top court while facing two other ongoing IMDB-related trials. — AFP

Mahathir stable after latest hospital admission

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad is in a stable condition after being admitted to a specialist heart hospital for the third time in just weeks, his daughter said yesterday.

The 96-year-old has been receiving treatment at the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur for the past two days, Marina Mahathir said.

Media descended on the hospital as news spread that Mahathir had been admitted again, and current Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob also paid him a visit.

In a statement, his daughter said he was receiving follow-up treatment after a procedure at the same facility about a fortnight ago. “His condition is now stable and he has been responding well to treatment,” she said.

His family “requests that people pray for him to make a full recovery”, she added. Mahathir also spent several days at the hospital in December for a check-up. He has had numerous heart problems over the years, suffering several heart attacks and undergoing bypass surgery.

Mahathir is one of Malaysia’s most dominant political figures, having served twice as prime minister for a total of 24 years. He was leader from 1981 to 2003, then returned to power in 2018 at the age of 92, heading a reformist coalition in the wake of the huge IMDB corruption scandal. But that administration collapsed in 2020 due to infighting. — AFP

News in brief

Unexploded bomb found

BOGOTA: An unexploded bomb was found Friday at the Bogota offices of the leftist Comunes party that replaced the disarmed FARC guerrilla group, Colombian police said. A bottle containing about 1.5 kilograms (3.3 pounds) of explosives was found on site, police general Eliecer Camacho told reporters. Police found a mobile phone near the device, suggesting it was to be activated from a distance, he added. The venue, dubbed Casa Alternativa (Alternative House), is a meeting point for ex-FARC combatants and Comunes party members preparing the campaign for legislative elections in March. “We were supposed to hold a meeting there with the youth of the @ComunesCoL party and tomorrow to have the launch of our party’s campaign,” party member Sergio Marin said on Twitter, adding: “Stop the attacks on peace!” The building, in central Bogota, was sealed off by police. — AFP

Mexican president healthy

MEXICO CITY: Mexico’s President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador underwent a heart inspection on Friday during a routine health check-up at a military hospital, the interior ministry said. “In this procedure, the president’s heart and arteries were found to be healthy and functioning properly,” the ministry said in a statement about Obrador’s cardiac catheterization procedure. “No other type of intervention was necessary and it was a brief procedure that lasted about 30 minutes.” — AFP

Malaysian protesters demand resignation of anti-graft chief

KUALA LUMPUR: Hundreds of Malaysians rallied in the capital yesterday, demanding the country’s powerful anti-graft chief resign over a stock trading controversy where he owned millions of shares.

Wearing masks and shouting “reject corruption”, the mostly black-clad crowd of about two hundred called for immediate action against Azam Baki, the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission’s (MACC) top official.

Protests in the Southeast Asian nation have been

Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 2022

NBK Economic Report

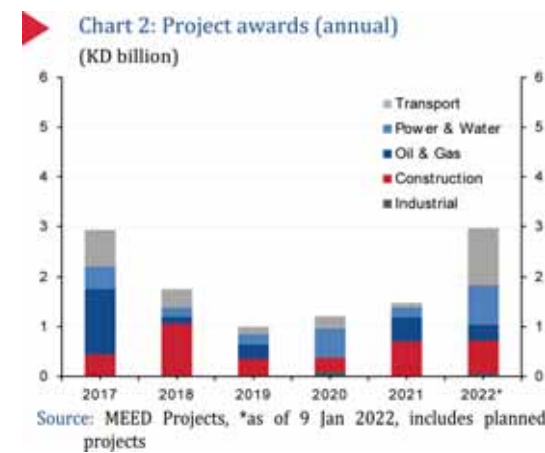
Kuwait project activity gathered pace in fourth quarter of 2021

KD 3.0 billion worth of projects set to be awarded in 2022: MEEDS Projects

KUWAIT: The total value of project awards in Kuwait surged to KD 556 million (+265 percent q/q; +279 percent y/y), according to MEED Projects. This brings the total value of awards in 2021 to KD 1.5 billion, up 13 percent on 2020. The figure falls short of the KD 2.4 billion that was forecast earlier, a likely outcome of government tendering delays amid cutbacks in capital spending and pandemic-linked supply chain constraints.

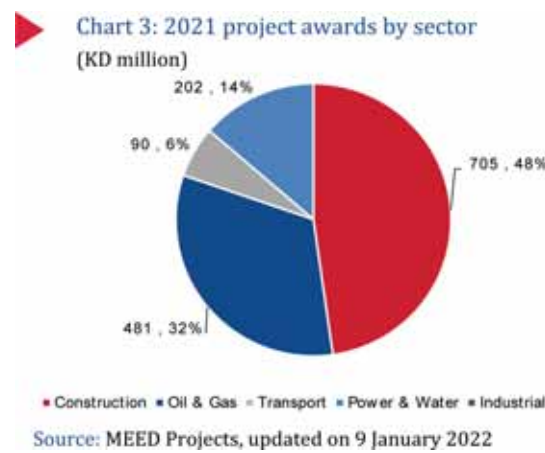
The surge in project awards in 4Q21 stemmed from the oil and gas sectors, while, for the year as a whole, the construction sector accounted for almost 50 percent of all awards, followed by the oil and gas sector with 32 percent. MEED Projects anticipates activity accelerating in 2022, with about KD 3.0 billion worth of projects set to be awarded.

Project awards in the construction sector amounted to KD 128 million in 4Q21. The bulk of awards came from the Hessah Al-Mubarak-Low Rise Commercial Buildings project (KD 42 million) and the KOC-KERP: Soil Remediation project (KD 36 million). Meanwhile, total 2021 construction sector awards reached KD 705 million, up 89 percent from 2020. In 2022, a similar value of construction contracts are expected to be awarded (KD 723 million). These include the CMGS-Development of Four Sites at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway (KD 165 million) and KOC's Kuwait Excavation, Transportation, and Remediation Project (KD 150 million), both currently scheduled



for 2Q22.

Project activity in the power and water sectors slowed down again in 4Q21, with awards falling 5 percent q/q to KD 45 million. Several small-scale projects were awarded last quarter, including two of PAHW's Feeding Main Transformer Stations cables projects valued at KD 30 million. Activity in the power and water sectors should, however, pick up in 2022, with about KD 798 million in the project pipeline. Several large-scale water projects are expected in the first half of 2022, including MPW's Wastewater Treatment Plant (KD 173 million) and phase 2 of MEW's Doha Desalination Plant (KD



130 million).

The transport sector saw no projects awarded in 4Q21. This is the third consecutive quarter of minimal activity, following 2Q21's outturn of only KD 5 million. Looking ahead, a recovery could be around the corner if the KD 1.1 billion worth of transportation projects, including PAHW's South Sabah Al-Ahmed Township (KD 300 million) and MPW's Regional South Road (KD 130 million) projects are awarded in 1H22.

Oil and gas sector activity recovered in 4Q21, after several quarters in which it was relatively subdued. Oil and gas awards came in at KD 383 million



KUWAIT: MEED Projects anticipates project activity in Kuwait accelerating in 2022 with about KD 3.0 billion worth of projects set to be awarded.

in 4Q21, accounting for nearly 70 percent of all awards in the quarter. This was mainly KOC's JPF4 & 5 Off-Plot Works & Production Facilities (KD 246 million) and 11 Patterns Well Hook-Up (KD 123 million) projects. In 2022, KD 315 million worth of awards could materialize, including several KOC-related oil projects (KD 150 million).

Project activity in Kuwait's chemical sector, which has been relatively quiet since 2011, is not expected until 2023, when the contract for KIPIC's Al-Zour Petrochemical Complex (KD 2.85 billion) is expected to be awarded.

Sri Lanka inflation hits record 14% as food crisis worsens

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka consumer prices shot up a record 14 percent in December, surpassing a previous high of 11.1 from a month earlier, official figures showed yesterday as food and fuel shortages worsen. Senior ministers warned parliament earlier in the week of a growing food crisis with rice harvests due in March expected to be drastically lower after an agrochemical import ban last year saw farmers abandoning more than 30 percent of agricultural land.

The island's tourism-dependent economy has been hammered by the pandemic with the government imposing broad import restrictions to avert a foreign exchange crisis, triggering a shortage of essential goods. The Census and Statistics Department said year-on-year inflation in December was the highest since the National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) was established in 2015.

It said food inflation also hit a record 21.5 percent, up from 16.9 percent in November and 7.5 percent a year ago. The use of substandard organic fertilizer and pesticides has sharply reduced vegetable and fruit crop yields. After intense farmer protests, the government lifted its agrochemical import ban in October, but banks are still short of dollars to finance imports. Supermarkets have been rationing milk powder, sugar, lentils and other essentials for months with a top official warning last month of more restrictions to feed those most in need. But agriculture ministry secretary Udith Jayasinghe was sacked hours after calling for a formal rationing scheme to ensure that mothers, the elderly and the sick could be fed in the months ahead. Sri Lanka's foreign reserves have tanked since President Gotabaya Rajapaksa took office in 2019, going from \$7.5 billion to \$3.1 billion at the end of December. The current figure is enough to finance less than two months of imports. International rating agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka over fears of default on its \$35 billion foreign debt. The government has insisted it can meet the obligations. —AFP

In Texas, driverless trucks are set to take over roads

HOUSTON: A giant 18-wheel transport truck is barreling down a multi-lane Texas highway, and there is no one behind the wheel. The futuristic idea may seem surreal, but it is being tested in this vast southern US state, which has become the epicenter of a rapidly developing self-driving vehicle industry.

Before driverless trucks are allowed onto roads and highways, however, multiple tests must still be conducted to ensure they are safe. Self-driving lorries are operated using radars, laser scanners, cameras and GPS antennas that communicate with piloting software. "Each time we drive a mile or a kilometer in real life, we re-simulate a thousand more times on the computer by changing hundreds of parameters," explains Pierre-Francois Le Faou, trucking partner development manager at Waymo, the self-driving unit at Google's parent company Alphabet.

Waymo is building a logistics center in Dallas that will accommodate hundreds of autonomous semi-trailers. And it is by far not alone. Embark, a self-driving technology startup, operates an autonomous trucking lane between Houston and San Antonio, while Aurora, co-founded by a former Waymo employee, will open three terminals and a new 635-mile route (1,000 kilometers) in Texas this year.

In a sign of how competitive the autonomous trucking industry is, none of the three companies agreed to show AFP one of its vehicles.

Friendly legislation

"I think that everybody who is in the autonomous trucking business is in Texas," says Srikanth Saripalli, director at the Center for Autonomous Vehicles and Sensor Systems at Texas A&M University. "Even if they don't advertise it." The companies didn't land in Texas by chance. The state has the largest number of truck drivers and many qualified engineers, its sunny climate is great for the trucks' sensors, and neighboring Mexico exports 85 percent of its goods to Texas by road.

Houston and Dallas are major freight hubs, and



HOUSTON: In this undated handout image released by Aurora Technologies Inc, Aurora tests its autonomous trucks, powered by the Aurora Driver, with human vehicle operators on public roads in Texas. —AFP

Texas's sprawling distances are ideal for long-haul transport. But most of all, local legislation is friendly toward driverless vehicles. In 2018, Texas passed a law that essentially gave autonomous cars the same status as conventional vehicles.

"You need insurance and you need to follow the rules of the road, but other than that Texas does not impose any other regulations," says Saripalli. With the United States so vast and trucking such a vital part of its economy, companies see self-driving as a way to cut costs and reduce risk, since unlike with human drivers autonomous vehicles don't get tired and don't require mandatory breaks.

While it will take a person three days to drive a truck from Los Angeles to Dallas, a self-driving big rig will complete the journey in 24 hours, estimates Aurora. And it will be nearly twice as cheap. The per-mile cost would drop from \$1.76 to \$0.96 if the truck drives itself, according to Embark.

Jobs at risk

Alex Rodrigues, CEO and co-founder of Embark Technology, insists self-driving trucks will be crucial in combatting the current shortage of long-haul

truck drivers in the US, some of whom are unwilling to be away from their families for weeks at a time. "Right now, there are containers sitting in the port of LA not getting moved," he says.

And Rodrigues promises that the self-driving truck industry will create "attractive" jobs for local drivers, who will take over the autonomous trucks at transfer points and drive them to their final destination points. Still, 294,000 trucking jobs would be threatened by the industry's automation, according to a 2018 study conducted by Steve Viscelli, a sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley.

For Julio Moscoso, a 56-year-old driver in Texas, the arrival of driverless trucks is "not good news."

He says while there are many trucking jobs available right now, that wasn't always the case. He recalls a time over the past two years when "there wasn't as much work."

And most importantly, Moscoso says he wouldn't trust driverless trucks. "It's dangerous. What happens if the sensors fail?" he asks. At the same time, he admits he does not want to do long-haul journeys anymore, and finds it uncomfortable to sleep in his cabin and not be able to shower every day. —AFP

Biden hails Intel's \$20bn chip plant investment amid shortage

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden on Friday praised Intel's plans to spend \$20 billion on a new US semiconductor facility, hailing the "historic" investment even as a global chip shortage fans the inflation wave weighing on his leadership. Biden is urging manufacturers to bring production back to the United States, which was once a leader in making the chips key to everything from vacuums and televisions to cars which have become scarce during the pandemic.

Intel said it plans to begin construction at the end of the year on two plants in the Midwestern state of Ohio, and chip production could start as early as 2025.

"This is a truly historic investment in America and American workers," Biden said at the White House, where he spoke alongside Intel's CEO Pat Gelsinger. Biden called it "one of the largest investments in semiconductor manufacturing in American history."

Problems in global supply chains have highlighted the fundamental importance of semiconductors, as well as the risks of overreliance on imports. The closure of

semiconductor plants, particularly in Asia, due to pandemic disruptions led to a global chip shortage that has affected a range of industries from automobiles to video games.

That was coupled with surging demand creating bottlenecks, forcing companies to slow production, and sending prices soaring. "This will be our first new manufacturing site in 40 years, and spanning nearly 1,000 acres (400 hectares) will be a mega fab location," Gelsinger said at the White House.

"The site alone could grow to as much as \$100 billion of total investment over the decade," he added.

Boosting domestic production

With the pandemic highlighting industrial dependence on imports, governments, particularly in the United States and Europe, have focused on securing semiconductor supply after years in which manufacturing has shifted to lower-cost Asian countries. Geopolitical tensions also play a roles as the chips are

largely manufactured in Taiwan, over which China has expressed territorial claims.

In a statement cheering the Intel announcement, the White House lamented that the United States had "lost its edge-our share of global semiconductor production has fallen from 37 percent to just 12 percent over the last 30 years." Biden's administration wants to invest \$52 billion in domestic semiconductor research and production. The Senate approved a bill last year but it still needs to pass the House of Representatives. Intel last year announced a \$20 billion investment in two new factories in Arizona.

The company plans to hire 3,000 new workers for the new site in Ohio, and building the factories will involve 7,000 construction workers. The announcement Friday comes ahead of an eagerly awaited decision from the California-based group on the location for its European factories, which will make semiconductor components so fine that they are measured in nanometers.

Germany appears to be the favorite to host the Intel site. Other major players in the microchip sector also are considering locating production closer to American consumers.



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks about the administration's work to increase the supply of semiconductors and rebuild our supply chains in the South Court Auditorium of the White House in Washington, DC, on Friday. —AFP

South Korean electronics giant Samsung announced in November it would build a \$17 billion factory in Texas. Since the start of 2021, the semiconductor industry has announced nearly \$80 billion in new investment in the United States through 2025, according to industry federation data cited by the White House. —AFP

Business

KFH wins 'Best Treasury and Cash Management Bank' award for 2022

Al-Sumait: The Global Finance award reflects KFH's distinguished rank

- The recognition for providing best financial services to customers
- The bank expanded investment and trading activities in the primary and secondary markets
- Introduced diversified package of capital markets services and products and FX products

KUWAIT: For the second year consecutively, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) wins the "Best Treasury and Cash Management Bank" prize for the year 2022, awarded by Global Finance Magazine in its 22nd ceremony of annual rankings awards to the best banks and suppliers of treasury and cash management services.

KFH Kuwait General Manager - Treasury, Ahmed Essa Al-Sumait said that KFH winning of the "Best Treasury and Cash Management Bank" award reflects the unique and distinguished rank which KFH enjoys in the field of treasury and cash management services as well the customers trust in the bank's services and the role which KFH plays as a significant banking partner in providing innovative financial and banking solutions.

He indicated that KFH winning of this deserved prize depicts the extensive efforts which KFH exerted to provide highly developed digital platforms in the field of treasury according to best quality standards and KFH success despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic. Al-Sumait added that the prize reflects KFH success in developing the latest digital solutions to ensure continuity of the best services in the field of treasury and cash management locally, regionally, and globally. He indicated that these honoring awards and prizes reiterate and affirm KFH pioneering position in the Islamic Banking Service Market.

He emphasized that KFH provides a diversified package of capital markets services and products, FX products as well as other innovated financial solutions to fulfill customers aspirations and facilitate their needs.



Ahmed Al-Sumait

The bank provides FX buy/ sell services, Gold account, currencies selling platform (KFHGlobal), Profit-Rate Swaps (PRS), Al-Waad product and "Live FX Pricing" which is an e-platform with live coverage from international markets to fulfill customers' needs. Also, it provided highly developed technologies to process and settle deals and accelerate the execution of transactions by using the Straight Through Processing system "STP" and other treasury services and products.

He added that KFH has a highly experienced team of young national talents who have sufficient expertise to manage all treasury activities and serve customers using all hi-tech solutions employed by KFH to enhance performance efficiency. Al-Sumait added that KFH endeavors, through treasury sector, to expand its investment and trading activities in the primary and secondary capital markets. He indicated that KFH has occupied the top rank in the IILM Primary Sukuk Program and the top rank in the secondary market in 2021. It is an unprecedented event that a

financial institution occupies the top rank dealer for the IILM Sukuk Program in both primary and secondary markets.

Ranking standards

The publisher and editorial director of Global Finance Joseph D Giarraputo said "As the pandemic continues to impact the treasury sector around the globe, smart management of cash and treasury systems is more important than ever." He added that Our awards honor the organizations that have best served their clients in an unprecedented and ongoing crisis."

Global Finance has used, in awarding the prizes highly accurate and professional global standards within a multi-tiered assessment process which included entries from banks and providers and input from industry analysts, corporate executives, technology experts and independent research to select the best providers of treasury and cash management services.

A variety of subjective and objective criteria were considered, including profitability, market share and reach, customer service, competitive pricing, product innovation and the extent to which treasury and cash management providers have successfully differentiated themselves from their competitors around core service provision. Global Finance, founded in 1987, is headquartered in New York and spread in more than 193 countries worldwide. It has more than 35 years of experience in global financial markets and considered as world reference for the financial sector news as it processes topics related to corporate finance, joint projects, capital markets, currencies, banks, and risk management.



بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House



Kuwait Finance House
BEST TREASURY AND CASH MANAGEMENT BANK IN KUWAIT 2022



Business

Myanmar: Growing number of foreign firms head for door

TotalEnergies and Chevron leave as activists ratchet up pressure on foreign firms

PARIS: The announcements Friday by TotalEnergies and Chevron have swelled the ranks of foreign firms that have quit Myanmar after the February military coup. As the civilian death toll from the military crackdown has surpassed 1,500 people, activists have ratcheted up pressure on foreign firms.

Investors piled into the country after the military relaxed its iron grip in 2011, paving the way for democratic reforms and economic liberalization in the country of more than 50 million people. They poured money into telecommunications, infrastructure, manufacturing and construction projects.

Now they face either pulling up sticks like TotalEnergies and Chevron, suspending operations, or continuing with business as usual.

Pulling up sticks

The decisions by TotalEnergies and Chevron to leave were significant, as the more than \$1 billion in fees and taxes they paid to operate the Yadana gas field in the Andaman were Myanmar's single largest source of foreign currency revenue, according to Human Rights Watch. Last year, Norway's Telenor announced it would sell off its Myanmar subsidiary, which was one of the nation's largest mobile phone networks, although the deal has yet to be finalized.

This week, it sold its stake in a Burmese digital payments service. British American Tobacco, which employed more than 100,000 people in Myanmar before the coup, pulled up sticks in October. French renewable energy firm Volitalia has also left.

Suspending operations

Japanese carmaker Toyota, which was due to launch manufacturing at a Myanmar factory last year, put the project on hold. Myanmar factories became suppliers of many popular clothing brands over the past decade, but groups such as Italy's Benetton stopped placing new orders after the coup.

French energy giant EDF has suspended its involvement in a \$1.5-billion project to build a hydroelectric dam, Shweli-3, alongside consortium partners Marubeni of Japan and Ayeeyar Hinthar of Myanmar.

Staying or stuck

Shortly after the military takeover, Japan's Suzuki suspended production at its two Myanmar factories but then quickly reopened the facilities, which assemble vehicles for the local market. French hotel group Accor, which has nine hotels in Myanmar, said on Friday that it had "made the choice to stay in the country for now and maintain support for its 1,000 employees on site and for the communities near the group's hotels."

Accor "came to Myanmar with the hope of bringing positive change for the population. It is in that spirit that we are maintaining our presence," the group told AFP in a statement.

"Tourism is vital for Myanmar and remains one of the last links that connects the Burmese people to the world," the statement said. Japanese brewer Kirin has been trying for months to end its business ties with the Myanmar military, with which it operates two breweries.



YANGON, Myanmar: A signboard for TotalEnergies EP Myanmar is seen past a shuttered gate in Yangon yesterday after energy giants TotalEnergies and Chevron said they would leave Myanmar following pressure from human rights groups to cut financial ties with the junta since last year's military coup. —AFP

After talks hit a wall, it launched arbitration proceedings in Singapore in December. Meanwhile, Denmark's Carlsberg, which employs around 450

people in the country, has said it has reduced output as consumption has declined, but has not announced any plans to leave. —AFP

Reserve Bank chief will be Chile's new finance minister

SANTIAGO: Chile's leftist president-elect Gabriel Boric, whose victory at the polls last month unsettled the markets, on Friday named the country's Central Bank governor as his finance minister in a young, diverse and woman-majority cabinet.

Mario Marcel, an independent politician and former member of the Socialist Party, with which he maintains strong ties, announced his resignation as Reserve Bank chief overnight.

The 62-year-old had held various roles under center-left governments from 1990 to 2008.

He was appointed Reserve Bank governor by Socialist former president Michelle Bachelet for a five-year term that started in late 2016 and continued under her center-right successor Sebastian Pinera. Marcel was the favorite of the markets, which view his appointment as a sign of moderation in the economic reforms Boric had vowed to implement.

Boric, painted by his detractors as a "communist," succeeded in mobilizing record turnout in the December 19 vote, and garnered nearly 56 percent of votes cast, compared to 44 percent for ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast. In an alliance with Chile's Communist Party, Boric campaigned on promises of creating a "welfare state," increasing taxes and social spending.

Kast, in turn, had pledged to protect the neo-liberal economic model left behind by Pinochet-credited with Chile's relative wealth but blamed for a yawning gap between rich and poor.

Investors reacted nervously to Boric's victory, with the SP IPSA index closed 6.18 percent down the day after the election, while the Chilean peso ceded 3.4 percent to the US dollar to reach an historic rate of 876.

'Diverse backgrounds and training'

Boric had vowed in his first official address to "expand social rights" in Chile, but to do so with "fiscal responsibility." "We will do it protecting our macro-economy," he said.

As interior minister, Boric chose Izkia Siches, 35, a surgeon who in 2017 became the first president of the Medical College, a professional association of physicians.

Boric's 24-member cabinet contains 14 women. It includes former student leaders and lawmakers Giorgio Jackson and Camila Vallejo, who together with Boric led protests in 2011 for free schooling.

Maya Fernandez-the granddaughter of Marxist former president Salvador Allende who died in the 1973 coup d'etat led by Augusto Pinochet-will be defense minister.

The new foreign minister will be 53-year-old lawyer Antonia Urrejola, who last year became the president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. "We are accompanied in this team of ministers by people of diverse backgrounds and training, a diverse cabinet," said Boric as he unveiled his new team.

The cabinet has a wide representation of regions, generations and political leanings, he added.

The average age of the team is 49, with the youngest, at 32, new Women's Affairs Minister Antonia Orellana. Seven of the cabinet members are in their 30s. Boric, elected at 35, will be Chile's youngest-ever president, and one of the youngest in world history. He will be sworn in on March 11. —AFP

KIB concludes 'Your KD equals 1kg in gold', rewards four winners

KUWAIT: Concluding one of its largest and most innovative customer-reward campaigns, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently crowned the last four winners in the final draws of the "Your KD equals 1kg in gold" campaign. The campaign, launched during the previous quarter of the past year, aimed to reward the Bank's Savings Account customers with valuable gold prizes.

The winners of the third and final draw of the campaign included both Jassim Akbar and Fahim Al Shemmari, who each won an Ottoman gold lira, and

Markaz to hold second round of 'House Views' webinar for investors

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) announced that it will be holding its second round of its 'House Views' webinar for investors, to raise awareness of the state of play in local and regional markets, and the future outlook for each, across various asset classes. Titled 'Markaz House Views 2022 - Navigating the Markets,' the webinar will be held on 24 January 2022, via Zoom, and feature expert speakers from Markaz.

At the webinar, Markaz's highly qualified and experienced professionals will shed light on the current and emerging opportunities and challenges to help investors make diligent and informed decisions over their assets and investment plans. The speakers will

QNB Weekly Commentary

High global inflation is set to moderate over medium-term

KUWAIT: The combination of robust global demand growth with pandemic-related supply constraints for goods and services has led to a significant rise in consumer prices. In fact, global inflation, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), spiked 5.8 percent year-on-year (y/y), a rate not seen in decades. Importantly, rapid inflation is taking place across most advanced economies except for Japan.

Against this backdrop, investors and economists are debating whether the world is on the cusp of a new long-standing inflationary cycle. The debate is already leading to a U-turn in the policy guidance of several central banks. Policymakers are moving from accommodation to "normalization" or even tightening. This even led to a more "hawkish" stance of the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank.

At the time of writing, global inflationary concerns are particularly salient as the recovery remains strong and supply bottlenecks are pervasive in key markets. In our view, however, while prices are expected to remain elevated over the next few months, inflation should nevertheless moderate over the medium-term. We highlight three main reasons to support our analysis.

First, while prices across the board have been

Waseela Mirdas, who won an ounce of gold. The campaign's grand prize, however, went to Turki Al-Muteiri, who won 1 kilogram of gold in the campaign's end draw.

Congratulating the winners of KIB's "Your KD equals 1KG in gold" campaign, Othman Tawfeq, General Manager of the Bank's Retail Banking Department, expressed his delight in rewarding the customers with such valuable gold prizes, hoping they enjoyed partaking in this award program and that it further enhanced their banking experience. Tawfeq also affirmed the Bank's commitment to introducing top-level offers and reward programs, particularly designed to suit the varying needs and serve the different interests of each segment of its customers. KIB ensures the delivery of its premium products and services is complemented by a plethora of unique and valuable rewards, striving to always to

maintain customer loyalty.

It serves to note that KIB's savings account has been specifically tailored to meet the needs of all potential customer segments, simultaneously offering them the advantages of both saving and investing under the umbrella of one account. The account does not require a minimum deposit amount to open or have a minimum balance limit. It also comes with a free debit card that can be used at more than 1 million ATMs worldwide through the KNET network and various POS touchpoints.



Othman Tawfeq

delve deep into the current trends and future prospects in the MENA region's equities and real estate as well as international real estate asset classes. The webinar will be moderated by Abdullatif W Al-Nusif, Managing Director, Wealth Management and Business Development. Other speakers include M R Raghu, Chief Executive Officer of Marmore MENA Intelligence, a majority-owned subsidiary of Markaz and a leading provider of research on the region, in addition to Mohammad K Al-Abdulkader, Vice President, Buy Side Research, MENA Equities; Khaled A Al-Mubarak, Vice President, MENA Real Estate and Christopher Santiago, Assistant Vice President, International Real Estate.

Announcing the webinar, Abdullatif W Al-Nusif commented: "As 2022 unfolds, we are witnessing new trends taking form mainly set off by the fast-evolving pandemic situation. While some of the uncertainties and volatilities are headwinds for various asset classes, others are set to offer tailwinds that will drive growth momentum with a significant increase in top and bot-

tom lines. At our new webinar, our experts will offer investors actionable

insights backed by extensive research so that they can seize opportunities as they emerge and gird their loins for eventualities. The takeaways will equip them to maximize returns through the deployment of the right mix of opportunities across asset classes."

The webinar comes as part of Markaz's ongoing efforts to support the development of the Kuwaiti financial services sector and the wider economy through the fostering of an informed generation of investors. Over the past few years, Markaz has rolled out broad-ranging initiatives including hosting webinars on various themes.



Abdullatif W Al-Nusif

Graph I: OECD CPI inflation
(%, y/y, November 2021 figure)



Sources: Haver, OECD, QNB analysis

ments. Prices for the transportation of dry bulk materials have already declined by almost 60 percent while air-freight rates declined by 20 percent and freight rates for container transportation stabilized over the last several weeks.

Third, there is still significant spare capacity in the global economy. Across several countries, total industrial capacity utilization and the employment-to-population ratio are still below their pre-pandemic levels. This suggests that, globally, there is still some room for additional manufacturing demand and employment growth before the economy start to overheat to the point of creating permanent inflationary pressures. All in all, global inflation is expected to moderate in 2022, driven by a stabilization of energy prices, the easing of supply-chain disruptions and the existence of economic spare capacity globally.



Dialika Sane (center), trainer at the Kourtrajme Dakar film school, speaks during a course with the learners on scriptwriting in Dakar. — AFP photos



Toumani Sangare (right), director and founder of the Kourtrajme Dakar film school, stands with his collaborators, Ladj Ly (2nd right) and the students during the press conference at the film school in Dakar.

Ground-breaking film school gets down to work in Senegal

It's the tale of a boy who cheats on his fiancée - one misdeed too many in a selfish life - and in desperation turns to a genie for help. The genie gives the errant lad five magic cowrie shells to wipe the slate clean... but these will only work if he uses them wisely. This is the idea for a script pitched by Kine Niang, a 30-year-old student screenwriter at new film school in Senegal that hopes to unlock Africa's movie-making potential. Housed in a beautiful old office building converted into a cultural space in the capital Dakar, the school is the first venture in Africa by a ground-breaking collective which offers free training in filmmaking.

The scheme is being pushed by Ladj Ly, a French director and screenwriter who won the jury prize at Cannes in 2019 for "Les Misérables" - a film about urban violence, set in the gritty Paris suburb of Montfermeil where he grew up. His collective, Kourtrajme, has already helped set up two other such schools, one in Montfermeil and the other in Marseille. They offer training in cinema and other audiovisual professions, free of charge and without conditions of age or academic qualifications.

Ly and Toumani Sangare, a director who co-founded Kourtrajme in 1995 and is the school's co-head, both have roots in Mali and were keen to found their latest venture there. But serious unrest thwarted the plan. Even in more peaceful Senegal, Ly and his partners would have appreciated a few magic cowries to make the task easier, with red tape and the COVID pandemic hampering progress. Fame "opens a lot of doors", said Ly, "but it is still an obstacle course, to tell yourself that you want to create free schools, open to all."

Tough challenges

The goal seems utopian on a continent where many countries may dream of a film industry but lack the resources to even start. The sector is dominated in Africa by Nollywood, giant Nigeria's pro-



A student stands in the hallway at Kourtrajme Dakar film school in Dakar.

duction hub, which churns out about 2,500 films a year. The UN cultural organization UNESCO reported in October last year that only 44 percent of African nations even have an established film commission. And, it said, other challenges for filmmakers are many, from piracy to constraints on freedom of expression. In February 2021, Ly was caught up in an investigation targeting the association which oversees the school, for alleged breach of trust and money laundering.

The director and his brother were questioned by police. The probe is now over and the public prosecutor's office has said it is examining what action to take if necessary. Ly spoke of "sabotage" attempts and damaging "nonsense" written by a former employee. "Our school disturbs a lot of people, they



Learners follow a course on scriptwriting at Kourtrajme Dakar film school in Dakar.

did everything to wreck it," he said. "But the important thing is that the school exists and we continue to open them everywhere" - Madrid is the intended location for the fourth establishment.

Senegal skills

"Senegal has become a go-to country in audiovisual production, in particular for series," Sangare said. Many international productions are filmed here, the technicians are well-trained and the landscapes "incredible", he said, all of it "five hours from Paris" by air. Fourteen young people - seven women and seven men, chosen from among hundreds of applicants - are to be trained in screenwriting for five months.

The school will take in 18 apprentice directors in June. The first year's budget of 400,000 euros (\$453,000) is being funded by France's AFD devel-

opment agency and private partners, including the French television and film channel Canal+. Niang, a novice screenwriter, was first selected a year ago. After months passed, she was about to begin a management internship when she got the call that the school was finally getting off the ground.

She has qualifications in statistics but said she is "mad keen about writing... it was a chance that I couldn't pass over." Their class started work on Tuesday. "We started the course with the question: why do you write?" said their trainer, Dialika Sane, who has worked on a number of television series. The responses were "very inspiring, sometimes absurd, sometimes poetic," Sane said. But everyone "understood the job of screenwriter, the very essence of the job - to project on screen what cannot necessarily be said by other means." — AFP



Long-lost slave ship and fake riot towns spotlight race at Sundance

From its last known slave ship to heavy police militarization in the Civil Rights era, the United States' deeply troubled history with racism is highlighted by several Sundance festival films this week. "Descendant" and "Riotville, USA" are among multiple documentaries and dramas on racial justice at the indie movie showcase, which is taking place online for a second year running due to the pandemic.

In "Descendant", which was premiered yesterday, Margaret Brown revisits her Alabama hometown where the "Clotilda" landed with 110 slaves in 1860, decades after the trans-Atlantic trade has been outlawed. Many descended from those slaves still live in the same community, and have passed down tales of their ancestors across the generations. The ship owner's family remains prominent landowners in the area, too.

But the remains of the ship-deliberately sunk by its owner to evade justice-were only found in 2018. Located wrecks of slave ships are extremely rare. "I knew if the ship was found, it's proof. It's a way for people to physically trace their ancestry in a way that's never been done in this country," Brown, who began the film six years ago, told AFP. The descendants, whose forebears escaped slavery after five years with the end of the Civil War, still live on mar-

ginalized land, hemmed in by heavy industry zones whose pollutants are linked to cancer.

According to the film, some of these factories are even constructed on land leased by the Meaher family, who owned the Clotilda. Despite cooperating with Brown on a previous documentary, none of the Meaher family would speak with her for "Descendant". "People were afraid," said Brown. "This story is a way to frame a conversation about reparations," she added. "Reparations can be seen as a tricky word. But there's nothing tricky about justice. I just hope the film can start conversations about justice."

'Dark'

Debuting a day earlier at Sundance was "Riotville, USA", in which Sierra Pettengill unearthed footage of fake model towns used by police and military in the 1960s to practice suppressing civil rights protests. Eerie clips show a grandstand packed with army chiefs laughing and applauding as a Black man is bundled into a new, state-of-the-art anti-riot vehicle in front of a row of fake shopfronts nicknamed "Riotville". "The CIA is there, secret service agents are there, police chiefs, high ranking military members, politicians, senators," Pettengill told AFP.

"And to see that group of people laughing at something that's dark as it is-that this is even being recreated, much less a display of pain and anger-I think is very telling about the attitudes of that time." The Riotville streets, seen in archive military training and media footage, were created in response to protests and rioting in dozens of major US cities in the late 1960s. Without explicitly targeting racial minorities, the exercises distinguished between "white protesters, and what they call 'hardcore professional agitators,' which are of course all Black," said Pettengill. — AFP

'Immersive' Princess Diana documentary opens Sundance

An "immersive" Princess Diana documentary offering an "origin story" for the British royal family's latest woes was among the opening night movies at the online Sundance film festival Thursday. Sundance, which celebrates independent cinema, was forced to go virtual for a second year running by the Omicron variant of COVID-19's surge across the United States.

The pandemic has forced filmmakers to innovate, and "The Princess" is one of several Sundance movies constructed entirely from archive footage. Without a narrator, it transports viewers back to Diana's tumultuous marriage to Prince Charles, and explores an obsessed media and public's impact on those events via contemporaneous footage.

"It is a kind of Shakespearean tragedy, but it's one that lots of us lived through, and actually actively participated in," said director Ed Perkins. While many previous documentaries tried to "get inside Diana's head", Perkins focuses on how the press and public perceived and judged her behavior. Well-known awkward interviews given by the couple to major broadcasters sit alongside rough footage of bored paparazzi with long lenses crouching in bushes, complaining among themselves about

Diana's wariness.

Diana's death is seen via home-video footage of a group of friends watching live TV news reports, whose initial excitement and light-heartedness turns to horror as the seriousness of the Paris car crash becomes clear. Acknowledging that countless documentaries have been made about Diana, Perkins said he hoped the film could "add something new to the conversation" by creating something "more immersive and experiential." The film "tried to live in the contemporaneous archive from the time, and allow it to unfold in a 'present-tense' unfolding."

It comes as the monarchy has been rocked by the departure of Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, who accused the family of racism and fought legal battles with the British press over privacy. "Part of the intention of this film - or the reason why it felt like the timing was right to make it - was perhaps, among other things, because of their story," said producer Simon Chinn. "Our instinct was... to go back in a sense of what we've always thought of as the 'origin story', and see what we could learn about what has happened subsequently through the story of Diana." — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

DIOR DESIGNER JONES: 'WE LIVE IN A BUBBLE'

Kim Jones may be borrowing from Dior's most iconic female looks for his latest menswear collection but that doesn't mean he believes gender boundaries are ready to disappear yet. "We live in cities and they are incredibly open, but go outside and it's not the same," Jones told AFP at his studio in Paris. "There are 40 countries in the world where if you dressed like that, you'd be killed," he said, referring to the increasing number of traditionally female clothes in menswear collections.

His own new collection, presented at Paris Fashion Week on Friday, includes a male reworking of Dior's iconic female Bar Jacket and plenty of feminine touches, from earrings and handbags to a sweatshirt covered in handwoven silk flowers. None of this raises an eyebrow at fashion shows these days, where genderless clothes and a mix of male, female and trans models have become the norm. But the 42-year-old Jones, who travelled the globe as a child with his geologist father, has a pragmatic view of life beyond the catwalk. "I'm lucky,

I grew up all over the world so I've seen it all and I understand we live in a bubble," he said. "If you go to other places, you have to be respectful of the culture."

'People want easiness'

Jones himself works on both sides of the divide since he has also been the womenswear and haute couture designer for Fendi since September 2020. "One thing I find now I'm doing womenswear is how constrained menswear is," he said. "Men's clothing hasn't changed much since the 1940s." He sees his current priority - with the world still mired in the pandemic - as making Dior's classic styles into something more comfortable. "Easiness is what people want now - I see it through sales, through talking to customers, everything." It fits neatly with Jones's pioneering work at Louis Vuitton where, as artistic director from 2011 to 2018, he helped pioneer streetwear styles on the catwalk.

Now wearing three hats, he dismisses the idea that he has too much on. "I like

working and I'm in a really good stride," he said. "The only problem for me now is COVID, because when I go home I have to isolate and keep away from everybody because I can't lose 10 days." He has made sure to build holidays into his hectic calendar every two months to avoid burnout. "I'm not going to kill myself for these people. I'm not stupid!" he said with a laugh.

On Virgil

He struck a more sombre note as he recalled his friend and successor at Louis Vuitton, Virgil Abloh, who died from cancer in November and had his final collection presented in Paris this week. "I can't really talk about it still because I can't believe it's happened," Jones said. "(Virgil and I) messaged pretty much every week. We travelled the world together. We would sit on the floor of hotel rooms, designing together with Kanye (West), Pharrell (Williams)... I feel very lucky to have known him. 'It's such a waste, to imagine what he could have done.' —AFP



British designer Kim Jones walks the runway after presenting his creations for the Fendi's Spring-Summer 2021 collection during the Paris Haute Couture Fashion Week, in Paris. —AFP

Rio and Sao Paulo postpone carnival parades over COVID

Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo are postponing the glittering parades that are the highlight of carnival festivities due to a surge in the pandemic, the Brazilian cities said Friday. The samba school parades originally scheduled for late next month will instead be held in late April, authorities said in a joint statement, citing the pandemic and "the need to save lives." Brazil has been hit extremely hard by the pandemic.

Raucous street celebrations associated with one of the world's biggest parties have already been cancelled altogether for the second year in a row. The part being postponed now, which is better known, are processions of floats and dancers from famous schools of samba, which work for months fashioning colorful costumes by hand and rehearsing musical numbers.

In the case of Rio, the procession of schools unfolds in a stadium called the Sambadrome, which can hold 70,000 people. The spectacle draws tourists from elsewhere in Brazil and around the world. This is being allowed to go ahead, at least for now and later than originally scheduled, because authorities can control who goes into the arena and demand proof of vaccination, for instance. The street party part of carnival is considered too wild and spontaneous for that.

"It is a necessary postponement. We can carry out the procession much more safely in late April," said Rio's top health official, Daniel Soranz. "Looking at the curve of the pandemic in other countries, we think it is very unlikely that the current wave will last until April," he added. The pandemic has killed more than 622,000 people in Brazil - a toll surpassed only by that of the United States - and this country is in the middle of yet another wave, fueled by the Omicron variant of the virus.

As that strain spreads, and after New Year's get together, this week the country set a record for new daily infections at nearly 205,000. Nearly 70 percent of Brazil's adult population has received two vaccination shots. Associations of samba schools endorsed the decision to wait until April to launch the samba processions. "We don't want to force a procession if people are worried," said Sidnei Carriulo, president of the League of Samba Schools of Sao Paulo. —AFP

Lawsuit over virtual Hermes Birkin bags

French luxury group Hermes has started legal proceedings against a US artist over virtual versions inspired by its iconic Birkin bags. Mason Rothschild creates digital art that he sells as non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, which can be traded online but ownership cannot be forged. These have transformed digital items ranging from illustrations to memes into virtual collectors' items.

He named the works depicting fanciful furry Birkin bags "MetaBirkins" and sold them on websites dedicated to selling NFTs. Hermes accused Rothschild of trying to profit from its trademarks. "Defendant's MetaBirkins brand simply rips off Hermes' famous Birkin trademark by adding the generic prefix 'meta' to the famous trademark Birkin," it said in its complaint filed on January 14 in New York, a copy of which AFP obtained.

Rothschild said in an online post that he wasn't creating or selling fake Birkin bags. "I've made art works that depict imaginary, fur-covered Birkin bags," he said, adding as art it was freedom of expression protected by the US constitution. "The fact that I sell the art using NFTs doesn't change the fact that it's art," he said. Hermes declined to comment on a legal case under way when contacted by AFP. —AFP

The Caravaggio, the American princess and a bitter family dispute



A journalist films the Hall of Fame painted by Guercino in the Casino dell'Aurora inside the Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi in Rome. A Roman villa housing the only mural by Caravaggio failed to find a bidder in an auction on January 18, 2022 sparked by a dispute between its heirs. —AFP photos

Princess Rita Jenrette Boncompagni Ludovisi has the rarest of guilty pleasures: gazing up at the world's only Caravaggio mural, as she practices yoga in her Roman villa. But those days of stretching and contorting under a depiction of the gods may soon be over. The villa in central Rome is up for auction due to a bitter inheritance dispute. Now she's hoping the Italian government will step in to purchase it-and let her remain living in it-after an initial sale this week failed to snag any buyers.

"Perhaps the state will buy it and let me stay here as they did princess Borghesi over in the Borghesi gardens," said 72-year-old Ludovisi, the third and last wife of Prince Nicolo Ludovisi Boncompagni, who died in 2018. Born in the US state of Texas, Ludovisi has lived on the estate, known as Villa Aurora, or Dawn Villa, for some 20 years.

"It's extraordinary, and of course it's a great privilege to be the caretaker of this villa," she said in her sitting room, decorated with framed photos of her family.

The home-which began as a mere outbuilding on the estate of Villa Ludovisi, which no longer exists-is named after a fresco by Italian baroque painter Guercino of the Roman goddess Aurora on her chariot. But now it is up for sale after a fallout with her late husband's children from his first marriage, and she admits she has no idea where she'll end up living. "I have looked at a couple of places in Rome where my husband's ancestors lived... (but) I just don't know, it would make me so sad to come by Villa Aurora and see someone else living here," said Ludovisi.

'Happiest moments here'

Villa Aurora has been valued at 471 million euros (\$534 million) - a cool 350 million euros of which are for the Caravaggio alone. It is the only mural the master of chiaroscuro ever painted. It depicts Roman gods Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto, along with the signs of the zodiac in the centre. The 2,800-square meter residence failed to attract any bids at an auction this week.

A new sale has been scheduled for April 7, and the bar has been lowered to 376.8 million euros-a 20 percent discount. Located near Rome's Piazza di Spagna, the villa boasts a large garden dotted with sculptures. Many Italians are hoping the state might buy it, to prevent it being snapped up by a wealthy foreigner. A petition on change.org for the government to purchase it and turn it into a museum has already collected nearly 40,000 signatures. For Ludovisi, the property's value is deeply personal.



Princess Rita Boncompagni Ludovisi poses in front of a painting representing Pope Gregorio XV, at the Casino dell'Aurora inside the Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi in Rome.

"I still feel him everywhere," she said, referring to her years there with the prince.

The building had been uninhabited since the 1980s when the couple moved in. "We spent our happiest moment here, we were really happy and we sacrificed everything for the villa". Under Italian law, the government can only exercise its right of pre-emption after the property has been purchased by a private individual. At that point, within 60 days it can claim it, but only by matching the purchase price. It would be no easy sum for the government to find though, considering the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic in the already debt-laden country. —AFP



Photo shows the Casino dell'Aurora inside the Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi in Rome.



Photo shows the ceiling painting 'Aurora on Her Triumphant Chariot' by Guercino in the Casino dell'Aurora inside the Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi.



Photo shows 'Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto' - the only known ceiling painting by the Italian master Caravaggio, in the Casino dell'Aurora at the Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi in Rome.

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DUBOULOZ JOINS THE MOUNTAIN GREATS
WITH SOLO CLIMB OF GRANDES JORASSES

After six days and five nights fighting against the freezing wind, being “glued to the ice”, barely sleeping, hardly eating, Charles Dubouloz is still on a high. The French mountain guide may be suffering from intense fatigue and frostbite, especially on his hands, but his eyes sparkle as he smiles—he has just conquered the world.

“I wanted to take a nice trip without taking the plane,” he chuckled as he spoke to AFP on Wednesday after returning to the Alpine town of Chamonix from where he had set off six days earlier. The phrase ‘nice trip’ hardly sums up what Dubouloz went through as he became the first person to climb the mythical and dangerous north face of the Grandes Jorasses, solo and in winter. Forming a part of the Mont Blanc Massif, the Grandes Jorasses is one of the three great north faces in the Alps, making up ‘The Trilogy’ with the Eiger and the Matterhorn.

It towers above the Leschaux Glacier and by taking it on at this time of year, Dubouloz staked a claim to rank among the very greatest of mountaineers. “It’s the quintessence of mountaineering, of going solo and even more so in winter. I’m touching a dream,” he told AFP. “When I got to the top, I cried a lot. I lay down. I felt a huge sense of accomplishment. “Alone, it needs extra commitment, everything is more extreme, working the rope for example. Arriving alone by your own means, up tough routes, it’s incredible. It’s an added dimension.”

‘Glued to the ice’

The 32-year-old mountaineer began his quest on January 13 when he left Chamonix with two backpacks, a duvet, a small hammock and some food. After five days of climbing, he reached the 4,208-metre summit of the Grandes Jorasses on Tuesday—an ascent of 1,100 meters by the ‘Rolling Stones’ route, so called for its dryness and its bad rocks, which can crumble at a touch. The first ascent of the highest peak of the mountain was by Englishman Horace Walker and his guides Melchior Anderegg, Johann Jaun and Julien

Grange on June 30, 1868 but the ‘Rolling Stones’ path was only opened up in the summer of 1979 by four Slovak mountaineers.

No one had yet attempted it solo and in winter, where the temperatures at night are close to minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit). “I only

did one bivouac in a hammock, I was glued to the ice, it’s not very pleasant,” he said. “To rest, I made a terrace with my ice axe and tried to make myself a space roughly 1.50 meters long and 1.70 meters wide. I found myself sleeping half-sitting.”

Because of the dangers and the stress they created,



Photo shows French climber Charles Dubouloz as he ascends the north face of the Grandes Jorasses in the Mont Blanc range. —AFP

Sherpa sibling daredevils aim for ‘Grand Slam’

Two out of three Sherpa brothers have proudly returned home after becoming the first Nepalis to reach the South Pole, part of their mission to achieve the hallowed Explorers’ Grand Slam. This holy grail of adventuring involves climbing the highest peaks in the seven continents – Everest, Aconcagua, Denali, Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Vinson, and Puncak Jaya – and reaching both poles.

“We saw flags of many countries, but the flag of our country was not there,” Chhang Dawa Sherpa said after returning from Antarctica where they also ticked off the 4,892-metre Mt Vinson. “We felt very happy to add Nepal’s flag there,” he told AFP on Friday. Sherpa and his elder sibling Mingma – due back in Nepal in the coming weeks – already hold the record for the first siblings to climb the 14 highest mountains in the world.

Their little brother, Tashi Lakpa Sherpa, holds the crown as the youngest person, at 19, to climb Everest without using supplementary oxygen. For the Explorers’ Grand Slam the siblings still have to climb another five peaks and reach the North Pole, but they are confident they can complete it within a year. The brothers run the aptly named Seven Summits Treks in Kathmandu, the largest expedition



Mountaineer Sherpa brothers Tashi Lakpa (left) and Chhang Dawa Sherpa pose for a picture upon their arrival in Kathmandu, after summiting Antarctica’s highest peak Mount Vinson and skiing to the South Pole. —AFP

organizer in Nepal, taking hundreds of climbers up Himalayan peaks every year.

Nepali guides – usually ethnic Sherpas from the valleys around Everest – are considered the backbone of the climbing industry in the Himalayas for bearing huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders. Long under the shadow as supporters of foreign climbers, Nepali mountaineers are slowly being recognized in their own right. Last year, a team of Nepali climbers made the first winter ascent of K2, the world’s second-highest peak – the notoriously challenging 8,611-metre “savage mountain” of Pakistan – shining a much-deserved spotlight on their own climbing prowess. —AFP

‘Bat Out of Hell’ singer Meat Loaf dies at 74

US singer Meat Loaf, famous for his “Bat Out of Hell” rock anthem, has died aged 74, after a career in which he sold more than 100 million albums and appeared in scores of movies. “Our hearts are broken to announce that the incomparable Meat Loaf passed away tonight with his wife Deborah by his side,” read a statement on his Facebook page early on Friday.

“Daughters Pearl and Amanda and close friends have been with him throughout the last 24 hours.” No cause of death was given. The beefy Texas-born singer distinguished himself in the late 1970s with his soaring vocal range and lavish stage productions. His 1977 “Bat out of Hell” album, which reportedly sold some 43 million copies, is one of the highest-selling ever.

After a career rut, Meat Loaf enjoyed a revival with his biggest success in 1993: the single “I’d Do Anything for Love (But I Won’t Do That)” topped the charts in 28 countries and won him a Grammy Award. “We know how much he meant to so many of you and we truly appreciate all of the love and support as we move through this time of grief in losing such an inspiring artist and beautiful man,” it said. “From his heart to your souls... don’t ever stop rocking!”

Tributes poured in, including from former US president Donald Trump, and stars such as Cher, who tweeting she was “Very Sorry For His Family, Friends, & Fans.” “RIP Meatloaf. Love and prayers to all his family and close friends,” tweeted singer Boy George. Adam Lambert, the lead singer for Queen since 2011, described Meat Loaf as “a gentle hearted powerhouse rockstar forever and ever.” “You were so kind. Your music will always be iconic,” Lambert said on Twitter.

Rough start

Born Marvin Lee Aday on September 27, 1947, Meat Loaf’s early years in Texas were rough. “I’ve forgiven my father for trying to kill me with a butcher’s knife,” he once told The Telegraph. But the bullying at school over his weight – the nickname Meat Loaf came early – was followed by the devastating loss of his mother to cancer while he was still a teenager. Not long after, he was on his way to New York, looking for ways to channel the angst and histrionics into performance.

There, he teamed up with musician and playwright Jim Steinman, who provided the wild, theatrical backing music to accompany Meat Loaf’s bellowing voice. Meat Loaf’s other hit singles include “Paradise by the Dashboard Light” (1977) and “I’m Gonna Love Her for Both of Us” (1981). Meat Loaf had started off seeking acting work – winning parts in “Hair” and the original cast of “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” and its film adaptation. Throughout his career, he also had several small



The Roxy Theater on Sunset Strip pays tribute to Meat Loaf following the news about his death, in Los Angeles, California. —AFP photos



US singer Marvin Lee Aday, popularly known as ‘Meat Loaf’, gestures in this file photo as he speaks during a press conference in Hong Kong. US singer and actor Meat Loaf, famous for his ‘Bat Out of Hell’ album, has died aged 74.

parts in TV shows and films, including “Wayne’s World” (1992).

His role in the 1999 cult classic “Fight Club” highlighted his acting prowess in one of the decade’s most critically acclaimed films. In 2016, he released a new album – his first since 2011 – and returned to a busy schedule after a two-year gap in touring, a string of health scares and speculation he would retire. The singer had collapsed onstage at least three times since 2003, including once in Canada in 2016 after suffering from dehydration while singing “I’d Do Anything For Love.” —AFP

NETFLIX STUNG BY SLOWING GROWTH

Netflix has reported cooling subscriber growth as fierce competition and the pandemic weigh heavy despite hits like “Squid Game” and “Money Heist.” The streaming service ended the year with 221.8 million subscribers, just below target, after booming during coronavirus lockdowns that kept people at home and on the platform.

Things are not looking better for the first quarter of 2022, with the Netflix earnings report saying the firm expected to only add some 2.5 million subscribers. The market punishment was immediate, with shares of the California streaming giant losing some 20 percent in after-hours trading. The last first-quarter expectation under 2.5 million subscribers came in 2010, when Netflix had a mere 13.9 million customers.

“While retention and engagement remain healthy, acquisition growth has not yet re-accelerated to pre-COVID levels,” Netflix reported. “We think this may be due to several factors including the ongoing COVID overhang and macro-economic hardship in several parts of the world,” it added. Most of the 8.3 million subscriptions added at the end of last year came from outside North America, according to the streaming service. Netflix argued that it was holding its own against fierce streaming competition from the likes of HBO Max and Disney+, saying it “may be affecting our marginal growth some.”

Fierce competition

But analysts from Parrot Analytics see a significant bite from Netflix’s business. “Apple TV+, Disney+, and HBO Max account for virtually all of Netflix’s losses in global demand share for original content over the last two years,” they said. “The world’s leading streamer faces more intense competition than ever heading in 2022,” they added.

Analyst Rob Enderle said the markets are already a bit jittery at the moment with concerns over inflation and geopolitical tensions with China and

Dubouloz says he “hardly ate” during the six days on the mountain. “This kind of ascent is played out with very thin margins. You are always on the edge of something, the result can be accident or death. “I admit, I often got scared. There were stretches, including one in particular on very bad rocks, where I was scared all along. There are blocks that move, you have to climb on eggshells.”

‘Abominable’

Dubouloz is no stranger to taking on breathtaking challenges in the climbing world. In 2021 he climbed the north face of the Petits Drus, also in the Mont Blanc Massif, and also opened up a new route with Benjamin Vadrines on the north face of Chamlang (7,319m) in Nepal. His feats have now placed him among the foremost of recent and contemporary French mountaineers such as Jean-Christophe Lafaille, Marc Batard, Lionel Daudet and Christophe Moulin, who climbed this same north face in the winter of 2006 but with two companions.

“What Charles has done is a great achievement, it’s the ordeal of testing himself and tapping into his resources. It’s almost in the realm of meditation,” Moulin told AFP. With this remarkable ascent, Dubouloz has brought “the great solo adventurer” back to centre stage. It was popular in the Alps in the 1990s and 2000s before fading into the background in favor of “the great ropes and the records of speed”, according to Moulin. “This is rediscovering the very roots of mountaineering. Routes like this are abominable in winter.”

You need exceptional abilities “It’s an extremely high and challenging face. It’s one of the hardest mountains in all of the Alps to climb. It has crumbling granite, with a lot of delicately balanced rocks. “It’s very cold, the days are shorter so you have to spend more time up there, the slightest gust of wind is an ordeal. “To succeed alone, you really have to be one of the best mountaineers.” Charles Dubouloz has earned his right to smile. —AFP



The Netflix logo sign is seen on top of its office building in Hollywood, California. —AFP

Russia-and competition is fierce. “Netflix will increasingly find it hard to stand out and attract subscribers; even the major television networks have their own services now,” he noted. “When people are having trouble affording gas and groceries, it is going to be hard for them to justify another streaming service,” Enderle added.

The platform benefited from the global success of the South Korean series “Squid Game,” which had been seen by more than 142 million subscribers by mid-October, one month after its release. Netflix confirmed a second season was coming, but did not give exact timing. Fans meanwhile will have to wait until March for large-scale releases such as season 2 of the wildly popular “Bridgerton.” Facebook recently announced subscription price bumps in the United States, with the basic option now costing \$9.99, and the most expensive going up to \$19.99.

Meanwhile, Netflix’s costs continued to rise as it spends on shows and marketing to fend off competition. “Film is incredibly important for our members, which is why our ambition has always been to work with the world’s best filmmakers and stars to create a wide variety of quality movies,” Netflix said in the letter. The pandemic stalled production of shows for a while, but Netflix has ramped back up its output of original programming, boasting hits such as “Squid Game,” “Red Notice” and “Money Heist.” The company reported a net income of \$607 million in the fourth quarter on revenue that grew to \$7.7 billion. —AFP



In this file photo, US actor-comedian Pete Davidson arrives for the Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. —AFP

investors won the auction with a bid of \$280,100. “The idea is to turn the space into a live entertainment event space with comedy, music, art, food, etc.,” Italia told AFP. It is not yet clear how they will move the broken down ferry from the Staten Island terminal where it is now docked as they prepare to overhaul it and seek a permanent home for the ship. Why buy one of these vessels that is a quintessential and free-of-charge part of life in New York? To keep the ship from being scrapped, for one. “The reality is that everyone who came together on this has a sincere motive to see the right thing happen, to restore a piece of New York,” Italia told the Times. —AFP

Comedians join in buying ferry that is ‘piece of New York’

A retired, hulking ferry of the iconic line linking Staten Island and Manhattan has been purchased by a group of investors who include popular American comedians Pete Davidson and Colin Hanks. The goal: turn it into an entertainment venue. The orange ferry John F. Kennedy, which was commissioned in 1965, was sold by New York City to Paul Italia, a real estate agent who owns a comedy club called “The Stand,” and other investors including Davidson and Jost, both cast members of the long-standing comedy show “Saturday Night Live.” Italia told AFP.

The sale – through an auction that concluded this week – was first reported by The New York Times. Davidson is dating reality TV star Kim Kardashian and Jost is married to the actress Scarlett Johansson. Both men are natives of Staten Island, one of New York’s boroughs, and Davidson still lives there. The city says the ferry they have acquired is 85 meters long, weighs around 2,100 tons and was retired from the fleet last year when its engines broke down. These

Curry’s buzzer-beater lifts Warriors; Lakers, Nets win

Golden State down Houston Rockets 105-103

News in brief

Dembele’s penalty lifts Lyon

DECINES-CHARPIEU: Lyon eked out an ugly 1-0 victory over struggling neighbors Saint-Etienne on Friday with a 15th-minute penalty by Moussa Dembele. The 124th derby between the bitter rivals did little to suggest either that Lyon can force their way into contention for a European place or that Saint-Etienne can escape the foot of the Ligue 1 table. Lyon climbed to 10th, six points behind third-place Marseille, ahead of the rest of the weekend fixtures. Saint-Etienne’s seventh straight loss left them six points away from safety. Lyon will face sterner tests in the coming week as they take on five teams above them: Marseille, Monaco, Nice, Lens and Lille. Health restrictions meant the derby was played in front of just 5,000 spectators in a stadium that holds 60,000. — AFP

Lewandowski ‘is best striker’

BERLIN: Jurgen Klinsmann rates Robert Lewandowski as the best Bundesliga striker of the modern era with the Bayern Munich star poised to inflict more misery on struggling Hertha Berlin today. League leaders Bayern start the weekend with a six-point cushion ahead of today’s game at Hertha, against whom Lewandowski has scored 10 goals in his last five games. Lewandowski retained his FIFA’s “The Best” male player title on Monday, two days after chalking up his 300th Bundesliga goal in Bayern’s 4-0 thumping away to Cologne. “There is no doubt Robert is the best striker the Bundesliga has seen in the modern era,” Klinsmann, who won the 1990 World Cup with West Germany, told AFP in a video conference. Klinsmann, 57, capped a glittering playing career, including spells at Tottenham, Inter Milan and Bayern, by captaining Germany to the Euro ‘96 title before coaching the German and USA national men’s teams. — AFP

Norwich out of relegation

WATFORD: Norwich moved out of the Premier League relegation zone for the first time this season as Josh Sargent’s double helped beat 10-man Watford 3-0 at Vicarage Road. Watford drop into the bottom three as a ninth consecutive game without a win piled the pressure on manager Claudio Ranieri. Sargent had not scored a league goal since his August move from Werder Bremen, but came good at a vital time for the Canaries bid to beat the drop. “To get your first one and then your second after that was pretty crazy,” said Sargent. “It’s a big game for us so a great night overall. “Every game is big for us, but to get a win against the team right in front of us is a huge win.” The American’s audacious flick with the outside of his boot crept in off the underside of the bar to open the scoring six minutes into the second half. — AFP

Sri Lanka crush Zimbabwe

KANDY: Sri Lankan spinner Jeffrey Vandersay returned figures of 4-10 to lead Zimbabwe’s 184-run rout in the third one-day international as the hosts clinched the series 2-1 on Friday. Zimbabwe crashed out for 70 in 24.4 overs as Sri Lankan bowlers combined to defend their total of 254-9 in Kandy. Fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera and offspinner Ramesh Mendis claimed two wickets each. Opening batsman Pathum Nissanka top-scored with 55 and Charith Asalanka made 52 to boost Sri Lanka’s score despite a disciplined bowling effort by Zimbabwe. But leg-spinner Vandersay made the match his own with career-best figures as Sri Lanka earned crucial Super League points in their attempt to get a direct entry into the 2023 World Cup. — AFP

Korda takes LPGA lead

MIAMI: World number one Nelly Korda fired seven birdies in a six-under par 66 on Friday to take a one-shot lead in the US LPGA Tournament of Champions in Orlando, Florida. After a roller coaster 68 on Thursday that left her one off the pace, Korda looked dialed in, bouncing back from her lone bogey of the day at the fifth with birdies at the seventh and ninth to make the turn three-under for the day. The American, who won her first major title last year in the KPMG Women’s PGA, picked up three more strokes coming in, moving atop the leaderboard with a 17-foot birdie putt at 18 that put her at 10-under par 134 after two rounds at Lake Nona Golf and Country Club. “I missed probably a 10-footer for birdie on 17, which I was disappointed with, but it was nice to roll that one in on 18 going into the weekend,” Korda said. She was one stroke in front of 2017 Women’s PGA champion Danielle Kang and first-round leader Gaby Lopez of Mexico. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry hit the first buzzer-beating game-winner of his illustrious NBA career on Friday, draining a step back jumper to lift Golden State to a 105-103 victory over the Houston Rockets. Curry, the smooth shooter who this season broke the league’s all-time record for three-pointers, was clearly thrilled to add another scoring achievement to his resume. “About time!” Curry told an on-court TV interviewer. “That’s my first one!”

Curry scored 22 points, but for much of the night there was frustration for him and his Warriors teammates, who trailed Western Conference stragglers



Lakers bounce back from their embarrassing loss

Houston by as many as 15 points. A day after falling in overtime to the Indiana Pacers, the Warriors got off to a slow start, Curry himself missing nine of his 10 attempts from the field in the first half and letting his frustration show when he kicked a courtside chair.

The Warriors trailed 54-43 at halftime, but scored 33 points in the third quarter to go into the final quarter with the score knotted at 76-76. It was 103-103 with 11.5 seconds remaining when Houston’s Garrison Mathews missed a three-pointer. Golden State got the rebound and on the inbounds after a timeout got the ball to Curry. “This whole game was crazy,” Curry said. “Back to back, we were kind of stuck in the mud and trying to find



SAN FRANCISCO: Jordan Poole #3 of the Golden State Warriors is fouled by Garrison Mathews #25 of the Houston Rockets in the second half at Chase Center on January 21, 2022. — AFP

our way through it.”

Elsewhere, the beleaguered Los Angeles Lakers bounced back from their embarrassing loss to the Pacers with a 116-105 victory over the Magic in Orlando. Superstar LeBron James scored 29 points, his last two coming on an alley-oop dunk off a pass from Russell Westbrook to seal the victory. Carmelo Anthony added 23 points off the bench, 19 of them in the second half for the Lakers, who opened the third quarter on a 19-2 scoring run and out-scored the Magic 31-16 in the period.

over hours of footage of opponents.

That could spell trouble for the Rams. Or as Tampa Bay coach Bruce Arians put it: “Once Tom Brady figures you out - you’re in trouble. He’s a surgeon.” Typically, Brady has prepared for the post-season by marginalizing extra-curricular activities. “This isn’t the time for trips to movie theaters,” he said. “This is the time to lock in on football. This is all we have.” The Buccaneers’ offensive arsenal could be bolstered by the possible return of running back Leonard Fournette, who is on the mend after missing last Sunday’s win over the Eagles with a hamstring injury.

The Rams meanwhile arrive in Florida on a high after an emphatic 34-11 dismantling of the Arizona Cardinals tomorrow. The Los Angeles defense laid the foundation for that win, with two sacks and two interceptions. Rams linebacker Von Miller is under no illusions that Brady is a different class of opponent. “It’s Tom Brady. He does everything well,” Miller said. “We just got to find a way to rattle him. We got to find a way to get to the quarterback.”

Bills aiming high

Today’s other divisional round game sees the Kansas City Chiefs attempt to return to the AFC Championship game for a fourth consecutive season when they face the Buffalo Bills. The Chiefs beat the Bills 38-24 in last year’s AFC Championship to reach the Super Bowl, but are hosting a Buffalo team who have hit form at the right time. The Bills thrashed the New England Patriots 47-17 last week, with quarterback Josh Allen outstanding in a devas-

Westbrook, who was benched late in Wednesday’s loss to Indiana - in which the Lakers blew a 15-point lead - scored 18 points with 11 rebounds and seven assists. “Russ is a high-character guy, we knew he was going to respond,” Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. On Friday, Vogel used reserve Stanley Johnson alongside the starters in the second half, the 10-day contract player making a confident pair of three-pointers as the Lakers gradually took control over a Magic team with the worst record in the league. — AFP



Tom Brady

tating offensive display. “He’s a tremendous player,” Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes said of his Buffalo counterpart.

“They put a lot on his shoulders and he rises to the occasion. He’s able to run the ball, he can throw the ball, he has the arm strength to throw it anywhere on the football field and he makes great decisions.” The Bills have already beaten the Chiefs this season, romping to a 38-20 win at Arrowhead Stadium in October. Since then, however, the Chiefs have improved steadily. A dazzling burst of scoring against the Pittsburgh Steelers last weekend, when Mahomes tossed five touchdowns in just over 11 minutes, served as a reminder that the Chiefs remain one of the most lethal offensive sides in the NFL when on song. — AFP

Stokes, Archer and Gayle missing from IPL auction

NEW DELHI: England’s Ben Stokes, Australia’s Mitchell Starc and veteran West Indies big-hitter Chris Gayle are among the stars missing from the upcoming auction for the Indian Premier League, media reports said yesterday. More than 1,200 cricketers from India and 18 countries across the world have registered to go under the hammer in Bangalore on February 12 and 13 for the 15th edition of the world’s most lucrative cricket tournament.

Other notable absentees from the long list of players in the bidding pool for the IPL - expected to begin in April depending on the COVID situation in India - are the English trio of Jofra Archer, Chris Woakes and Sam Curran, the reports said. Stokes and Woakes both participated in England’s recent disastrous Ashes tour of Australia. Captain Joe Root - who has never played in the IPL - is also sitting out the auction although fast bowler Mark Wood is on the list along with Australian stars David Warner and Pat Cummins, the reports said. Ten teams will bid and participate in this year’s IPL after the addition of two new franchises, Ahmedabad and Lucknow.

India’s opening batter KL Rahul will captain Lucknow after he was signed as the joint-highest-paid player, for 170 million rupees (\$2.3 million), in the history of the tournament. Former Indian captain Virat Kohli was signed for the same amount in 2018 by the Royal Challengers Bangalore franchise. “I have been very impressed by KL’s not only batting and wicket-keeping abilities, but his leadership skills,” Lucknow team owner Sanjiv Goenka told Star Sports.

Ahmedabad, which was purchased by global private equity giants CVC capital, announced Indian all-rounder Hardik Pandya as the new team’s skipper. The franchise also signed Afghanistan’s star leg-spinner Rashid Khan for 150 million rupees (\$2.1 million) and young Indian batter Shubman Gill for 80 million rupees. — AFP



PAARL: South Africa’s Rassie van der Dussen (right) plays a shot past India’s wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant (left) during the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between South Africa and India at Boland Park in Paarl on January 21, 2022. — AFP

De Kock outshines Pant as South Africa clinch series

PAARL: Quinton de Kock won a stroke-filled battle with rival wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant as South Africa clinched their one-day international series against India at Boland Park in Paarl on Friday. South Africa chased down India’s 287 for six and won the second match in the three-game series with 11 balls to spare. De Kock was named man of the match after scoring 78 runs off 66 balls and pulling off a spectacular leg side stumping, trumping Pant, who made a hard-hit 85 but missed a crucial stumping chance offered by De Kock.

“It’s great to have Quinny back,” said South African captain Temba Bavuma. “He reminded us again why he is such a valuable player.” De Kock,

who announced a shock retirement from Test cricket after the first Test against India last month, was back to his best after taking paternity leave to be with his wife for the recent birth of a baby daughter.

He was in sparkling form as he and Janneman Malan put on 132 for the first wicket in just 22 overs. De Kock raced to a half-century off 36 balls in an innings comprising seven fours and three sixes, before he missed a full toss and was leg before wicket to Shardul Thakur. But he was lucky when he was on 32 when he went down the wicket to a delivery from off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin which went past his bat and eluded Pant, who had an opportunity to make a straightforward stumping.

Malan provided solid support for De Kock and went on to make 91 before he was bowled by a Jasprit Bumrah off-cutter which lifted off a length and deflected into the stumps off the batsman’s elbow. On a day when the temperature reached 40 Celsius, Pant scored his runs off 71 balls. He shared a third wicket partnership of 115 with captain KL Rahul, who made 55. — AFP

Sports

Abuse, bullying: The dark side of S Korean Olympic skating glory

Cases of sexual assault sabotage rock skaters and coaches

BEIJING: South Korea's short track speed skaters head to the Beijing Olympics next month hoping to leave behind high-profile scandals and bring glory to a country deeply passionate about the breakneck sport. South Korea are a short track superpower, winning more Olympic medals than any other nation — 48, including 24 golds—since the sport was added to the program in 1992.

But cases of sexual assault and bullying, and even accusations of sabotaging races, have dogged its skaters and coaches since the 2018 Games in Pyeongchang. The fallout has lingered right up to February's Games, with one star skater's Olympic hopes dashed just weeks from the start. A Seoul court on Tuesday rejected Shim Suk-hee's last-gasp bid to overturn a two-month suspension that rendered her ineligible for Beijing, Yonhap news agency reported, citing legal sources.

Shim was punished in December after local media revealed expletive-laden texts she sent to a coach about her teammates during the 2018 Games. Shim is one of South Korea's most successful skaters with four Olympic short track medals, including relay golds in 2014 and 2018. Even if she had won her case in time for Beijing, there was no guarantee of her being welcome in the team. In her denigrating messages, Shim had suggested tripping her teammate Choi Min-jeong if they competed in the same event at Pyeongchang.

The two ended up racing in the 1,000-metre final, got tangled in the final stretch and crashed into the wall. Investigators concluded Shim had not intentionally sabotaged Choi, citing a lack of evidence. Choi has publicly asked Shim to stop trying to contact her to apologize, according to local media. Despite the controversies, skater Lee Yu-bin was upbeat. "I heard that some are expecting the atmosphere in our team to be negative," she said at a press conference this month. "But... our team's mood is really good."

Abuse, bullying

While South Korea's highly competitive and well-funded Olympic setup has yielded major successes, it has also seen abuse and harassment in several sports, including short track. Shim is among the survivors. She revealed in 2019 that one of her coaches, Cho Jae-beom, had sexually abused her for three years, starting when she was 17. He was jailed last year for more than a decade. Shim's revelations confronted a culture of shame in socially conservative South Korea, prompting a series of athletes to come forward with similar allegations, and apologies from sports authorities.

Also in 2019, a male skater was suspended for a month after secretly getting into the female dorm at the national training centre. The next year, the 1,500m Olympic champion Lim Hyo-jun was convicted of sexual harassment after he pulled down another male athlete's trousers in front of other teammates at the training centre. But the verdict was overturned on appeal, with the Supreme Court finding last year that "the incident happened in a playful circumstance where athletes were fooling around before practice", Yonhap reported.

National pride

The behavior of some South Korean fans has underlined just how passionate the country is about speed skating. During the Pyeongchang Olympics, Canadian skater Kim Boutin was bombarded with online abuse from South Koreans angry about the disqualification of Choi. And during

However before Juve's 4-1 Italian Cup win over Sampdoria on Tuesday, in which Dybala scored his third goal in five matches since the new year, CEO Maurizio Arrivabene insisted the club would discuss the new deal with Dybala next month. "It's not just him, we also have contracts for (Juan) Cuadrado, (Mattia) Perin, (Federico) Bernadeschi and (Mattia) De Sciglio to deal with," Arrivabene told Mediaset. Last week the Gazzetta Dello Sport reported that Juve, who recorded a loss of almost 210 million euros in the year up to June 2021, want to cut Dybala's salary and shorten the length of his renewal due to worries about his physical condition following a string of injuries.

Meanwhile Inter Milan CEO Giuseppe Marotta suggested they might be ready to pounce should the 28-year-old leave the league leader's biggest rivals, who are unbeaten in eight in the league and have the chance to creep into the Champions League places this weekend as fourth-place Atalanta travel to high-scoring but inconsistent Lazio. Champions Inter, who are two points clear of AC Milan, may end up having two games in hand come the end of the weekend, as their match with Venezia is at risk of being postponed following a rash of COVID-19 cases at their promoted opposition.

Morocco despite the absence of stars Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Mario Lemina and Denis Bouanga due to the coronavirus. Jim Allevinah is a clinical finisher and he could give the Gabonese the edge over a Burkina Faso team that needs to improve with a heavy burden on the shoulders of Aston Villa forward Bertrand Traore.

Nigeria v Tunisia

Form and tradition suggest Nigeria, the only nation to win all three group matches, will be too strong for opponents who fell to Mali and minnows Gambia in the first round. Nigeria have never lost to Tunisia at the Cup of Nations and remain in Garoua while their rivals spent Friday relocating from Limbe at the other end of Cameroon, leaving them little time to prepare.

Guinea v Gambia

Guinea are under severe pressure with junta leader Colonel Mamady Doumbouya telling the squad they will have to repay the cost of state-fund preparations if they do not bring the trophy back to Conakry. The absence of suspended captain, Liverpool midfielder Naby Keita, will weaken Guinea and offer hope to Musa Barrow-inspired Gambia, whose performances have mocked being ranked 150th in the world.

Cameroon v Comoros

After a stunning victory that eliminated four-time champions Ghana, Comoros tackle hosts Cameroon, who boast the leading scorer after the group stage in five-goal Vincent Aboubakar. "Nothing is impossible in football," says Comoros coach Amir Abdou, and his team have clinical forwards in Ahmed Mogni from the French third division and Serbia-based El Fardou Ben Mohamed.

Burkina Faso v Gabon

Gabon, often flops at the finals, impressed when holding



PYEONGCHANG: South Korea's gold medalists Shim Suk-hee (left) and teammates Choi Min-jeong, Kim Ye-jin, Kim A-lang and Lee Yu-bin pose on the podium during the medal ceremony for the short track women's 3000m relay at the Pyeongchang Medals Plaza. —AFP

Vancouver 2010, a South Korean fan furious over a disqualification decision by Australian judge James Hewish was arrested for threatening to blow up the Australian embassy in Seoul. Hewish was also involved in arguably the most famous of all South Korean short track controversies. During the 2002 Olympics, American skater Apolo Anton Ohno won the 1,500m final when Kim Dong-sung—who crossed the line

Nearly two years after the pandemic first shut down professional sport in Italy, a protocol made official this week has laid out a clear rule: if you have nine players positive from a pre-agreed 25-man squad list then your match will not go ahead. Inter will be waiting to see how many of the 15 cases at Venezia—who announced 11 new positives on Thursday—are players and if those announced last weekend turn negative before the match at the San Siro yesterday. Napoli too risk not playing their derby with Salernitana after the league's bottom side announced a ninth player positive on Thursday evening.

Player to watch: Victor Osimhen

Osimhen could make his first Napoli start in two months should their derby with Salernitana go ahead, as the Nigeria forward makes a sooner-than-expected return to action from face fractures suffered against Inter in late November. The 23-year-old made his comeback, after missing the Africa Cup of Nations, in a cameo appearance during Napoli's 2-0 win at Bologna on Monday, and with Luciano Spalletti's side four points behind Inter the return of his star strike could kick-start their faltering title challenge.—AFP

Senegal v Cape Verde

Unpredictable Cape Verde battled to overcome Ethiopia, lost to Burkina Faso and held star-studded Cameroon while coach Bubista remains at home in the island nation due to COVID-19. Kalidou Koulibaly-captained Senegal have disappeared, needing 97 minutes to beat Zimbabwe through a Mané penalty then held to goalless draws by Guinea and Malawi.

Morocco v Malawi

It is 46 years since Morocco won their only Cup of Nations title and hopes are high that the Wahid Halilhodzic-coached class of '22 can go all the way. Malawi have an impressive forward in Frank Mhango and run relentlessly, but it is hard to imagine the Flames succeeding despite a dramatic recent improvement under a new coach, Romanian Mario Marinica.

Ivory Coast v Egypt

Two-time champions Ivory Coast outclassed Algeria and will be favorites to win the match of the round despite having succeeded only once in 10 previous Cup of Nations clashes against Egypt. But Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz remains hopeful, saying "we have been concentrating on our finishing. Sometimes we try too hard to score and complicate matters."

Mali v Equatorial Guinea

Cameroon has been a happy hunting ground for Mali—they achieved their highest Cup of Nations finish of second place 50 years ago and were 2020 African Nations Championship runners-up there. They won Group F thanks largely to the penalty-taking of top forward Ibrahima Kone while the well organized Equatoguineans exceeded expectations by finishing second in Group E. —AFP

first—was disqualified. The South Koreans claimed Ohno, who raised his arms in protest as he tried to cut past Kim, fooled the referee. Ohno became "the most hated athlete in South Korea", according to a newspaper at the time, and one company reportedly produced toilet paper with his face on it. The entire US team pulled out of a 2003 World Cup event in South Korea over death threats to Ohno. —AFP

Electric Kilde fires Olympic broadside with victory

KITZBUEHEL: In-form Norwegian Aleksander Aamodt Kilde fired an Olympic broadside when he streaked to a "completely wild" victory in the famed World Cup downhill in Kitzbuehel on Friday. On a course cut slightly short up high because of wind, Kilde clocked 1min 55.92sec to claim 100,000 euros (\$113,400) in prize money, part of a 1m-euro pot on offer for three days of racing in the upmarket Austrian resort.

France's Johan Clarey, at 41 the elder statesman of the circuit, claimed second, 0.42sec adrift, while late-running teammate Blaise Giezendanner took a shock third (+0.63) after starting with bib number 43 in the field of 51. "It's always been a dream for me to win in Kitzbuehel. I haven't been close in downhill before, it's an incredible feeling," said Kilde of his 12th World Cup victory. The Norwegian, who is one half of alpine skiing's golden couple alongside his girlfriend, US star Mikaela Shiffrin, said he had come far in the last 12 months. "I looked through my phone this morning and a photo from one year ago popped up and I was standing on my balcony in Innsbruck with crutches, having just had an operation on my knee," he said. "It's quite different now." Kilde said the timing of his win "couldn't be better, to be honest. I'm just so stoked, so it's good for the Olympics". Clarey, who bettered his own record as the oldest World Cup podium finisher, admitted to having woken up "stressed out".

"I think I knew I was capable of doing something good, I gave my all," he said, calling Kilde a "monster" on skis. With the men's downhill at the Beijing Olympics just 16 days away, Kilde upstaged the fancied Swiss duo of Marco Odermatt and Beat Feuz, who won last season's two downhillers here. He also nullified a strong Austrian presence, including Matthias Mayer and Vincent Kriednmayr. Mayer was nudged off the podium by Giezendanner's late show while Odermatt, who retains his lead in the overall World Cup standings, finished fifth, at 0.78sec.

Kilde truly mastered the 3km-long Streif course, the most prestigious course on the circuit, but also widely regarded as the most testing, down the Hahnenkamm mountain overlooking Kitzbuehel. Any thoughts of Olympic gold are temporarily put on hold as racers focused completely on the thigh-trembling descent, which made its debut in 1931 and now sees the skiers reach motorway-coasting speeds of 140km/h while negotiating sections that have an 85-percent gradient. —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 Kunjachen 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).

I BALU 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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EMERGENCY



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Man United move into top four

Gerrard's Villa rub salt into Everton wounds



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo (center) tries to kick the ball as West Ham United's English defender Craig Dawson (left) dives to head the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and West Ham United yesterday. — AFP

MANCHESTER: Marcus Rashford struck with virtually the last kick of the game to take Manchester United into the Premier League top four at West Ham's expense with a 1-0 win yesterday. United were insipid as an attacking force for 93 minutes at Old Trafford, but found the breakthrough at the death as all three of Ralf Rangnick's substitutes combined when Anthony Martial and Edinson Cavani teed up Rashford for a tap in at the back post.

Victory lifts United a point above the Hammers and sees the Red Devils leapfrog Tottenham and Arsenal in the battle for Champions League football next season. Rangnick has lost just one of his 10 games since taking temporary charge till the end of the season, but once again the result was more impressive than the performance from the German's side.

Bruno Fernandes looked back to his best with two goals and two assists in the past week and the Portuguese nearly created

the opener with a fiercely struck cross that just evaded Cristiano Ronaldo in the most dangerous moment of the first half. Alphonse Areola was drafted in to the West Ham goal in the absence of Lukasz Fabianski due to a positive test for coronavirus, but the Frenchman was forced into just one serious save when he turned Fred's driven shot behind early in the second half. Fernandes dragged another effort wide from the edge of the box as United toiled to the frustration of the 75,000 crowd.

However, Rangnick's changes made the difference. Rashford has looked devoid of confidence in recent months, but his first goal since October in a 3-1 win at Brentford on Wednesday gave the England international a lift. Rangnick claimed that Anthony Martial had refused to be part of his squad for last weekend's 2-2 draw at Aston Villa as he looks for a move away from the club for more game time.

The Frenchman publicly denied that

accusation and was given his first minutes under the interim boss when he was introduced along with Cavani in the final 10 minutes. David de Gea was nearly caught out by a long-range effort from Declan Rice as the game entered stoppage time. But rather than snatch a winner, West Ham were hit with a sucker punch on the counter-attack.

Martial played in Cavani on the left of the box and the Uruguayan's cross just required a touch from Rashford at the back post. The wild celebrations survived a VAR check against Cavani for offside and there was barely time for West Ham to kick-off in what could be a fatal blow to their outside hopes of reaching the Champions League for the first time.

Aston Villa 1 Everton 0

In another development, Everton's change of management did not result in a change of fortunes as Aston Villa manager Steven Gerrard enjoyed a winning return

to Merseyside with a 1-0 victory at Goodison Park. Emiliano Buendia's header in first half stoppage time separated the sides to leave the Toffees still just five points above the relegation zone in 16th. Duncan Ferguson took temporary charge of Everton following the sacking of Rafael Benitez last weekend after a run of just one win in 13 league games.

Ferguson was unbeaten in three matches as caretaker boss against Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal before Carlo Ancelotti took charge just over two years ago. But he could not replicate that success as former Liverpool captain Gerrard got one over on his old rivals. "It's a big win for us," said Gerrard, whose side move up to 10th in the table. "It was a different style of game. Especially second half we had to roll our sleeves up and put our bodies on the line."

Ferguson bought a round of drinks for fans in a pub next to the stadium before

kick-off and got the raucous atmosphere he was looking for. Both sides flew into tackles, but there were few clear-cut chances in the first half. Ollie Watkins should have done better when he prodded wide with just Jordan Pickford to beat. Another former Liverpool midfielder Philippe Coutinho was quiet on his first Villa start since joining on loan from Barcelona, but had a part to play in the only goal.

The Brazilian's header was tipped over by Pickford. From the resulting corner, Lucas Digne came back to haunt his former club just weeks after leaving Everton as his corner was flicked in by Buendia. Digne and Matty Cash were hit by a bottle thrown by the home fans as they celebrated the goal. Everton should have salvaged at least a point after the break in their battle to beat the drop. "In the second half the boys gave everything, we just lacked the little bit of quality to stick one in," said Ferguson. — AFP

Medvedev, Tsitsipas march into last 16 as Halep fires warning

MELBOURNE: World number two and title favorite Daniil Medvedev won over the Australian Open crowd yesterday as the Russian "villain" eased into the last 16 along with Stefanos Tsitsipas. After the drama of Friday, when defending champion Naomi Osaka exited Melbourne in the third round, the leading women's seeds were also mostly untroubled on day six.

Second seed Aryna Sabalenka overcame some of her serving yips and Simona Halep was an emphatic winner, the former number one now playing self-described "dinosaur" Alize Cornet on Monday for a place in the quarter-finals. Medvedev, the de facto men's top seed after the deportation of defending champion Novak Djokovic on the eve of the Grand Slam, said some fans at Melbourne Park had a "low IQ" after they booed him in his second-round victory over Australian showman Nick Kyrgios.

The reigning US Open champion needed four sets and a large dose of composure to see off Kyrgios and silence Rod Laver Arena, and was branded a "villain" by local media for the way he riled up the crowd. But it was altogether more comfortable as he dismissed unseeded Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp and



MELBOURNE: Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return against Netherlands' Botic Van de Zandschulp during their men's singles match on day six of the Australian Open tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

he won some friends in the process. The 25-year-old Medvedev kept his cool in sweltering conditions on Margaret Court Arena to roll through 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 in 1hr 55min and faces American Maxime Cressy in the fourth round.

"I'll put it this way, it's easier to play a guy from the Netherlands than a guy from Australia in Australia in Melbourne," said Medvedev, who has a similar love-hate dynamic with the crowd in New York. "Every good relationship must have its ups and downs so I think it's good, it's entertaining and it's real, there is some relationship going on." Greek fourth seed Tsitsipas, who is chasing a maiden major, was also largely untroubled in a 6-3, 7-5,

6-7 (2/7), 6-4 win over unseeded Frenchman Benoit Paire and plays American Taylor Fritz next.

Tsitsipas's serve was the foundation. He did not drop a service game despite losing a set and sent down 21 aces. Medvedev and Tsitsipas, two of the generation coming up fast behind the "Big Three" of Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, could meet in the semi-finals. There was defeat however for Andrey Rublev, the Russian fifth seed, who lost in four sets to 2018 runner-up Marin Cilic. Felix Auger-Aliassime sent home the last Briton left standing in singles, thrashing Dan Evans 6-4, 6-1, 6-1. — AFP

Haaland on the mark; Dortmund bounce back

BERLIN: Erling Haaland put Borussia Dortmund on their way to a rollercoaster 3-2 win over Hoffenheim yesterday to keep his side's Bundesliga title hopes alive. Despite being outplayed for much of the game, Marco Rose's side bounced back from a shock defeat in the cup in midweek, scrapping their way to a victory which moves them within three points of league leaders Bayern Munich overnight.

Dortmund started brilliantly, carving through the Hoffenheim defense with a brilliant string of passes on six minutes, providing Erling Haaland with a tap-in for the opener. Hoffenheim then squandered several good chances before Andrej Kramaric equalized with a smart volley on the stroke of half-time. Marco Reus restored the lead on the counter-attack, before a David Raum own-goal appeared to seal the three points for Dortmund. Georginio Rutter gave Hoffenheim hope late on, but Dortmund held on to claim the three points.

Dortmund remain eight points ahead of Bayer Leverkusen, who stormed to a 5-1 victory over Augsburg thanks to a Moussa Diaby hat-trick. Karim Bellarabi and Diaby gave Leverkusen a

comfortable 2-0 half-time lead over a limp Augsburg side, before Arne Maier pulled a goal back for the guests on the hour mark. Diaby was irresistible, however, adding a third for Leverkusen minutes later before tearing through Augsburg on the counter-attack to complete his hat-trick. Substitute Lucas Alario added a fifth with a crafty back-heel ten minutes from time.

Union Berlin broke into the top four as they beat Borussia Moenchengladbach 2-1, piling more misery on under-fire coach Adi Huetter. Gladbach were in need of a result, having won just one of their last eight in the league and slumped to a shock cup defeat to Hannover in midweek. Huetter's side started sluggishly, however, and Max Kruse gave Union the lead from the penalty spot after a Denis Zakaria handball.

The hosts showed a sign of life just before half-time, Manu Kone smashing home the equaliser after a superb counter-attack. Gladbach had chances to take the lead themselves in the second half, but were left shell-shocked when Kruse blasted home a second to give Union a smash-and-grab win. — AFP