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60+ expats can renew iqama for KD 250, health insurance

Decision to be reviewed after one year: Justice minister

Kuwait projects \$10bn deficit for 2022-2023

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday submitted a draft 2022-2023 budget projecting a narrower budget deficit amid climbing oil prices. The state, whose revenues heavily rely on hydrocarbons, projected a budget deficit of \$10.3 billion for the fiscal year starting in April, down 74.2 percent from the current year's estimated shortfall, according to a finance ministry statement.

It added that spending would fall 4.8 percent to around \$72.8 billion, of which 74.5 percent would be allocated to civil service wages and public subsidies. Revenues are projected at \$62.2

billion, up 72.2 percent from the current fiscal year's estimates. The budget has been worked out on the basis of oil price at \$75 per barrel.

"Next year's budget projects higher revenue levels, however we were keen to maintain our cap on expenditure at 22 billion Kuwaiti dinars (\$72.8 billion) while maintaining healthy capital expenditure that is in line with previous years," Finance Minister Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid said, according to the statement. A new government was sworn in on Dec 29, Kuwait's fourth in two years, after the last one resigned in November amid political deadlock.

The new lineup included a critical voice in Rushaid, who earlier in December called on the government to "focus on a sustainable economy rather than on the fluctuations of oil prices". Like most Gulf countries, Kuwait's economy and state budgets have been hit by the coronavirus pandemic and the low price of oil. — AFP

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Minister of Justice and head of the Public Authority for Manpower Jamal Al-Jalawi yesterday said the authority's board decided to allow expatriates aged over 60 years who do not hold a university degree to renew their residencies by paying an annual fee of KD 250 and purchasing private health insurance, ending a problem that continued for well over a year.

The minister said the decision will be re-evaluated after one year to see the impact of its implementation. Children of Kuwaiti women, their husbands and holders of Palestinian travel documents are exempted from the decision. Under its previous board, the authority had decided to ban this category of expats, estimated at around 90,000, from renewing their residence permits and were asked to leave the country. But the decision was never implemented after it came under fire by MPs, human rights groups and the chamber of commerce.

The government's legal department last year ruled that the original decision was unconstitutional and called for halting its implementation. Since then, authorities have been studying the best way to deal with these residents. Foreigners who are over 60 but hold university degrees are exempted from the decision.

Head of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Saqer welcomed the decision and thanked authorities for resolving the dilemma and reconsidering the initial decision to ban expats without university degrees from renewing their residency when they reach 60 years of age.

He said the new decision conforms with Kuwait's economic interests and is in line with its just positions, urging for cooperation from all sides to end visa trading, which is harming the national economy. Saqer also called for long-term plans to deal with the serious imbalance in the structure of the workforce and the population that is heavily tilted in favor of expats.

Kuwait records 5,176 new COVID cases, one death



KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday said 5,176 more people tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, an all-time record, taking the country's total caseload to 502,630, according to health ministry data. Some 4,337 more people recovered from the virus, taking total recoveries to 454,799, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who said the recovery to positive case ratio stands at 90.5 percent.

One fatality linked to the virus took the country's death toll from the pandemic to 2,487, while 397 people are hospitalized with the virus, 65 of whom are in intensive care, Dr Sanad told KUNA. Some 28,910 swab tests were conducted in the past 24 hours, taking total tests to 6,689,318, he added.

Earlier yesterday, Health Minister Dr Khaled Al-Saeed warned Kuwait is going through an unprecedented wave of the novel coronavirus, adding that with the medical staff's efforts and the support of the community, it will pass. After the inauguration of Sabahiya Western Health Center, Dr Saeed said in a statement that this turn of events requires joining efforts with workers in hospitals, noting that vaccines against the coronavirus are available. He noted that more than 5,000 COVID cases are being

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Lebanon ex-PM Hariri retires from politics

BEIRUT: Former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri announced yesterday he would not run in upcoming parliamentary elections and was withdrawing from political life. The announcement could jeopardize the crisis-hit country's ballot altogether and marks the end of an era that saw the Hariri family dominate Lebanese Sunni politics since the end of the civil war in 1990.

The 51-year-old three-time pre-

mier, who was propelled into politics by his father Rafik's assassination in 2005, announced his decision during a press conference in the capital Beirut. The Sunni Muslim leader said he was "suspending his work in political life" and urged fellow members of his Future party to also leave the political arena.

A tearful Hariri, who was first elected to parliament in 2005, declared he would not run in the legislative polls due in May. "I am convinced there is no room for any positive opportunity for Lebanon due to Iranian influence, international upheaval, national division, sectarianism, and the collapse of the state," he said. Iran backs Hezbollah, a Shiite movement that wields considerable

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Taleban hail Oslo meet as great success

OSLO: On their first visit to Europe since returning to power, the Taleban held landmark talks with Western diplomats in Oslo yesterday over the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, a meeting the Islamist regime's delegation called an "achievement in itself". The international community has however insisted the Taleban must respect

human rights before aid can be resumed to Afghanistan, where hunger threatens more than half population.

Having accepted a controversial invitation from Norway, the Taleban were holding talks yesterday with representatives of the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, the European Union and Norway. The closed-door discussions were taking place at the Soria Moria Hotel, on a snowy hilltop outside Oslo, with the Taleban delegation led by Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, who hailed the fact that the meeting took place as a success in its own right.

Continued on Page 2

First woman judge at Pak supreme court

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan swore in Ayesha Malik as its first female supreme court judge yesterday, a landmark occasion in a nation where activists say the law is often wielded against women. Malik attended a ceremony in the capital Islamabad where she now sits on the bench alongside

16 male colleagues at Pakistan's highest court.

"I want to congratulate Justice Ayesha Malik on becoming the first woman judge of the Supreme Court," Prime Minister Imran Khan said. "I wish her all the best," he added on Twitter. Lawyer and women's rights activist Nighat Dad said Malik's promotion is "a huge step forward". "It is history in the making for Pakistan's judiciary," she told AFP.

Malik was educated at Harvard University and served as a high court judge in Pakistan's eastern city of

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BEIRUT: Lebanon's former prime minister Saad Hariri gestures to the crowd after a press conference yesterday. — AFP



OSLO: Britain's Special Representative for Afghanistan Nigel Casey and Taleban representative Amir Khan Muttaqi shake hands as they arrive to attend a meeting yesterday. — AFP



ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed administers the oath to supreme court judge Ayesha Malik yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Foreign Minister discusses regional, int'l challenges with EU FMs

Borrell hails Kuwait as EU's close and reliable partner

BRUSSELS: Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah discussed in Brussels yesterday regional and international developments with EU foreign ministers over a working breakfast. "We had a chance to exchange our perspective regarding our work on how to enhance our cooperation and our dimension between EU and Kuwait," he told the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) and Kuwait TV after the meeting. They also discussed Kuwait's viewpoint regarding



BRUSSELS: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends as a guest of honor a work breakfast at the invitation of Cyprus' Minister of Foreign Affairs Ioannis Kasoulidis. — KUNA

“ We see great opportunity to enhance our cooperation ”

regional and international challenges, he noted. "I had the chance to provide the EU foreign ministers with our perspective in Kuwait regarding challenges that engulf us, and I have heard from our EU partners their outmost engagement with Kuwait and with the region and their clear and firm stance in security and stability of the region," said the Kuwaiti foreign minister. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser expressed his thanks and gratitude to Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulidis for organizing the event to meet with EU foreign ministers over a working breakfast.

Meanwhile, Kasoulidis thanked the Kuwaiti minister for giving such an interesting presentation in peace making and peace understanding for the whole region, saying that "the whole region is so important for stability for Europe but also beyond." "Your presentation was extremely interesting," said the Cypriot minister. Later, the Kuwaiti foreign minister met Slovenian foreign minister Anze Logar and discussed relations between the two countries. "We see great opportunity to enhance our cooperation.

Our bilateral exchanges are modest and there are several fields where we can really enhance our cooperation be in cyber security and artificial intelligence and exchange of information in technology in the health sector," Logar told KUNA and Kuwait TV. They decided to raise the frequency of bilateral meetings, he said and voiced optimism that there will be concrete result of "our today's meeting." "Kuwait and Slovenia are like-minded countries. We all defend peace and security and seek to bring all the crises to a peaceful solution," he said.

In a separate meeting, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah discussed bilateral ties with the foreign minister of Malta Evarist Bartolo. "Our countries have been friends for many, many years. We are two countries (together) not only with the past but with the future," Bartolo told KUNA and Kuwait TV. "We understand each other, and we can work in different areas, health and

education sustainable development, tourism," he said. "Kuwait helps us to understand the Gulf, Kuwait helps us to understand the Arab world and we help the Gulf and Kuwait to understand the EU," he said. "We can work together for security and peace which we need a lot. Both in the Gulf and in the Mediterranean and the whole world," said the Maltese foreign minister. He added that "relations between Kuwait and Malta have always been very good and we look forward to strengthening our relations."

Reliable partner

European Union High Representative Josep Borrell has meanwhile described Kuwait as a close and reliable partner and praised Kuwait's moderating role in the region. "Kuwait stands out as a close and reliable partner of the European Union. This meeting will give me the opportunity to underline the appre-

ciation for Kuwait's moderating role in the region and the intention to reinforce our bilateral relations," Borrell said ahead of a working dinner he hosted in honor of Kuwait's Foreign in Brussels Sunday night. "Certainly, I am very happy to meet the minister here in Brussels and to know more about the mediation that the minister has done with the Lebanese," said the EU foreign policy chief referring to the visit of the Kuwaiti foreign minister to Lebanon before arriving on his first trip to Brussels.

Borrell said he has invited the Kuwaiti foreign minister for the next EU-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ministerial that will take place on February 21 in Brussels to discuss the future of partnership. "We want to build a broader and strategic partnership with Kuwait and with other GCC members," he said. Borrell said they will discuss during their meeting key global issues such as the green and digital transformation as well as oil, renewable energy, trade, investment, security, development cooperation humanitarian assistance "Kuwait's role as the current chair of the Arab League offers an additional opportunity for further engagement on regional challenges and in our shared neighborhood. So there are many important reasons to meet with the minister," he said.

Borrell further indicated that bilateral EU-Kuwait relations are "very good and there is room for improvement as always but certainly we have a strong and profitable relations with Kuwait." On his part, the Kuwaiti foreign minister said he is very happy to be in Brussels and to meet his friend and colleague the EU High Representative Josep Borrell. "EU-Kuwait relations are diverse and deep and there are many common bases between Kuwait and the EU. We highly value these relations and we both Kuwait and the EU have all the intention to strengthen ties in all sectors," he said. He noted that during the working dinner they will discuss many issues related with the challenges and common denominators both in the region and on the international level. "The important thing is that we will share ideas and listen to our European friends their views on the challenges that our region is facing," he added. — KUNA

Taleban hail Oslo meet as...

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"Norway providing us this opportunity is an achievement in itself because we shared the stage with the world," Muttaqi told reporters yesterday. "From these meetings we are sure of getting support for Afghanistan's humanitarian, health and education sectors," he added. Afghanistan's humanitarian situation has deteriorated drastically since last August when the fundamentalists stormed back to power 20 years after being toppled.

International aid came to a sudden halt, worsening the plight of millions of people already suffering from hunger after several severe droughts. Thomas West, the US special representative for Afghanistan, tweeted on Sunday: "As we seek to address humanitarian crisis together with allies, partners, and relief orgs, we will continue clear-eyed diplomacy with the Taleban regarding our concerns and our abiding interest in a stable, rights-respecting and inclusive Afghanistan."

No country has yet recognized the Taleban regime which hopes that meetings of this kind will help legitimize their government. Norway's Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt has stressed the talks would "not represent a legitimization or recognition of the Taleban", but because of the humanitarian emergency "we must talk to the de facto authorities in the country".

Experts and members of the Afghan diaspora have criticized the Norwegian invitation to the Taleban, and protests have been held outside the foreign ministry in the capital. In Kabul, Wahida Amiri, an activist who has protested regularly in Kabul since the Taleban's return, told AFP she was "sorry for such a country as Norway for organizing this summit, sitting with terrorists, and making deals".

Since August, international aid, which financed around 80 percent of the Afghan budget, has been suspended and the United States has frozen \$9.5

billion in assets in the Afghan central bank. Unemployment has skyrocketed and civil servants' salaries have not been paid for months in the country. Hunger now threatens 23 million Afghans, or 55 percent of the population, according to the United Nations, which says it needs \$4.4 billion from donor countries this year to address the crisis.

But the international community is waiting to see how the Taleban intend to govern after being accused of trampling on human rights during their first stint in power between 1996 and 2001. While the Islamists claim to have modernized, women are still largely excluded from public-sector employment and most secondary schools for girls remain closed. Two women activists disappeared last week in Kabul. The Taleban have denied responsibility.

Before meeting with the Taleban, the Western diplomats held talks early yesterday with members of Afghanistan's civil society, including women activists and journalists, who had themselves held talks the day before with the hardline Islamists on human rights. One of those in attendance, women's rights activist Jamila Afghani, told AFP "it was a positive icebreaking meeting" where the Taleban "displayed goodwill", but it remained to be seen "what their actions will be".

Yesterday, another woman activist who took part in Oslo, Mahbouba Seraj, said the Taleban "acknowledged us and they heard us". "I'm hopeful. I'm hoping for some kind of an understanding of each other", she told reporters. Meanwhile, Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted after their talks that "the participants recognized that understanding and joint cooperation are the only solutions".

Among the 15 members of the all-male Taleban delegation was Anas Haqqani, a leader of the most feared and violent faction of the Taleban movement, the Haqqani network blamed for some of the most devastating attacks in Afghanistan. His participation has been heavily criticized on social media and local media reported a Norwegian-Afghan has filed a police complaint in Oslo against Haqqani for war crimes. — AFP

nating 40 percent of their people by end-2021 and 85 percent of people in Africa were yet to receive a single jab, Tedros said. "We simply cannot end the emergency phase of the pandemic unless we bridge this gap," he said.

"On average last week, 100 cases were reported every three seconds, and somebody lost their life to COVID-19 every 12 seconds," he added. COVID-19 has killed more than 5.5 million people since it first emerged in late 2019 and case numbers have been driven to record levels by the new Omicron variant. Since the strain was first detected in southern Africa nine weeks ago, Tedros said 80 million cases had been reported to the WHO - more than in all of 2020.

Omicron appears to cause less severe disease than previous variants and Tedros confirmed that "the explosion in cases has not been matched by a surge in deaths". The WHO chief said the world would need to learn to live with COVID. "We will need to learn to manage it through a sustained and integrated strategy for acute respiratory diseases," he said, emphasizing it was "dangerous to assume that Omicron will be the last variant, or that this is the endgame". "On the contrary," he said, "globally the conditions are ideal for more variants to emerge. The potential for a more transmissible, more deadly variant remains very real." — Agencies

Houthis fire missiles at UAE, Saudi Arabia

SANAA: Yemen rebels fired missiles at the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, with coalition forces hitting back by blowing up the insurgents' launchpad as a sharp escalation of hostilities entered a second week yesterday. Witnesses saw bright flashes arcing over the Emirati capital Abu Dhabi in the early hours of yesterday as two ballistic missiles were intercepted, scattering debris.

Nobody was hurt in the attack, which came a week after the Iran-backed Houthi rebels killed three people in a drone and missile assault on the city, triggering a volley of deadly air strikes on Yemen. Separately, missiles were fired on Saudi Arabia in regions bordering Yemen, with two people wounded in Jazan, and another missile intercepted over Dhahran al-Janub.

The kingdom's foreign ministry yesterday condemned the latest attacks, calling on the international community "to put an end to this hostile behavior". The UAE said an F16 fighter jet destroyed a Houthi

missile launcher in Al-Jawf in northern Yemen at 4:10 am (0110 GMT), "immediately after it launched two ballistic missiles at Abu Dhabi".

Abu Dhabi released a black-and-white video of the attack in Yemen, showing an explosion followed by a large fire that sent up plumes of thick smoke. UAE presidential adviser Anwar Gargash stressed the UAE's resilience against such attacks, tweeting that the Emirates was "an impenetrable dam against forces of darkness and terrorism". The 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also condemned the attacks on the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The UAE, part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthis in Yemen, is "ready to deal with any threats" and is "taking all necessary measures to protect the state from all attacks", the defense ministry said. The seven-year conflict, which has killed more than 150,000 people and displaced millions according to the United Nations, entered a dangerous new phase over the past week.

After last Monday's attack, the rebels threatened to ramp up their targeting of UAE, and repeated their warning for foreign companies to leave the oil, business, transport and tourism hub. "We are ready to expand the operation during the next phase and confront escalation with escalation," rebel military spokesman Yahya Saree said in a televised statement. — AFP

First woman judge at Pak...

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Lahore for the past two decades. She has been credited with rolling back patriarchal legal mores in her Punjab province jurisdiction. Last year she outlived a deeply invasive and medically discredited examination used to determine a woman's level of sexual experience.

Women in Pakistan often struggle to gain justice in rape and sexual assault cases, and the test was

deployed as a means of discrediting victims by casting aspersion on their character. Malik's elevation to the apex court of Pakistan may clear the way for more women to enter the historically conservative and male-dominated judiciary of the Islamic republic.

"She has broken all barriers in the judicial system and it will allow other women in the system to move forward," said lawyer and women's rights activist Khadija Siddiqi. "I hope this will lead to more women-centric decisions by the judiciary in the future." But her appointment has been mired in controversy for the past four months, with claims she jumped a queue of more senior male candidates qualified for the post. Earlier this month the Pakistan Bar Council staged a strike to protest against Malik's nomination. — AFP

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listed daily, noting that primary care is an important part of the development of the health system, as it provides high-level medical care to patients.

Meanwhile, the head of the World Health Organization said yesterday that the planet can end the COVID-19 emergency this year, although the virus last week killed someone every 12 seconds. "We can end COVID-19 as a global health emergency and we can do it this year," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the UN health agency's executive board. To do so, countries need to work harder to ensure equitable access to vaccines and treatment, track the virus and its emerging variants, and keep restrictions in place, he warned.

The WHO has for months demanded that countries do more to accelerate the distribution of vaccines in poorer nations, calling on all countries to vaccinate at least 70 percent of their populations by the middle of this year. Half of the WHO's 194 member states missed the previous target of vacci-

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influence in Lebanese politics and which Hariri blames for his father's killing.

Hariri is also a citizen of Iran's arch-foe Saudi Arabia, where he was born in 1970. His political fortunes took a turn for the worse when the regional powerhouse that had traditionally backed his father and his Future movement withdrew its support in 2017. Lebanon is grappling with an economic crisis that has seen the currency lose more than 90 percent of its value on the black market.

Food prices have skyrocketed and around 80 percent of the population now live below the poverty line, according to the United Nations. Potential donors have repeatedly said any restoration of aid is dependent on the establishment of a viable government committed to rooting out corruption. Hariri's withdrawal from the electoral process could cast doubt over the upcoming vote, seen as a key step in meeting the demands of the international community.

"I see this is as the makings of a Sunni boycott of

the upcoming Lebanese parliamentary elections, which will most likely be postponed," said Maha Yahya, an analyst with the Carnegie Middle East Center. "This move will fuel sectarian tensions, and rally the Sunni partisans," she said. In Lebanon's post-war power-sharing system, the prime minister should be a Sunni Muslim, the speaker a Shiite and the president a Maronite Christian.

Hariri first became prime minister in 2009, forming a unity government with Hezbollah and its allies after marathon negotiations. The Tehran-backed group abruptly withdrew its ministers in 2011 and the government collapsed, after which Hariri stayed in self-imposed exile in France and Saudi Arabia. He returned to back a successful 2016 presidential bid by Michel Aoun, a Christian ally of Hezbollah, and formed a new unity government.

He resigned in 2019, days after the eruption of an unprecedented popular uprising demanding an end to corruption and the wholesale removal of the ruling political elite. Hariri was designated again in Oct 2020 to form a technocratic government but he failed to broker a cabinet deal and eventually threw in the towel. His announcement had been anticipated for days but his speech sparked angry reactions among some of his supporters, who torched tyres and blocked streets in some of the capital's Sunni strongholds. — AFP

Local

As health insurance hike looms, questions remain on future of healthcare for expats

Report says KD 130 annual health insurance fee to start in 2023

By Ahmad Jabr and Chidi Emmanuel

KUWAIT: Foreign residents in Kuwait could be required to pay a KD 130 annual health insurance fee instead of the current KD 50 to renew their visas as early as 2023, according to a recent report by Al-Rai quoting sources at the Health Assurance Hospitals Company (Dhaman). While the increase is far from confirmed, residents realize it's inevitable, as plans to introduce a new health insurance system for the country's expatriate community have been in the works for years.

But many foreign workers have voiced concerns over the proposed hike. "It will surely come to pass. A bill like this always starts like a rumor or unconfirmed report, but before you know it, it will become a law. I pray the authorities will not approve this; otherwise, it will hurt a lot of people and families who are already struggling to survive in Kuwait," Filipino expat Margaret Angelo told Kuwait Times.

The current plan is for Dhaman to provide health services to residents covered under its insurance plan through a network of new hospitals and clinics distributed around Kuwait. The company is currently finalizing preparations to inaugurate the first hospital in its network, which is likely to happen by late 2022. Once the hospital opens and the company's new integrated system enters operation, the Interior Ministry will be informed to start collecting the new KD 130 fee for every renewed visa, said the sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity, adding that this will likely happen "by the beginning of next year".

"Actually, anything that goes up in Kuwait doesn't go down again. Before the insurance fee was KD 10-15, after which they increased it to KD 50 - promising to improve on the quality of services. That never happened, but rather things went from bad to worse. We are still receiving the normal paracetamol and basic medicines. Even if they make the health issuance KD 300, we (expats) still won't get good medical services. This is quiet unfortunate," said Dickson, an expat who claimed he spent a lot when his wife was hospitalized, told Kuwait Times.

New healthcare system
The Dhaman hospitals and health insurance program is part of a new healthcare system Kuwait plans to introduce and hopes would improve the quality of healthcare services in a country, where medical facilities have long suffered from overcrowding. Shifting healthcare of its large expatriate population - foreign residents make up nearly 70 percent of Kuwait's total population of around four million - under Dhaman helps alleviate pressure on the public health sector, which would then focus on providing services to Kuwaiti citizens.

According to Dhaman, most basic treatment costs would be covered under its KD 130 annual insurance for expatriates - unlike the current system where residents pay for medical checkups, lab tests, hospital stay, medications and other services at public hospitals and polyclinics on top of the KD 50 mandatory insurance. While the company promises that the increased cost comes with improved quality services, the almost three-fold hike will certainly create financial problems for many in a country, where the average monthly salary for expatriate laborers remains less than KD 300.

Under the law, companies are required to pay the KD 50 government health insurance for their employees. Yet, there are many cases where workers are asked to pay the fee to have their visas renewed, and it is expected that firms would be more inclined to ask their staff to bear the added cost when the hike goes into effect. Even if they don't, employees who sponsor families must still pay the health insurance for each of their respective family members. Therefore, the KD 130 fee will surely create a financial burden that far exceeds many families' current annual budgets.

"COVID and the economic downturn have stretched many foreign workers to the limit. This new additional fee (if approved) will surely send a lot of families packing. I really wonder how a family of six will cope with rent, school fees and other additional expenses," lamented Mahmoud Latif, an African expat.

There is also the question of how the company's medical facilities would be able to serve the country's entire expatriate population of over three million people, especially during the initial stage of



Can the new hospitals handle the pressure?



operation. Dhaman CEO Thamer Arab said in an interview last month that the new healthcare system would help elevate the quality of services in Kuwait's public and private health sectors alike. Pressure on Kuwait's health infrastructure has for years been blamed as the primary cause for deteriorating health services.

This situation raises legitimate questions regarding the new company's ability to handle the expected load on only two hospitals it plans to inaugurate before 2023. "I don't think anything will improve. Giving the expat community only two or three hospitals will surely do more harm than good. It would have been better to scrap the issuance scheme and let them go to any private hospital of their choice," argued Shakira, an American expat. The health ministry has not made public any details about the transition plan, such as whether it would be gradual or if part of the expatriate population would remain covered under the government health insurance program.

What is Dhaman?

Establishment in 2015, the Health Assurance

Hospitals Company (Dhaman) is considered the first Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) healthcare organization in the Middle East as it was founded based on an Amiri directive as part of the national development plan 'New Kuwait Vision 2035'.

Dhaman handles establishing an integrated healthcare system that includes medical insurance programs, as well as building and operating a network of primary healthcare centers and hospitals that cover all areas in Kuwait while applying best professional practices to achieve sustainability in healthcare and investing in the infrastructure of the health sector based on highest international standards and recruiting over 7,000 highly qualified individuals in medical and administrative fields.

The shareholder structure of Dhaman consists of government bodies represented by Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) with 24 percent, a strategic partner from the private sector with 26 percent, and 50 percent of the company's shares were allocated for Kuwaiti citizens through an initial public offering.



KUWAIT: This file photo shows a vendor sitting inside his shop in Mubarakiya Market in Kuwait City. This picture is used for illustration purposes only. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Expats over 60 hope decision ends year-long anxiety

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower yesterday approved the renewal of work permits of residents aged over 60 years without a university degree for KD 250, in addition to private health insurance, during a meeting chaired by Justice Minister Jamal Al-Jalawi. The decision is reviewable after one year. The law, which was supposed to be implemented in January 2021, was passed in 2020, but suspended due to fierce opposition by individuals and many groups here.

Nanay Vera said she has been extending her residency for the past six months, which caused her great anxiety. "I cannot sleep because I never had any problem with my documents in Kuwait. Now it is killing me. I do not want to go home because I am still young. I can work and I don't have any health problems," she said. "I don't want them to think I am no longer capable of working," she said.

Vera works as a restaurant supervisor at a family business in Fahaheel. "I've experienced wars and the pandemic here in Kuwait. I ended

up having no partner in life - no husband, no kids - because of my work in Kuwait. I stayed focused and didn't want to bother anyone. Two years back I heard about this law and have been constantly stressed. But I hope Kuwait reconsiders the decision, as it's unfair and discriminatory. I will go back home if they won't renew my visa," she added.

Since the decision was imposed in 2020, many non-degree holders left the country for good. Nonetheless, many residents who raised their families here were still hoping for a miracle, which came true yesterday with the PAM announcement.

Renan said he was ready to go home before the new rule was announced. "I have grandchildren whom I am trying to help. I want to stay for at least two more years," he said. Renan used to work as driver for a food company, but when the company cut its staff, he was included in the retrenchment. "I bought a driver's visa and continued to work for the past 10 years. Now I am 61 years old. My visa expired in September 2021 and I am here on extensions only. I hope the new visa rule is final, as I am not ready yet to go back home for good. KD 250 is reasonable, but not more than that," he said. Renan makes KD 400 in his private transport job. When the ban was in force, the interior ministry issued temporary residency permits valid from one to three months 'on humanitarian grounds' for this category of expatriates pending a final solution from PAM.

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News in brief

Kuwait, US eye
closer defense ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's defense ministry and the US Department of Defense assembled via video link yesterday for a fresh round of talks aiming to push bilateral ties to greater levels. The Kuwaiti side, headed by Major General Fahad Al-Turaiji, engaged their American counterparts, led by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Dana Stroul, in discussions over matters of mutual concern, said a defense ministry statement. Bilateral ties, which date back decades, have come a long way in recent years, both sides agreed.

Kuwait decries
Houthi attacks

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry yesterday emphatically denounced the cowardly terrorist attacks launched by Houthi militias by firing drones and ballistic missiles against civilians and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia and UAE. In a statement, the ministry said Houthi militias' continued targeting of civilians and civilian areas, and their insistence on defying the international community, breaching international humanitarian law and deliberately destabilizing regional security and stability, underline the serious behavior of these militias.

Assembly holds
special session

KUWAIT: The National Assembly will be holding a special session today based on a parliamentary request to look into a law proposing the increase of Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB) capital. The residential and real estate committee discussed in a meeting on Sunday a draft law to increase KCB capital with the attendance of Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid, as well as officials from Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and KCB.

Council members act
against demolition

KUWAIT: Five members of the Municipal Council filed a request yesterday against demolishing the Palace of Justice's building in Kuwait City after the courtroom's planned relocation to a new site. They called for restoring and maintaining the structure as a historical landmark under the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters.

Timetable for Gulf
railway authority

RIYADH: GCC ministries of communication and transportation have approved a timetable to begin a 12-month process to piece together the Gulf Railway Authority during the committee's meeting on Sunday. A statement by the General Secretariat mentioned that this move comes in implementation of a resolution to establish the authority issued by the GCC leaders in their 42nd summit in Riyadh last December. Adding, the Sunday's meeting was also attended by Saudi Minister of Transport and Logistics Saleh Al-Jasser and the GCC General Secretariat Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.

ALAFCO to lease
jets to Alitalia

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Aviation Lease and Finance Company (ALAFCO) said yesterday it has agreed to lease a quartet of Airbus aircraft to Italy's state-owned carrier Alitalia for 12 years from the date of delivery, which is expected later this year. The deal is a testament to growing global demand for ALAFCO's aircraft despite the hardships thrust upon the aviation industry by the COVID pandemic, the company's CEO Adel Al-Banwan said in a statement. He said Italy's state-owned carrier represents a "valuable addition" to ALAFCO's growing clientele, hailing the deal as a major feather in the company's cap.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Mannequins are lined up at Souq Mubarakiya yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait going through unprecedented
wave of pandemic: Health Minister

KUWAIT: Kuwait is going through an unprecedented wave of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), stated Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed, adding that with the medical staff's efforts and the support of the community, it will pass.

Kuwait reported a record 5,176 new COVID-19 cases yesterday in addition to one death and 4,337 recoveries. Meanwhile, the number of patients in ICU's increased from 61 on Sunday to 65 yesterday. The number of patients hospitalized also increased from 377 to 397, while total active cases rose from 44,506 to 45,344. The percentage of daily new cases to new tests increased from 16.5 percent to 18 percent, while the percentage of recovery remained almost unchanged at 90.5 percent, according to the health ministry's bulletin.

After the inauguration of Al-Sabahiya Western Health Center, Dr Saeed said in a

statement yesterday that this turn of events requires joining efforts with workers in hospitals, noting that vaccines against the novel coronavirus are available. Dr Saeed added that more than 5,000 infection cases are being listed in some days, noting that primary care is an important part of the development of the health system, as it provides high-level medical care to patients.

In a similar statement, Director of Al-Ahmadi Health District Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti said that there are 31 health centers in the district, after re-opening Al-Sabahiya Western Health Center, indicating that the center is supported by an electronic follow-up system linked to Al-Adan Hospital through which information is exchanged. Moreover, more medical centers are to be rehabilitated or reopened, bringing the total number to 37 centers in the district, he pointed out. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed is seen during a tour at the newly-inaugurated Al-Sabahiya Western Health Center yesterday. —KUNA

#Education4PeaceQ8: Changing
Course, Transforming Education

KUWAIT: "The time has come to reignite our collective commitment to education" - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. This year, the UN marks the International Day of Education under the theme "Changing Course, Transforming Education". As highlighted in the recently published UNESCO's global Futures of Education report, transforming the future requires an urgent rebalancing of our relationships with each other, with the nature as well as with technology that permeates our lives, bearing breakthrough opportunities while raising serious concerns for equity, inclusion and democratic participation.

This year's International Day of Education will be a platform to showcase the most important transformations that have to be nurtured to realize everyone's fundamental right to education and build more sustainable, inclusive and peaceful futures. It will generate debate around how to strengthen education as "a public endeavor and a common good", how to steer the digital transformation, support teachers, safeguard the planet and unlock the potential in every person to contribute to collective well-being and our shared home.

Dr Tarek Elsheikh, Representative of UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator to the State of Kuwait said: "In Kuwait, it is no different: the UN is

collaborating with Abdul-Aziz Al-Babtain Foundation, through marking a series of the UN international events, to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels locally and internationally."

"Al-Babtain Foundation is a key partner who translates the true meaning of culture of peace through education. Prof Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, an eminent Kuwaiti poet and writer was awarded recently by UNESCO on Arabic Language Day in recognition of his well-known and pioneering achievements in communication between civilizations. It is a great opportunity for the UN in Kuwait to join forces to promote quality education for peace and development in achieving the global goals in Kuwait and beyond," Dr Elsheikh added.

Prof Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain refer to his book "Contemplation for Peace, p32" where he says: "We must all understand that if we want to enshrine something and make it eternal as a value, a symbol, or a wisdom, then it must be taught to an entire generation, and this generation will carry its banner and advance it make it part of the culture. There is no doubt that education is a right to all human beings: it is the highest right, or in other words, the universal

right of all human rights."

Dr Anna Paolini, Director of the UNESCO Office in Doha and Representative to the countries of the Gulf and Yemen, emphasized: "This year we celebrate the International Day of Education in a moment when education systems are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and grappling with additional challenges given by the new waves of the virus spread. More than ever, we are reminded of the multiple dimensions of learning institutions as learning, well-being, social and protection sites for children and youth. UNESCO's flagship report on the Futures of Education calls for a new social contract where all involved actors share a similar vision of the public purposes of education. Concerted and coordinated efforts, principles of participation, effective partnerships, including the private sectors, are key to deliver on the Sustainable Development Agenda. It is time now to reimagining learning institutions as sites of inclusion and equity, where the well-being of children and youth is promoted to build the societies and futures we strive for, and lifelong learning opportunities are more widely made available."

As we continue to work with the government of Kuwait and national partners on advancing this national priority, and promoting Human Capital and Knowledge Economy - Redirecting Education and Training in Kuwait, where strategic investment in education is identified as one of the most critical development areas to accel-

erate the process of the knowledge economy in the country. The United Nations in Kuwait collaboration with Al-Babtain foundation will be announced today 24th January 2022, launching an initiative to mark the "International Day for Education", targeting university students in Kuwait between the age of 18 to 25. Participating students should submit papers which generate innovative solutions for transformations - in view with the current situation - to build/accommodate more equitable and inclusive education systems that will accelerate progress towards SDG4 (Quality Education) and SDG16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions).

Main objectives of the initiative is to:

1- Showcase best practices locally with a potential transfer of knowledge in the areas of advanced digital inclusion, climate action, promoting culture of peace, youth, and women empowerment.

2- Spotlight student voices on what changes and innovations they want to see to make their education more fit for purpose.

3- Showcase the positive impact of an inclusive society "a society of all" as one of the key goals of social development (inclusion, integration, cohesion, and participation).

Without inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all, countries will not succeed in achieving gender equality and breaking the cycle that is leaving millions of children, youth and adults behind.

Indian School of Excellence
introduces educational robot 'NINO'

KUWAIT: In today's fast paced life, robotics and artificial intelligence are an integral part of our lives. Students have started using more and more gadgets for studies as well as other recreational activities. To keep their students at par with their daily requirements, robotics is introduced at Indian School of Excellence, Kuwait from Grade 1. They get exposure to both Computer Science where they learn how to use computers and then in Robotics class, they get trained on how to use those lessons starting from simple block-based programming, like scratch for game development and MIT App Inventor for mobile app development, setting up simple circuits on a bread board in electronics.

Building a robot involves different areas of expertise and for that purpose we have introduced the subject from the basic level. These classes have been introduced with the idea of giving a Stem-based learning approach to children enabling them to think out of the box, conceptualize an idea, design, program it and implement. Classes 1 and 2 will be working on projects like Pocket Flashlight, Table fans in Electronics and Game Development. Class 3 onwards 3D designing is introduced for some basic objects like a dumbbell, wrench, screwdriver, table lamp apart from Block based programming for Game Development. Concept of



Microcontrollers are introduced to help with automation related projects, eg home automation in Class 5 and 6. The presence of the humanoid educational robot 'NINO' makes each class more exciting, educational as well as amusing for the students.

The Robotics Team at Indian School Excellence, Kuwait aims at unleashing the creativity in all students, encouraging them to explore their ideas, guiding them to convert the ideas into designs and help them to turn their designs into projects.



Afghan women activists feel betrayed by Oslo talks

Thousands of Sudanese brave tear gas to protest military rule

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BRUSSELS: British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (L) fist bumps with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg while posing prior to a meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels yesterday. — AFP

NATO bolsters eastern flank as fears mount over Ukraine crisis

US, UK, Australia order diplomats' families to leave Kyiv • EU readies fresh €1.2bn aid package

KYIV: NATO said yesterday it was sending jets and ships to bolster its eastern European flank, as the US and EU looked to coordinate a tough response to Russia if it invades Ukraine.

Tensions have soared over Russia's deployment of some 100,000 troops and heavy armour at its neighbour's borders, despite the Kremlin's insistence it is not planning a new incursion.

The United States, Britain and Australia ordered diplomats' families to leave Kyiv, while France told its citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Ukraine.

But both Kyiv and the European Union's foreign policy chief said any withdrawal of diplomatic personnel appeared premature, amid doubts over how imminent any attack could be.

Top US diplomat Antony Blinken was to dial in to a meeting of EU counterparts in Brussels to brief them on his meeting Friday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, where the two sides failed to make a breakthrough but agreed to keep talking.

The US is trying to marshal its allies to prepare an unprecedented package of sanctions for Moscow if it sends in more of its forces—and European Union members insist they could hit the

Kremlin with "massive consequences" within days if needed.

The US-led NATO alliance said its members were placing troops "on standby" and sending ships and jets to bolster eastern Europe's defences in response to the Russian buildup, pointing to recent decisions by Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands to mobilise forces.

"NATO will continue to take all necessary measures to protect and defend all allies," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said. The Kremlin accused the alliance of ramping up tensions through "information hysteria" and "concrete actions", adding that the risk of an offensive by Ukrainian troops against pro-Russia separatists was "very high."

EU foreign ministers will sound out Blinken over a written response Washington has committed to provide to Moscow this week after the Kremlin laid down a series of security demands that would stop Ukraine joining NATO and roll back the alliance's forces in eastern Europe.

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc has as yet no plans to pull diplomatic personnel out of Kyiv, adding there was no need to

"dramatise" the situation while talks with Russia continued.

'Never seen before'

The EU-in consultation with the US and other allies-is pushing to put together a package of sanctions against Moscow that it hopes will help deter Russia from any military action.

Foreign ministers are not expected to give approval to any options for sanctions yesterday, but an EU source said Russia's mammoth oil and gas supplies to Europe could be targeted. "There's no doubt we are ready to react forcefully with comprehensive sanctions-never seen before," Danish Foreign Minister Denmark FM Jeppe Kofod said.

The 27-nation bloc faces a complex task compiling its raft of measures as its members have starkly differing approaches and ties to Russia. The new government in economic powerhouse Germany has faced criticism from Kyiv over its refusal to send arms to Ukraine and hesitation over calls to cut Moscow from the global SWIFT payment system.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock insisted any further aggression from Moscow would get a "clear response" from Europe and talked up economic support Berlin gives Kyiv.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the bloc was preparing a 1.2-billion-euro emergency financial aid package for Ukraine. Britain, which left the EU at the end of 2020, ramped up the rhetoric with Moscow over the weekend by alleging it had information the Kremlin was seeking to install a "pro-Russian" leader in Kyiv.

And yesterday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned Russia an invasion could prove to be a "new Chechnya"-referring to Moscow's bloody conflict in the 1990s over the territory. Non-NATO member Ireland sounded the alarm over upcoming Russian military exercises off its southwest coast in the international waters of the Atlantic.

The current fears of a Russian invasion follow Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. Kyiv is already fighting a low-level conflict with Russian-backed rebels controlling a chunk of the east of the country that has claimed 13,000 lives in the past eight years. — AFP

Jihadist fighters holed up with minors in Syrian prison

HASAKEH, Syria: Kurdish forces geared up for an assault yesterday on a northeast Syria prison that Islamic State group fighters stormed last week, raising concern over the fate of hundreds of under-age detainees.

IS fighters on Thursday rammed two explosives-laden vehicles into the Kurdish-run Ghwayran prison to launch a brazen jailbreak operation that has plunged the city of Hasakeh into chaos.

The attack, the group's biggest since their once-sprawling proto-state was defeated in 2019, has already killed more than 150 people, including more than 100 among jihadist ranks.

Fighting drove hundreds of residents of Syria's largest Kurdish city to flee, but clashes receded yesterday, with the presence of hundreds of children complicating an assault. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said elite Kurdish forces had moved armoured vehicles inside the main prison yard, ahead of a possible attempt to storm the facility.

The autonomous Kurdish authorities running the region imposed a state of emergency across Hasakeh, after at least seven civilians were caught in the cross-fire. According to rights groups and the United Nations, hundreds of children were being held in Ghwayran, a hugely overcrowded facility where at least 3,500 suspected IS members were held.

More than 700 minors are thought to be held in Ghwayran, a former school converted into a detention facility three years ago when thousands of jihadists were captured in the dying moments of their "caliphate".

Minors 'trapped'

"These children are effectively trapped in Ghwayran prison," said Sara Kayyali, Syria researcher at Human Rights Watch. HRW heard voice messages from an injured minor at Ghwayran who reported "there are dead bodies everywhere,"



HASAKEH, Syria: A member of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) mans a checkpoint in the northern Syrian city of Hasakeh. —AFP

Kayyali said.

"It's not clear if they have any kind of medical assistance," Kayyali added, explaining that most of the minors were aged between 12 and 18.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the autonomous Kurdish authorities' de facto army, charged IS attackers were using children as human shields to prevent an assault. The jihadist group "continues to hold children hostage and is using them as human shields to protect themselves," the SDF said in statement yesterday.

Eva Hinds, a spokesperson for UN children's agency UNICEF, said the plight of the trapped minors, around 10 percent of whom are believed to be 15 or younger, was a source of "grave concern".

"The SDF initially allocated a special section for children. Many of them have adult relatives inside and have since joined them in other sections," Hinds said. The US forces who are based in the region — and were the main support in the Kurdish offensives that put thousands of jihadists into custody three years ago — were heavily deployed in Hasakeh.

US-led coalition helicopters could be seen flying overhead as a full curfew was enforced across the city, an AFP correspondent reported.

"If IS is using these children as human shields, and the SDF and the US-led coalition are trying to retake the prison, then the children are at incredible risk from both sides," Kayyali said. — AFP

Mutinuous soldiers detain Burkina Faso president

OUGADOUGOU: The president of Burkina Faso was arrested yesterday and detained by soldiers along with members of his cabinet, security sources said, one day after troops staged a mutiny in the jihadist-wracked country.

Soldiers rose up at several army bases across the West African state on Sunday, demanding the sacking of the military top brass and more resources to fight the Islamist insurgency that erupted in 2015. President Roch Marc Christian Kabore, in power since 2015 and who won re-election in 2020 vowing to prioritise the fight against the insurgency, has faced rising public anger about failure to stop the bloodshed.

"President Kabore, the head of parliament and the ministers are effectively in the hands of the soldiers" yesterday at the Sangoule Lamizana barracks in the capital Ouagadougou, a security source said.

Tehran says 'possible' to agree on US-Iran prisoners, nuke deal

TEHRAN: Tehran yesterday said it is "possible" to reach an agreement on the two issues of Iran-US prisoners' release and the Vienna talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal. "They are two different paths, but if the other party (the US) has the determination, there is the possibility that we reach a reliable and lasting agreement in both of them in the shortest time," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said during his weekly press conference.

Khatibzadeh's comments came in reaction to remarks made by the US envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, who on Sunday said it is unlikely that



OUGADOUGOU, Region du Centre: A man holds a newspaper with the headline on the mutiny in Ouagadougou yesterday. — AFP

A second security source confirmed the arrest.

The situation was tense and confused in the capital, where mobile internet had been cut on Sunday, making it difficult to verify rumours of a coup in progress. Around 10 hooded troops deployed in front of the headquarters of the national broadcaster RTB yesterday, an AFP journalist said, but it was not immediately clear if they were from the mutineers or had been sent in by the government. — AFP

Washington would strike an agreement unless Tehran releases four US citizens.

"Iran has not accepted any precondition from day one of the negotiations," Khatibzadeh said. He added that "the negotiations are complicated enough, and should not get more complex with complicated remarks".

The four US citizens held in Iran are Iranian-American businessman Siamak Namazi, 50, and his father Baqer, 85, as well as environmentalist Morad Tahbaz, 66, and businessman Emad Sharqi, 57. "It is a humanitarian issue and it was on our agenda, both before these negotiations and during them," Khatibzadeh said, referred to the situation of Iranian nationals kept in US.

Regarding the latest situation of nuclear talks in Vienna, Khatibzadeh said "we are seeing progress in the negotiations in the right direction in Vienna," but "very important issues still remain" which require political decisions by Washington. — AFP

International

Thousands of Sudanese brave tear gas to protest military rule

Sudan's authorities deny using live ammunition against demonstrators

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas yesterday at crowds calling for civilian rule and demanding justice for the scores killed in crackdowns since a military coup nearly three months ago. Thousands of protesters in the capital Khartoum chanting slogans against the army headed toward the presidential palace, an area which security forces had sealed off ahead of the march.

Police forces later fired tear gas to disperse the protesters, according to an AFP correspondent. Protests were also held in cities including Wad Madani, south of the capital, the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, and the eastern state of Gedaref, according to witnesses. "No, no to military rule," and "civilian (rule) is the people's choice" protesters shouted in Wad Madani, according to witness Emad Mohamed. Sudan has been rocked by regular protests since the October 25 military power grab led by general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The coup derailed a civilian-military power-sharing deal, that had been painstakingly negotiated after the 2019 ouster of autocrat Omar al-Bashir, stalling a planned for transition to civilian rule. Anti-coup demonstrations have left at least 73 people killed and hundreds wounded, according to medics.

Sudan's authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition against demonstrators, and insist scores of security personnel have been wounded during protests. A police general was stabbed to death during the unrest earlier this month.

Mass arrests

On Sunday, Sudan's key Umma party vowed "to remove all traces of the coup". It however warned

that the "coup leadership" will "persist with its brutality and come up with new ways to commit violent massacres and launch mass arrests of revolutionaries." Hundreds of pro-democracy activists have been arrested in the crackdown on anti-coup activists.

On Saturday, a leading women rights activist Amira Othman was arrested following a raid on her home in Khartoum, according to a statement by the "No to Women's Oppression" initiative which she leads.

UN special representative Volker Perthes slammed Othman's arrest saying the "arrest and pattern of vio-

“ No to Women's Oppression ”

lence against women's rights activists severely risks reducing their political participation." Other activists from the "resistance committees", informal groups which have been instrumental in organising anti-coup protests, were also arrested late Sunday, according to members who requested anonymity fearing reprisals.

On Friday, Sudanese authorities requested delaying the arrival of UN expert on human rights in Sudan, Adama Dieng, who was appointed in November and had been due to make his first official visit. Last week, senior US diplomats visited Sudan in



KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters demonstrate calling for civilian rule and demanding justice for those killed in crackdowns in the capital Khartoum yesterday. — AFP

a bid to bolster UN-led efforts to cajole the military into restoring a transition to full civilian rule.

Perthes earlier this month launched individual talks with various Sudanese factions in a push to resolve the crisis. The ruling Sovereign Council-formed by Burhan following the coup with himself as chairman-

has welcomed the UN-led dialogue, as have the United States, Britain, neighbouring Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

The Forces for Freedom and Change, Sudan's main civilian bloc, also joined consultations "to restore the democratic transition". — AFP

Burundi must probe prison fire: HRW

NAIROBI: Burundi is yet to conduct a credible and transparent investigation into a prison fire over a month ago that may have killed or injured hundreds of inmates, Human Rights Watch said yesterday. The rights watchdog accused government authorities of failing to conduct a proper inquiry into the December 7 inferno at Gitega Central Prison that officials said claimed 38 lives and injured 69 others.

"More than a month after the tragedy at Gitega prison, the government has failed to give a full and truthful accounting of what happened and to treat family members of the deceased with dignity," Lewis Mudge, central Africa director at HRW, said in a statement.

"The absence of information about the real number and identities of the victims only adds further pain and distress in the wake of unimaginable loss." HRW said the authorities must examine the cause of the blaze that ripped through the rundown and overcrowded prison and ask why inmates were not evacuated or properly accounted for after the disaster.

"They should communicate findings transparently—including the names of the dead and the injured—and fairly prosecute anyone who may be held responsible, if necessary," it said, adding that compensation and other support should be provided to victims' families. Many prisoners were still asleep when the massive blaze erupted before dawn. Vice President Prosper Bazombanza, who visited the scene of the tragedy with several ministers, told reporters that 38 people were killed and 69 seriously hurt. — AFP

Assange wins, to appeal US extradition decision

LONDON: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was yesterday given permission to appeal a decision to extradite him to the United States where he could face a lifetime in prison. Washington wants to put the 50-year-old Australian on trial in connection with the publication of 500,000 secret military files relating to the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The High Court in London in December overturned a lower court's ruling not to send him to the United States on the grounds he would be a suicide risk. But lawyers for Assange then challenged the decision, arguing that the country's highest court should rule on "points of law of general public importance".

"The respondent's application to certify a point of law is granted," said judges Ian Burnett and Timothy Holroyde in a written ruling. The judges stated that they themselves were not granting him a right of appeal at the Supreme Court but Assange had the right to do so himself. It is now for the Supreme Court to decide whether to take the case.

Assange's fiancée and the mother of his two young children, Stella Morris, emerged from the court smiling and visibly relieved. "What happened in court today is precisely what we wanted to happen," she said.

"The situation now is that the Supreme Court has to decide

whether it will hear the appeal. But make no mistake, we won today in court. "If there were justice, the crimes that Julian exposed-war crimes, the killing of innocent civilians-would not be impugned. "Our fight goes on. We will fight this until Julian's free."

Crowds gathered outside the Royal Courts of Justice in central London and welcomed the decision. "I'm relieved beyond words," said Sue Barnett, 61, from Nottingham, central England, holding a placard stating: "10 years enough. Free Assange now." "We were all fearing the worst."

Assange could be jailed for up to 175 years in the United States, although the exact sentence is difficult to estimate. WikiLeaks editor Kristinn Hrafnsson hailed Monday's ruling as a "partial victory", calling the US charges against Assange were "a blatant terrorist attack on press freedom worldwide."

Protracted case

At a two-day hearing in October, US lawyers argued that a lower court judge had not given sufficient weight to other expert testimony about Assange's mental state. They also pointed to diplomatic assurances provided since the January decision that Assange would not be held in punishing isolation at a federal supermax prison, and would receive



LONDON: WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson (C) makes a statement outside the High Court in London yesterday. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was given permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court against a decision to extradite him to the United States. — AFP

appropriate care. Approving that appeal, two judges accepted the new assurances, noting they were not unusual in such cases and "solemn undertakings offered by one government to another".

They ordered the case to be returned to Westminster Magistrates' Court with the direction that it be sent to interior minister Priti Patel for the final say. Assange has been held at London's high-security Belmarsh prison since 2019 because he is seen as a flight risk, having previously skipped bail in 2012 over claims he sexually assaulted two women in Sweden.

He spent seven years at Ecuador's embassy in London to avoid being

removed to Sweden to face the allegations that were later dropped. A coalition of anti-war groups and thousands of peace campaigners on Friday signed a statement calling for his immediate release.

Morris said he had spent longer in Belmarsh than many prisoners sentenced for violent crimes. Nathan Fuller, director of the Courage Foundation, said: "While the Biden administration is confronting US adversaries over their press freedom shortcomings, it should address its own hypocrisy.

"Locking up Julian Assange for exposing the truth about US wars is an insult to all those struggling for peace and human rights." — AFP

Mexican journalist murdered in Tijuana

TIJUANA, Mexico: A journalist was killed in Tijuana Sunday, the local prosecutor said, the second media worker murdered in less than a week in the northern Mexican border city. Lourdes Maldonado Lopez was "attacked with a firearm while she was in a vehicle," said the Baja California state prosecutor's office. Mexico is one of the world's deadliest countries for reporters.

Media rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) regularly ranks it alongside Afghanistan and Yemen as the world's most dangerous places for news media. Maldonado had worked for several media outlets, including Primer Sistema de Noticias (PSN), which is owned by Jaime Bonilla Valdez, who was governor of Baja California from 2019 to the end of 2021.

She won a lawsuit a few days ago against PSN, which she had been suing for nine years over unfair dismissal, Mexican press reported. Two years ago, Maldonado had asked Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador for "support, help and justice" as she feared for her life, according to a video republished on social media after news broke of her assassination. "I have been on trial for six years with him," she added about the governor, during one of Obrador's press conferences.

'No one to stop them'

Balbina Flores, a Mexico representative of watchdog RSF, told AFP that "it remains to be confirmed" whether Maldonado had official protection. These crimes "send the message that journalists are killed and nothing happens because there is no one to stop them," she said.

NGO the Committee to Protect Journalists called on local authorities to "thoroughly and transparently investigate the attack." Its representative in Mexico, Jan-Albert Hootsen, said he was "shocked and horrified by four brutal attacks on journalists in Mexico in barely two weeks," including a non-fatal knife attack on a media worker in Merida, Yucatan state.

Yesterday, photojournalist Margarito Martinez was found dead near his home in the city. The 49-year-old, who specialized in news related to the police, had a gunshot wound to the head, according to prosecutors.

Authorities were also urged to investigate an attack earlier this month that led to the death of journalist and social media activist Jose Luis Gamboa in the eastern state of Veracruz. Gamboa was taken to the hospital on January 10 after he was stabbed and left lying on the street, but his body was not identified until Friday.

It was unclear if the killing was related to his work. At least seven journalists were murdered in Mexico in 2021, according to an AFP count, although it has not been determined if all the killings were linked to their work. More than 100 reporters have been murdered since 2000 in Mexico and only a fraction of the crimes have resulted in convictions. — AFP

Ex-pope admits giving 'incorrect' info to abuse inquiry

VATICAN CITY: Former pope Benedict XVI yesterday admitted providing incorrect information to a German inquiry about his presence at a 1980 meeting discussing a paedophile priest, blaming an editing "oversight". "He is very sorry for this mistake and asks to be excused," Benedict's personal secretary Georg Ganswein said in a statement cited by the KNA news agency and republished by Vatican News.

But the statement insisted no decision was made at the meeting about reassigning the priest to pastoral duties. An independent report last week found that Benedict XVI, who stood down in 2013, knowingly failed to stop four priests accused of child sex abuse in the 1980s.

The report by law firm Westpfahl Spilker Wastl (WSW) was commissioned by the archdiocese of Munich and Freising to examine how abuse cases were dealt with between 1945 and 2019. Ex-pope Benedict's whose civilian name is Joseph Ratzinger-was the archbishop of Munich from 1977 to 1982.

In one case, a now notorious paedophile priest named Peter Hullermann was transferred to Munich from Essen in western Germany where he had been accused of abusing an 11-year-old boy. Hullermann was reassigned to pastoral duties despite his history and continued to reoffend for many years.

The lawyers said that "to our surprise", Benedict had denied attending the meeting in 1980 at which the decision was made to admit Hullermann to the diocese, despite being quoted directly in the minutes of the meeting.

The statement from the emeritus pope said: "He



Former Pope Benedict XVI

would like to make it clear now that, contrary to what was stated at the hearing, he did attend the Ordinariate meeting on January 15, 1980. "The statement to the contrary was therefore objectively incorrect," it added, while insisting this was "not done out of bad faith, but was the result of an oversight in the editing of his statement".

"Objectively correct, however, remains the statement, documented by the files, that in his meeting no decision was made about a pastoral assignment of the priest in question," it said. "Rather, only the request to provide him with accommodation during his therapeutic treatment in Munich was granted."

The statement said further explanations would follow but the 94-year-old pope, who is said to be in shaky health, is still reading the inquiry report. "At present, he is carefully reading the statements set down there, which fill him with shame and pain about the suffering inflicted on the victims," it said. — AFP

International

Afghan women activists feel betrayed by Oslo talks

'Norway has invited terrorists who have no respect for women's and human rights'

OSLO: Afghan women protesting against the Taliban's harsh rule say they have been betrayed by Norway, the first Western nation to host the hardline Islamists since they seized power in August. Led by the foreign minister, a Taliban delegation travelled first class on a plane specially chartered by the Norwegian government to Oslo for meetings with Western officials and members of Afghan civil society.

Women activists who have been facing intimidation by the Taliban after staging small and scattered protests are outraged by the diplomatic efforts.

"I am sorry for such a country as Norway for organising this summit, sitting with terrorists, and making deals," said Wahida Amiri, an activist who has protested regularly in Kabul since the Taliban's return. "It saddens me a lot. Shame on the world for accepting this and opening doors to the Taliban," she told AFP.

Several women — too afraid to step outside — instead protested in their homes in the cities of Kabul, Bamiyan and Mazar-i-Sharif, in images posted to social media.

"Norway has invited criminals and terrorists who have no respect for women's rights and human rights," an activist from Bamiyan who asked not to be identified told AFP. "They (the Taliban) are against women and humanity and they do not believe in freedom of speech."

Another activist in the city said women were concerned their rights would be "traded behind closed doors" in Oslo. The Taliban have promised a softer rule than their last stint in power between 1996 and 2001 when women were banned from

leaving the house without a male chaperone and forced to wear the all-covering burqa.

Many women, however, remain deeply mistrustful and afraid of the new government. Women's rights improved slightly over the past 20 years in the patriarchal Muslim nation, but the gains were mainly limited to cities.

Last week, women activists said two of their comrades, Tamana Zaryabi Paryani and Parwana Ibrahimkhel, were seized from their homes in Kabul after taking part in a demonstration. The Taliban have denied any involvement.

Isolated from talks

Some Afghans argue that engaging with the Taliban is necessary to save the country from collapse, with millions suffering from hunger. Afghanistan's humanitarian situation has deteriorated drastically since August when the Taliban stormed back to power 20 years after being toppled.

International aid came to a halt, worsening the plight of millions of people already hungry after several severe droughts. No country has yet recognised the new government, and Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt stressed the talks would "not represent a legitimisation or recognition of the Taliban".

During the first day of talks on Sunday — aimed at addressing the deepening humanitarian crisis — the Taliban met with Afghan civil society members, including women activists and journalists flown in from Kabul.

Women's rights campaigners took part in previ-

Women activists are outraged by the diplomatic efforts



OSLO: (L-R) Mahboub Seraj of the Afghan Women's Network, Ismail Ghazanfar and Heda Khamoush attend a meeting with international special representatives and representatives of Afghans with a background from civil society yesterday in Oslo, Norway. —AFP

ous negotiations between the Taliban and the United States leading to a deal in Doha that ultimately failed to stop the militants seizing control of Afghanistan.

Hoda Khamoush, a women's rights defender who was invited from Kabul to the Oslo talks, warned the West that by "remaining silent or tolerating the Taliban, you are partly responsible for these crimes".

Mahboub Seraj, who also took part in the discussions, said she was "hopeful" and the Taliban had "acknowledged and heard us" during the talks.

But many feel isolated from the meeting, held in a high-end hilltop hotel. "As a protester seeking the rights of women in Afghanistan, facing street fights with the Taliban in Kabul... (these women) cannot represent us in the Oslo summit," said one woman in a news clip posted to social media. —AFP

S Korea presidential candidate's wife threatens to jail critical reporters

SEOUL: A South Korean opposition party was struggling yesterday to contain the fallout after the wife of its presidential candidate threatened to "jail all reporters" who criticised her husband. It is the second scandal to hit People Power Party candidate Yoon Suk-yeol since taped recordings and court transcripts of his wife speaking to a journalist became public last week following a court battle.

Yoon is locked in a tight race with Democratic Party candidate Lee Jae-myung ahead of the

March presidential election, with recent polls falling within the margin for error. "If I make it to the Blue House, I will put them all in jail," said Kim Keon-hee, referring to the presidential office, in the latest comments.

She said critical media outlets would likely be prosecuted under her husband's future administration. "Police will charge them whether we order them to or not," she told a journalist in recorded comments. Last Tuesday, Yoon's party was forced to distance itself from remarks in which Kim expressed strong support for a former politician now jailed for rape and was dismissive of the country's #MeToo movement. Yoon's campaign manager on Monday said the party was "trying to find the best way forward" after the would-be first lady's most recent remarks were made public. Kim's comments have touched a raw nerve in South Korea, a robust democracy where strong libel laws can result in reporters facing jail time over their work.

South Korea is ranked 42nd in the World Press

Freedom Index compiled by Reporters without Borders. In a poll by the Korea Economic Daily released yesterday, more than half of respondents said that the comments by Yoon's wife would negatively affect his approval.

The party had lodged multiple injunctions in a bid to keep the recordings out of the public domain, but all were rejected by the courts. The comments by a woman who could become the country's next first lady "reflect her views... and thus are subject to public interest and inspection", the Seoul Central District Court ruled last week. —AFP



Kim Keon-hee

China lifts Xi'an lockdown as Beijing virus fight ramps up

BEIJING: One of China's longest coronavirus lockdowns ended yesterday with authorities announcing the lifting of most restrictions in the northern city of Xi'an. The historic city's 13 million residents had been confined to their homes since December 22 after the discovery of a COVID-19 cluster that grew to more than 2,100 cases—China's largest outbreak in months. With the Winter Olympics beginning next week, Chinese authorities have been scrambling to eradicate flare-ups in several major cities, most recently Beijing, where more than 40 cases have been recorded since mid-January.

While China's coronavirus caseload pales in comparison to global numbers, the country's strict "zero-Covid" strategy means even the slightest hint of the virus is met with contact tracing, targeted lockdowns and long quarantines. Officials began removing Xi'an restrictions last week after daily cases slowed to single digits.

Residents with a clean bill of health are now permitted to leave the city, while public transport and economic activity have fully resumed now that Xi'an has been deemed a "low-risk" area, virus control authorities said in a statement yesterday. But travellers to Xi'an, home of the famed Terracotta Warriors, still need to provide a negative test result,

while those from virus-affected areas of China are barred entry. Xi'an authorities came under fire for their handling of the prolonged lockdown, which saw food supply issues and medical tragedies stemming from patients being denied hospital access.

Beijing outbreak

In Beijing, authorities are ramping up already-strict virus controls after a recent spike in cases, which coincides with the traditional nationwide travel rush before the Lunar New Year. People in the capital who buy over-the-counter fever medication are now required to undergo virus testing, while all two million residents of one district were screened on Sunday after a local Delta outbreak involving frozen food workers was found.

Authorities said yesterday they would launch a second round of testing in the district. Meanwhile, Shanghai official Wu Jingfei told Chinese media that residents should avoid leaving the city unless absolutely necessary, after reporting a fresh locally transmitted case yesterday.

Authorities have suggested Beijing's Omicron outbreak may have originated from contaminated international mail, though experts said there was little evidence to support the idea. Chinese customs authorities will step up testing of imported refrigerated food—which has also been blamed for carrying the virus into the country—and impose curbs including "suspension of their import business" on companies that bring in Covid-positive cargo, the official Xinhua news agency reported Monday.

Leaders are anxious to avoid a full-scale lockdown of the capital ahead of a Winter Olympics they

istry said late Sunday it saw 39 warplanes from China enter Taiwan's ADIZ—the second-largest number of incursions on record, which is shared with October 2 last year.

It added that it scrambled its own aircraft to broadcast warnings on Sunday and deployed air defence missile systems to track the jets that entered its zone. The warplanes included 24 J-16 fighters—which experts say are among China's favourite jets for testing Taiwan's air defences — 10 J-10 fighters and one nuclear-capable H-6 bomber.

It remains unclear why China launched such a large single-day mission. Another 13 Chinese warplanes entered the island's ADIZ yesterday. Among them was eight J-16 fighters and two J-16D planes—a warplane introduced in an air show last year that is capable of neutralising various types of radar and communication systems, according to defence websites.

The rash of incursions come on the heels of the United States and Japan carrying out naval exercises



BEIJING: People queue next to a poster of Bing Dwen Dwen, mascot of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Games, to have their swab samples taken to test for the COVID-19 in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

are determined to pull off smoothly, urging residents to stay put during the Lunar New Year holiday.

Thousands of athletes, media workers and foreign dignitaries arriving for the Olympics will operate in a "closed-loop" bubble strictly cut off from the outside world. On Sunday, it was announced that more than 70 Games participants had tested positive inside the bubble so far.

The International Olympic Committee said yesterday that Beijing organisers were easing their Covid test standards, allowing more athletes to avoid a positive result and continue participating in the Games despite having trace amounts of the virus in their bodies. China yesterday reported 18 domestic transmissions, six in Beijing. —AFP

in the Philippine Sea, an area that includes waters just east of Taiwan. Ten US Navy ships, including aircraft carriers USS Carl Vinson and USS Abraham Lincoln, participated in exercises with Japan from January 17-22 "for effective deterrence and response", Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force tweeted Monday.

Taiwan only started regularly publicising its data on air incursions in September 2020. October remains the busiest month on record, with 196 incursions, 149 of which were made over just four days as Beijing marked its annual National Day.

The defence zone is not the same as Taiwan's territorial airspace but includes a far greater area that overlaps with part of China's own ADIZ. Beijing has ramped up pressure on Taiwan since Tsai Ing-wen was elected president in 2016, as she considers the island a sovereign nation and not part of "one China". Last year, Taiwan recorded 969 incursions by Chinese warplanes into its ADIZ, according to a database compiled by AFP—more than double the roughly 380 carried out in 2020. —AFP

News in brief

German lecture hall shooting

FRANKFURT: A gunman injured several people in a shooting inside a lecture hall at Heidelberg University in southwestern Germany yesterday, police said, adding that the perpetrator was now dead. "A lone perpetrator injured several people in a lecture hall with a long gun. The perpetrator is dead," Mannheim police said in a statement. A major police operation was under way at the university's Neuenheimer Feld campus, they added on Twitter, urging people to steer clear of the area "so that rescue workers and emergency services can travel freely". Heidelberg is a picturesque university town in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, home to a population of around 160,000 people. The university's Neuenheimer Feld campus hosts natural sciences departments, part of the university clinic as well as a botanical garden. Germany has been hit in recent years by a spate of attacks, mostly perpetrated by jihadists or far-right militants. —AFP

China expels 3 officials for corruption

BEIJING: Three senior Chinese officials—including a former top banking regulator—have been expelled from the ruling Communist Party for alleged corruption and placed under criminal investigation, the country's graft watchdog said yesterday. The expulsions come days after Chinese authorities vowed "no mercy" in their ongoing anti-corruption campaign, which has brought down high-flying politicians and influential tycoons, ahead of a key political meeting that could secure President Xi Jinping a third term. Critics argue China's anti-corruption campaign—which Beijing says has already netted more than a million officials—has served as a way to remove political enemies since Xi came to power in 2013. Cai Esheng, former vice chairman of the China Banking Regulatory Commission, as well as former supreme court official Meng Xiang and former deputy director of the national food administration Xu Ming have all been expelled for "serious violation of discipline and laws", the party's top enforcement body said in three separate statements yesterday. —AFP

S Africa probes fire at airbase

JOHANNESBURG: The South African army is investigating a fire that broke out at its main air force base on Sunday, just weeks after a blaze ripped through parliament. The fire broke out around 7 pm (1700 GMT) at a fuel storage section of the Waterkloof base in the capital Pretoria, the defence forces said in a statement. It was extinguished within an hour and no structural damage was reported. "The cause of the fire, the magnitude of the damage... will form part of an investigation that will interrogate all events and or incidents that might have led to the fire breakout," the South African National Defence Force said. A huge fire extensively damaged the parliament building in Cape Town some weeks ago and a man went on the rampage breaking windows of the Constitutional Court building on Johannesburg, raising concerns about in public buildings. President Cyril Ramaphosa said earlier this month that such incidents undermined the country's security and stability. —AFP

China sends largest incursion of jets into Taiwan defence zone

TAIPEI: China sent 39 warplanes—mostly fighter jets—into Taiwan's air defence zone on Sunday, the island's government said, in the second-largest daily incursion on record. Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by China, which sees the self-ruled, democratic island as part of its territory to eventually be reclaimed, by force if necessary.

The final quarter of 2021 saw a massive spike of incursions from China into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ), with the biggest single day coming on October 4, when 56 Chinese warplanes entered the zone. The island's defence min-

Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2022

Britain forces airlines to fly more as economy reopens

UK bank jobs soar despite COVID, Brexit strains

LONDON: Airlines must operate more flights in Britain this summer as demand recovers from the pandemic or lose lucrative take-off and landing slots, the UK government warned yesterday. Carriers operating in Britain are currently using about 50 percent of their slots as the sector continues to recover from the long-running COVID crisis.

This has helped to ensure that airlines have avoided carbon-intensive "ghost flights" - with none or few travellers during pandemic restrictions. Carriers operating in Britain have traditionally been required to use 80 percent of their slots, but the target was suspended owing to COVID. From the end of March, carriers must use slots at least 70 percent of the time in order to keep them, the Department for Transport (DfT) said in a statement yesterday. But airlines will also "benefit from added flexibility over when they are justified not to use them", the DfT said.

During the pandemic, the rule had been eased "to provide financial stability to the sector and prevent environmentally damaging ghost flights", added aviation minister Robert Courts. "As demand for flights returns, it's right we gradually move back to the previous rules while making sure we continue to provide the sector with the support it needs." Yesterday's news was welcomed by London airports. The move "strikes the right balance between driv-

ing recovery and promoting competition", said a Heathrow spokeswoman.

The aviation sector was slammed by the COVID-19 health emergency that erupted in early 2020, grounding planes worldwide and decimating demand for air travel. Recovery has been hampered by frequent changes to travel restrictions and testing requirements following the emergence of the Omicron variant late last year.

Bank jobs soar

In another development, Britain's banking sector saw job vacancies hit a record high last year as the economy reopened from lockdowns and London avoided a post-Brexit exodus of workers, a survey showed yesterday. The number of job openings soared by 129 percent between 2020 and 2021, according to a study by recruiters Morgan McKinley and data analysts

Airline sector continues to recover from COVID crisis



Vacancysoft. "Vacancies in the UK's banking industry hit an all-time high in 2021... despite Covid restrictions, general sector underperformance and issues such as the post-Brexit financial services agreement still unresolved," the study said.

US investment bank JP Morgan Chase was the industry's leading recruiter in the UK last year, with vacancies up 122 percent. Among British banks, NatWest led the way with



MUNICH, Germany: In this file photo, an Airbus plane of the German airline Lufthansa rolls at the "Franz-Josef-Strauss" airport in Munich. —AFP

vacancies up almost fourfold, as retail banks benefit from strong mortgage demand and higher interest rates. UK vacancies at Swiss bank UBS, however, dipped 3.5 percent. Hakan Enver, UK managing director at Morgan McKinley, said companies "felt confident in hiring again" after having put thousands of roles on hold in 2020.

Despite holding onto jobs in the wake of Brexit, London over the past year has lost out

to European rivals on equity trading volumes. The 'City' financial sector has also yet to strike a post-Brexit deal with Brussels on equivalence, which would allow London-based firms to fully operate in Europe. Banking job vacancies in London rose by 96 percent to 29,000 in 2021. "Brexit did not usher in the dramatic movement of finance professionals away from the UK as many previously thought - particularly in the capital," the study said. —AFP

Stocks slide on Ukraine tensions, Wall St selloff

LONDON: Global stock markets mostly sank yesterday, hit by fears over simmering Ukraine tensions — and a painful pre-weekend selloff on Wall Street. Asian indices mainly fell with investors' focus on the Federal Reserve's next policy meeting this week, where officials are expected to unveil their US interest-rate plans to battle soaring inflation.

Bitcoin continued to struggle, having hit a six-month low at the weekend. London stocks slumped by 1.2 percent at midday, while Frankfurt and Paris each shed 1.8 percent in early afternoon eurozone trade. Economic growth in the eurozone and UK slowed sharply in January, key surveys showed yesterday, as the Omicron variant hit consumer spending.

Geopolitical concerns surrounding Russia's military build-up on the Ukraine border also weighed on traders' minds. "Ukraine conflict concerns, inflation worries and COVID woes hang over financial markets," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst, Susannah Streeter.

"The threat of conflict breaking out on the doorstep is hanging over European indices, as hopes begin to fade that there will be fresh meaningful moves from diplomats." Tensions have soared over Russia's deployment of some 100,000 troops and heavy armor at Ukraine's borders, despite the Kremlin's insistence it is not planning a new incursion. It comes as the European Union draws up an emergency 1.2-billion-euro aid package for Ukraine.

Wall Street slump

Wall Street tumbled again Friday following a plunge in Netflix shares that sent the Nasdaq further into correction territory, spurring questions of just how far the market will fall. Tech firms — which soared on the back of the pandemic — led the retreat in New York after weak subscriber figures from Netflix fuelled concerns that the end of lockdowns and reopening of economies is seeing consumers changing their spending habits.

That comes as traders contemplate the end of the ultra-loose monetary policies put in place by central banks in early 2020 to cushion the impact of COVID-19 containment measures, with the Fed expected to start lifting interest



SEOUL: Currency dealers walk past screens showing South Korea's benchmark stock index (center) and the Korean won/USD exchange rate (right) in a trading room at Hana Bank in Seoul. —AFP

rates from March. Minutes from the Fed's December gathering indicated officials were turning more hawkish as they grow increasingly concerned about inflation, which is sitting at a four-decade high.

Commentators have tipped the first increase in borrowing costs in March followed by another three hikes before the end of the year, while the central bank is also forecast to start running down its vast bond holdings that have helped keep rates down. The prospect of

tighter policy has battered markets in recent weeks, with the Nasdaq in New York down about 15 percent from its recent peak — tech firms are considered more susceptible to higher rates.

The S&P 500 is down more than eight percent from a record high touched at the start of the month. Oil prices steadied yesterday on optimism that demand will improve as countries reopen and the Omicron variant shows signs it may be peaking. —AFP



MONTGISCARD: A photograph shows petrol nozzles at a gas station in Montgiscard, southwestern France yesterday as oil prices are at their highest in France since 2014. —AFP

Eurozone growth slows as Omicron curbs hit spending

BRUSSELS: Economic growth in the eurozone slowed sharply in January, a key survey showed yesterday, as new coronavirus restrictions hit consumer spending, raising a new obstacle for the region's recovery. In its closely watched monthly survey, IHS Markit said the deceleration, which brought growth to an 11-month low, was completely attributable to the services sector, with manufacturers enjoying a reprieve from supply challenges and seeing a boost in activity.

IHS Markit said that the sky-high caseloads for the highly contagious Omicron variant had disrupted consumer-facing services through staff absences and continued social distancing. The purchasing managers' index (PMI) from IHS Markit dropped to 52.4 in January, after posting 53.3 points in December and hitting a high 59 points in August. A figure above 50 indicates growth.

Tourism, travel and recreation were "especially hard hit", said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit. However, he added that the impact on other parts of the economy was "relatively muted" and that the overall fallout from Omicron "so far looks less severe than prior waves". The overall trend masked different situations in different countries.

Germany, the leading European economy, recorded a rebound in activity in January, thanks to a robust increase in industrial production and a return to growth in the services sector, said IHS Markit. On the other hand, growth in France reached its lowest level since April, with a near-stagnant industrial sector and a much weaker performance in its Omicron-hit services sector. Rory Fennessy, economist at Oxford Economics, said the pickup in manufacturing "offers further reassurance that the region has passed the peak of supply-chain disruptions". Despite the hit to services in January, "ultimately, Omicron should not significantly alter the overall growth outlook for 2022," he said. —AFP

WeChat denies Australia PM's account was hacked

MELBOURNE: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's WeChat account has disappeared, prompting accusations of Chinese "interference" from senior members of his government yesterday. But Tencent, the Chinese tech giant that owns WeChat, has denied that the prime minister's account was hacked or removed from its platform.

"Based on our information, this appears to be a dispute over account ownership — the account in question was originally registered by a PRC individual and was subsequently transferred to its current operator, a technology services company," a Tencent spokesman said. Morrison's account on the Chinese social media app, which was launched in February 2019, appears to have been replaced with one titled "Australian Chinese new life." The name was registered by Fuzhou 985 Technology Co, Ltd on October 28, 2021. However the account has posts dating back to February 1, 2019, including Morrison's first, which reads: "I'm very happy to

open my official WeChat account".

It's understood the Australian prime minister had a Weixin account, which needs to be registered by someone in mainland China, rather than a WeChat account, which can be accessed by overseas users. Fuzhou 985's legal representative Huang Aipeng told SBS yesterday that the purchase of the account was legal. There was no immediate comment from Morrison but a senator from his ruling center-right Liberal Party accused Beijing of being behind the change.

"What the Chinese government has done by shutting down the prime minister's account is effectively foreign interference in our democracy," James Paterson told 2GB radio on Monday.

Paterson called on Australian politicians to boycott WeChat in response. Immigration Minister Alex Hawke and Coalition MP Gladys Liu have joined the boycott. Morrison first launched his WeChat account to communicate with Australia's sizable Chinese-Australian community ahead of the country's last federal election in 2019. That year, Morrison was asked by reporters whether there was a risk his account could be censored by the Chinese Communist Party.

"We haven't experienced any such censorship," he said. In December 2020, WeChat removed a post from Morrison that defended Australia's investigation into allegations of war



Scott Morrison

crimes perpetrated by Australian soldiers. The post also criticized Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who had tweeted a fake image of an Australian soldier holding a knife. The last post on the "Australian Chinese new life" account is from July 9, 2021. The Daily Telegraph reported Morrison has been locked out of his account since then.

All of the posts on the "Australian Chinese new life" account relate to Australian government announcements or messages from Morrison. Tencent said the company "will continue to look into this matter." —AFP

Business

US firms cite COVID-19, worker shortages as main risks: Survey

American companies end year 2021 on strong note

WASHINGTON: American companies ended the year on a strong note but are worried about resurging COVID-19 infections, although supply issues are expected to ease, according to a survey released yesterday.

Just over one third of company economists cited spiking COVID-19 cases as the biggest downside risk to the outlook, ahead of rising prices, the National Association for Business Economics (NABE) said in its quarterly Business Conditions Survey. Inflation has become a growing concern for US consumers and businesses throughout 2021, fueled in part by global shortages and transportation snags. NABE said about two-thirds of firms reported rising sales in the final quarter of 2021, in line with the last three surveys, and among the highest in the survey's 40-year history. And nearly two-thirds of respondents said sales at their firms returned to pre-crisis volumes.

"The positive results and outlook come despite clearly visible shortages, particularly labor shortages," survey chair Jan Hogrefe said.

NABE found 57 percent of respondents faced skilled labor shortages — 10 points more than the October survey — while nearly one-quarter struggled to find unskilled labor, compared to just 11 percent previously.

"Both shortages have grown steadily more widespread over the past year," said Hogrefe, who is also the chief economist of Boeing Commercial Airplanes. Almost a third of respondents expect labor shortages to continue into 2023 or later.

In contrast, only 11 percent of firms saw supply chain problems persisting next year, while a similar share viewed those issues as their main downside risk. Opinions varied over when the problems would end. — AFP



WASHINGTON: American companies ended the year on a strong note but are worried about resurging COVID-19 infections



Cathay Pacific says 'cash burn' will worsen over Hong Kong curbs

HONG KONG: Cathay Pacific is poised to lose nearly \$200 million a month from February, the embattled Hong Kong carrier reported yesterday, as the city's COVID-19 restrictions have seen cargo flights slashed. Hong Kong has maintained some of the world's harshest travel restrictions, isolating a city that was once one of the world's largest logistics and transportation hubs.

Air crew quarantine measures were further tightened following the discovery that two COVID-positive Cathay staff had breached home quarantine which resulted in the city's first outbreak of the hyper-contagious Omicron variant.

By January, Cathay's cargo flights—one of the few sectors where the airline was making cash—had reduced to 20 percent of its pre-pandemic capacity, while passenger flights dropped to two percent, its CEO Augustus Tang said yesterday.

"According to our preliminary assessment, we expect these capacity levels to result in an oper-

ating cash burn of HK\$1.0-1.5 billion (\$128 - \$193 million) per month from February." Tang's forecast means the losses for 2022 could outstrip last year's total consolidated loss of approximately HK\$5.6 - 6.1 billion, according to Cathay's report.

Like most international carriers, Cathay has been hammered as the pandemic wipes out most international travel. But the airline is especially vulnerable because it has no domestic market to fall back on, and is based in a finance hub that has embraced mainland China's "zero-COVID" plan.

The airline flew some 717,000 passengers in 2021, Tang said—a far cry from the 35.2 million people transported in 2019. Strong cargo demand was what sustained the carrier—it flew 1.3 million tons in 2021, compared to two million two years before. The Cathay flight attendants who breached home quarantine measures face up to six months in jail if convicted.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said last week that authorities were investigating whether Cathay Pacific has complied with regulations, and could face legal action. Chairman Patrick Healy argued that a "tiny minority" of rule-breakers should not overshadow Cathay's contributions to Hong Kong.

In 2021, the airline's crew spent over 62,000 nights in quarantine hotels, he said, adding that 1,000 of their staff were subjected to more than 11,000 nights in the Penny's Bay government quarantine camp. — AFP

Evergrande shares rise after reports of govt restructure

BEIJING: Shares in debt-laden Chinese property giant Evergrande rallied yesterday after a state firm official was appointed to its board, paving the way for a government rescue plan. Evergrande, which has been teetering on the brink for months owing to its struggles in servicing a debt pile of more than \$300 billion, ended up nearly four percent higher yesterday. The rally came after a Sunday stock exchange filing showed the company has appointed Liang Senlin of China Cinda Asset Management—one of the country's four biggest state asset managers—to its board.

The provincial government of Guangdong—where the firm is headquartered—is currently overseeing Evergrande's debt restructuring process and appointing an official from a major state asset manager appears to have pleased investors. State-owned firms are expected to take over the ailing property giant's assets and the company set up a risk management committee last month, with senior officials from state entities to facilitate the process.

On Sunday, Evergrande said it has also appointed the head of its electric vehicle business Shawn Siu to the company's board as it bets on the growing sector to help bail out its troubled real estate businesses. The company has repeatedly said it will finish its property projects and deliver them to buyers in a desperate bid to salvage its debts, despite having missed a payment of more than \$1.2 billion in December.



But the company warned in a separate statement later yesterday that its situation "will become increasingly complex", adding that it was in communication with overseas creditors about its efforts to form a debt restructuring plan. Evergrande said it had asked creditors to "give us more time" and to avoid "taking any radical legal action that would have an impact on the current hard-won stability".

China's property firms have struggled in the wake of Beijing's drive to curb excessive debt in the real estate sector and address rampant consumer speculation. Another struggling developer, Yuzhou Group, said it will default on two dollar bonds worth over \$100 million due this week, in a filing to the Hong Kong stock exchange yesterday.

Yuzhou has \$5.7 billion worth of dollar-denominated debt, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. In recent days, stressed property companies Agile Group and Shimao Group have also announced sales of stakes in companies to state-owned enterprises. — AFP

Uganda central bank chief dies aged 72

NAIROBI: The head of the Bank of Uganda, Emmanuel Tumusiime Mutebile, died on Sunday, the central bank said, and analysts warned that his death could augur a period of uncertainty for the fragile economy of the east African country.

Mutebile, who had headed the central bank for more than 20 years and was one of the architects of key reforms to help turn Uganda's economy around, died early Sunday in a hospital in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, the Bank of Uganda said in a statement. The 72-year-old had been hospitalized in December for health complications linked to diabetes. Mutebile's contract as central bank chief had been renewed at the beginning of 2021.

Prior to taking office in 2001, he had previously occupied a number of important posts in the finance

ministry. In both capacities, he oversaw the implementation of key economic reforms in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund. Since the brutal nationalization policies of Idi Amin Dada in the 1970s, Uganda has managed to diversify its economy and attract foreign investors, notching up average annual economic growth of around 6.4 percent over the past three decades.

"A seasoned professional economist and reformer, he spearheaded the design and implementation of the Economic Reform Program that restored Uganda from the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s to sound economic performance," the Bank of Uganda wrote on its website. Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja described his death as a "big loss to the country of a great economist who played a key role in stabilising our economy".

Under Mutebile's direction, the central bank was one of the few institutions in the country to enjoy independence from President Yoweri Museveni, who must now name a successor.

But the central banker also had his critics, who claimed that Mutebile did not prevent the government from plundering the public coffers to illegally finance election campaigns. —AFP



Lexus brings next chapter of brand to life with all-new Lexus NX

KUWAIT: In an effort to meet the growing and diverse aspirations of discerning drivers in Kuwait, Lexus has announced the launch of the all-new Lexus NX. The second generation of the luxury mid-size crossover further raises the bar for performance, comfort, and safety to redefine the segment, and opens the next chapter for the Lexus brand.

With the launch of the first-generation RX in 1998, Lexus created a new category of luxury crossover and has been a leader in the realm ever since. In 2014, Lexus launched the NX, which was well received by customers, thanks to its agile driving performance and powerful design, and has gone on to sell over one million units in more than 90 countries across the globe.

The all-new Lexus NX heralds new directions in exterior and interior design and comes with a new electrified powertrain, bringing a quantum leap in dynamic performance to deliver a more rewarding connection between driver and machine with the Lexus Driving Signature. The introduction of the model also marks the debut of a brand-new multimedia platform that takes connectivity, information, and convenience to the next level.

In addition, the all-new vehicle benefits from the expansion of the scope and functionality of the next-generation Lexus Safety System+ to help guard against an even wider range of accident risks and bring greater peace of mind to drivers in the region. Takeaki Kato, the NX Chief Engineer, explains: "For this project, we ensured quality by implementing 'digital development' to evaluate the design structure under various conditions using computer models. Professional racing drivers also conducted test drives at the Shimoyama test course to thoroughly train the vehicle's body structure and inherit and evolve the Lexus driving flavor. We have redefined the ideal cockpit space as the contact point between the driver and vehicle, aiming for a design that enables a deeper, more intuitive connection and allows for more precise control of the vehicle. All of this has been done with the full force of our team working together for the smiles of our customers, who we hope will be inspired by the passion that was poured into delivering this exceptional vehicle."

Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and

Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: "We are thrilled to launch the all-new Lexus NX in the region, announcing the beginning of Lexus' next chapter of excellence. The vehicle is designed to meet the diverse lifestyles of our Middle East customers with a comprehensive upgrade and complete renewal of the model's key strengths. The introduction of the electrified model, which is also a prominent feature of our upcoming model lineup, underlines Lexus' commitment to promoting the realization of a carbon-neutral society."

Fujita continued: "The sophisticated new design and enhanced driving performance add to NX's appeal, while a wealth of new technologies ensures every journey is safer, more connected, and more enjoyable. I'd like to thank our loyal customers in the region for continually inspiring us as we strive to create amazing experiences by transforming performance into passion and technology into imagination."



For those seeking to experience the ultimate in thrilling responsiveness, the all-new NX is also available in an F Sport version. Engineered for exhilaration, the F brand DNA has trickled down from the legendary LFA, which represents the pinnacle of refined performance. The NX F Sport model boasts exclusive interior and exterior features, including a distinctive 'F' mesh-pattern grille in Piano Black, new front and rear bumper designs with larger side vents cut into the front bumper, black roof rails, and 20-inch alloy wheels with a 10-spoke design inspired by the wheels used on Lexus' LC flagship coupe. The cabin comes with Dark Spin Aluminum ornamentation, a unique meter, bolstered sport seats, a newly developed steering wheel, and aluminum pedals and scuff plates. Owners can choose from a range of ten exterior colors that emphasize the vehicle's sportiness, including two that are exclusive to the NX F Sport model, namely Heat Blue CL and White Nova GF. The interior is available in Flare Red, White, and Black variants.

Business

We are proud of our achievements in journey towards digitization, sustainability: Al-Bahar

NBK Group Deputy CEO in her lecture at 'Tamakan' program's panel discussion

KUWAIT: As part of the activities of "Tamakan" career readiness program sponsored by it, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a panel discussion in which Shaikha Al-Bahar, NBK Group Deputy CEO gave a lecture and answered a number of questions raised by the participants.

Al-Bahar started her meeting by addressing the participants: "I would like to welcome you all to the program, this program is exceptionally close to my heart, and it makes me so happy to be talking to young talents like yourselves, and to see your commitment to further developing and learning more as you grow."

An endless journey

Al-Bahar stated: "Personally, I am a very big fan of education and a great believer that we live to learn. Learning and education is a journey that is not age linked and should never stop. Especially in today's fast-paced world, it is very important to never stop acquiring knowledge or else we become less competitive." Al-Bahar urged the participants to never give up saying: "If you don't make mistakes you won't learn and if we don't evolve, we lose our abilities, creativity and intelligence."

Keeping up with a rapidly changing world

Giving her tips to the participating youth for career progression, Al-Bahar mentioned: "When you join the workforce and regardless of what you will be doing, you will realize how things change and progress very fast and we need to keep up with that. We have seen through history industries disappearing and businesses failing because they stopped learning and refused to transform and advance."

"As you continue to develop yourselves, you will be the driving force behind the success of your organizations and your country," Al-Bahar emphasized. In this regard, she highlighted the Singaporean example in focusing on education as a strategic priority, working to develop individuals and their behaviors and enhancing their knowledge, and how this was enabled such Asian country suffering from lack of resources to make significant achievements and leaps in economic growth rates and technological advancement to emerge as a international financial hub.



Shaikha Al-Bahar gives a lecture at 'Tamakan' program's panel discussion.

Transformations in banking

Al-Bahar shared with the participants her own real life experience and how the banking sector has significantly changed in the past 10 years, saying: "Banks are facing major challenges and rapid developments in the industry, therefore, at NBK we placed the learning drive at the core of our strategy and strides towards a sustainable growth in the future."

"Two main themes that are dominating the world nowadays barely existed 10 years ago: digitization and sustainability. However, now, our daily discussions involve a lot of meetings and debates around these two topics," Al-Bahar indicated.

"It is all because of our eagerness to continue learning and developing ourselves, otherwise, we would not have been able to maintain our leading position and survive those rapid changes. We never stop attending seminars, and industry conferences around the world, we regularly attend training and continued education programs. This helps every one of us to be up to date with the latest industry trends, emerging challenges and how the world is changing around us," she added.

Sustainability and digitization

Al-Bahar mentioned that NBK developed a digital transformation strategy many years ago, which included learning and self-development as one of its key pivots. "We learned and educated ourselves on cloud computing, artificial intelligence, machine learning and many other topics, to evolve as a full-



fledged digital world that is developing every day," she noted.

"Similarly, we are also learning the business sustainability world and how it affects banking. A lot of new topics emerged like climate change risks, biodiversity, financial inclusion and so many others that have significant impact on our banking operations," she explained.

Concluding her speech, Al-Bahar said: "At NBK, learning and education is a journey that never stops or comes to an end. Many years ago, we started our journey towards digital transformation and business sustainability to keep up with the changes taking place in the banking industry, during which we learned a lot, and we are very proud of what we have achieved."

It is worth mentioning that the new edition of "Tamakan" training program for fresh Kuwaiti university graduates offered by Creative Confidence Consulting Company was recently launched with the strategic sponsorship of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) for the third consecutive year.

In this hands-on training experience, NBK hosts 34 trainees at different training locations at its headquarters for 3 months, starting from 18 January until 27 March 2022, during which the bank provides them with courses aimed to develop their skills and qualify them to the labor market.

Tips for personal and professional excellence:

During the discussions in this session, Shaikha gave the participating youth a number of tips representing the synthesis of her practical and personal experience:

- Challenge your comfort zones and always think outside the box
- Learning and education is a journey that is not age linked and should never stop
- If you don't make mistakes you won't learn
- Failing to transform and advance is a prelude to failure, especially in today's fast-paced world
- As you continue to develop yourselves, you will be the driving force behind the success of your organizations and your country

"Weyay" team are young innovators always thinking outside the box

Al-Bahar mentioned that NBK's recent launch of "Weyay" as the first digital bank in Kuwait was a milestone in reaping the fruits of the bank's continuous learning and development strategy.

"Behind this launch were so many efforts of and great thinkers who have refused to surrender to their comfort zones and always think outside the box," she explained.

Al-Bahar stressed that technological advancement is rapid and incessant, which necessitates continuous learning and development, especially on new topics like cloud computing, artificial intelligence and machine learning.



Burgan Bank recognizes 91 internal trainers and mentors

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently organized a special event to honor 91 of its internal trainers and mentors in recognition of their dedication, passion and success in delivering effective learning solutions throughout 2021. This came in line with the Bank's strategic commitment to promoting a culture of ongoing learning and development across all departments and functions.

The event was inaugurated by the Unit Head of Learning and Talent Development (LTD) at the Bank, Ghada El Kadi, in the presence of Halah El Sherbini, Burgan Bank Group's Chief Human Resources and Development Officer, senior management from various departments as well as senior executives from the Human Resources Group.

Speaking about the event, El Sherbini said: "Internal knowledge transfer and collaborative learning are crucial components of building a strong work and learning focused culture ensuring a seamless operating environment. Internal trainers and mentors in particular are an important asset in our human resources strategy driving change from within and actively contributing to the advancement of our people and our processes."

El Sherbini further added: "Every single employee at Burgan is contributing to the

Bank's success and growth, and internal trainers in particular are playing a vital role in upskilling our human capital. We therefore continuously aim to recognize them for their efforts and for especially helping us tackle this challenging year with a development-centric mindset. Our human resources development plans are long-term and expansive, and we are looking forward to even more ambitious and innovative training programs in the years ahead."

On her part, El Kadi noted that in addition to helping develop skills and expand knowledge bases, internal trainers and mentors are promoting a stronger internal culture; embedding core values in an effective and resonating manner. She added: "As we continue to drive towards elevating the banking experience we offer customers, we will continue to invest in building a strong workforce that is fully capable of delivering on that promise."

It serves to note that 2021 witnessed considerable activity and continuous investment by Burgan Bank with regards to the development of its human resources, as the Bank maintained a robust calendar of professional development and practical training programs throughout the year, targeting all departments and service areas. This included the "Ro2ya Talent Journey" program, an as-yet ongoing program launched by the Bank which focuses on upskilling top performing employees from across all levels and functions and building the future successors. The Bank's learning and development agenda in 2021 also included specialized programs for all Burgan employees from across all departments, as well as summer training programs and internship programs targeting aspiring young talents in the market.

Gulf Bank continues support of 'Diraya' campaign

KUWAIT: As part of its commitment to social responsibility, Gulf Bank is continuing to support and participate in the banking awareness campaign "Diraya," launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association. As part of its participation in the campaign, the Bank is continuing to publish educational materials and awareness leaflets on its social media platforms and digital channels.

Ahmed Al-Fassam, Cards Customer Service Manager at Gulf Bank, said, "We are keen to achieve the goals sought by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association through the Diraya campaign, which aims to educate and raise customer awareness about their rights, including teaching customers how to protect their data and accounts, and the safe use of their bank cards." Al-Fassam stressed the importance of customers' protection and secure use of their banking data to prevent fraud, especially in light of the rapid development witnessed by local financial and banking services, and in keeping with the pace of the rapidly advancing global banking industry.

He pointed out that cards are among the most salient and prevalent banking services, and they vary according to their facilities and uses. Given that customers rely heavily on bank cards on a daily basis, caution must be taken in order to prevent falling victim to fraud; by following the instructions and advice that banks direct toward customers, fraud prevention is possible.

He advised customers to avoid writing their passwords on their cards. In addition, if customers would like to use their cards while traveling, they should request a statement of bank fees and commissions for the cards they intend to use,

as there are fees for using bank cards outside the country.

He continued: "When using ATMs outside of Kuwait, customers must make sure that there are no foreign devices in them, as some devices are used to steal card data. Furthermore, when shopping online, prepaid cards are a convenient way to shop; however, customers should also take care not to deposit large amounts of money in their prepaid cards." He noted that credit cards provide their users with special benefits, whether inside Kuwait or when traveling, such as the benefits of access to airport lounges, reward points, cashback or discounts from certain merchant stores.

Al-Fassam affirmed Gulf Bank's keenness to protect its customers and their banking data, by following the best global cybersecurity policies, systems and protocols, with the continuous review of the Bank's systems in keeping with global developments in both regulations and fraud prevention.

The Diraya campaign spans several topics, including the borrowing process, bank cards, cybersecurity, security tips, and services for customers with special needs. The campaign also aims to clarify the mechanisms for raising official complaints in an effort to protect customers' rights, and also aims to highlight the banking sector's tasks and roles in stimulating and developing the economy.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.



Ahmed Al-Fassam

KFH: Injaz investment plan enhances planning, future saving culture

KUWAIT: Considering its pioneering role in offering unique solutions and innovative products, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has continued its distinction in fulfilling customers aspirations and providing the best investment plans and solutions according to the highest international standards.

KFH is keen on fulfilling youth investment aspirations through the multipurpose "Injaz" plan. According to this plan, youth can pre-plan and achieve their future dreams by starting to invest their savings until the right time comes to achieve their goals e.g., having a private project or purchase a suitable house etc. The investment plan terms demand that the customer's age should range between 21 - 55 years while the investment term shall range between 2-15 years.

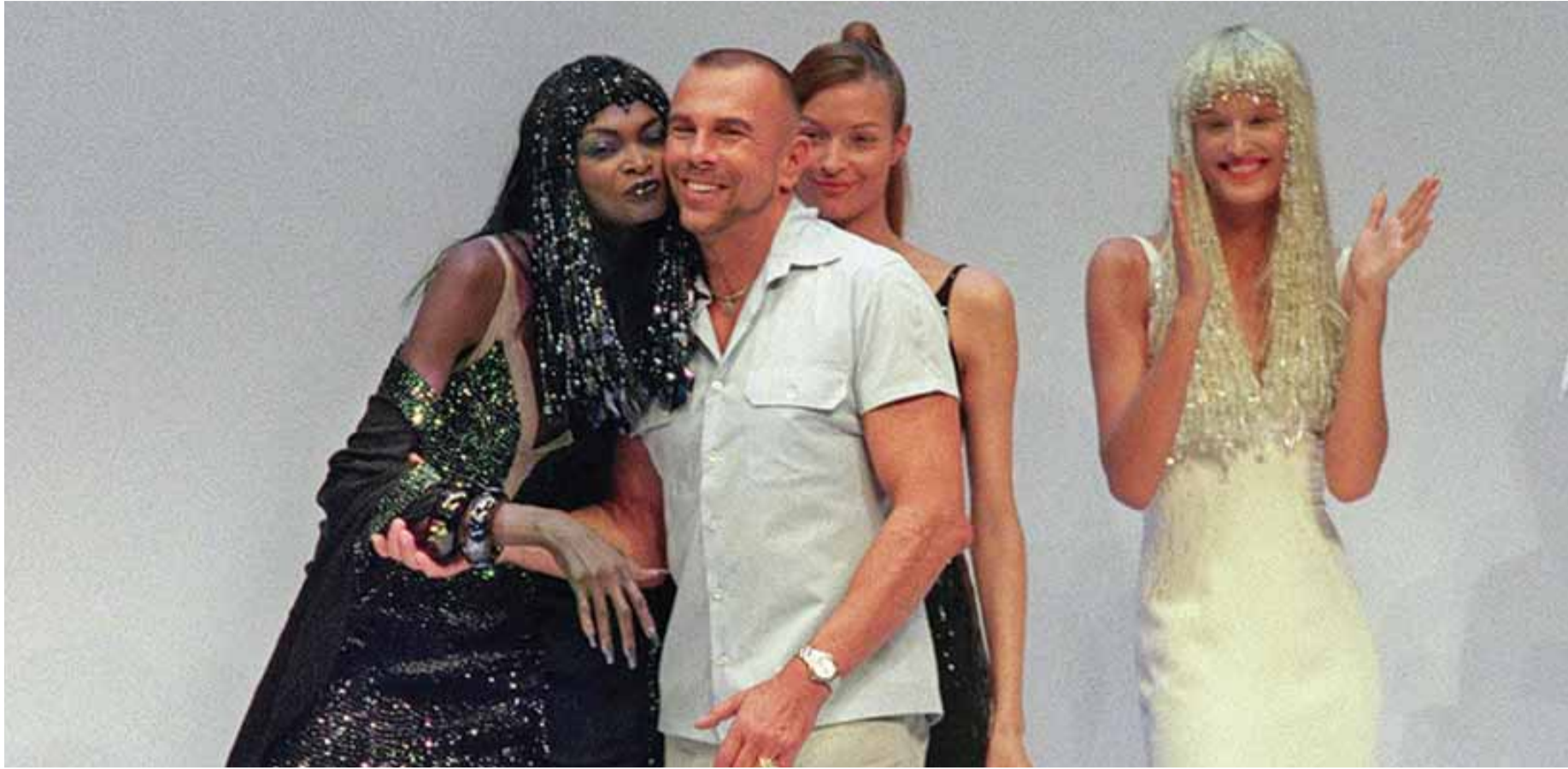
The flexible investment plan "Injaz" enables customers to save monthly amounts and receive investment returns on their savings. Upon starting a private project, total savings amount and accrued investment returns shall be available as per a Takaful coverage to be issued automatically in the

name of the customer when establishing the flexible investment plan "Injaz". In case of death or total disability (due to sickness or accident) during the plan validity period, the Takaful insurance policy shall cover the remaining unpaid balance of the targeted amount.

The investment plan "Injaz" advantages include the following: the investment amount or monthly payments may be amended at any time and the amounts shall be automatically transferred on monthly basis from the customer account to the flexible investment plan "Injaz" account. Also, the customer can withdraw 60 percent of the balance in the first year and 60 percent every year after the first withdrawal. The customer can deposit certain payments in addition to the monthly deducted amounts without affecting the time schedule of the investment plan. The saving amount and accrued profit during the investment period shall fall due upon expiration of the investment plan. The investment plan can be cancelled at any time and the invested amount and profits accrued on the date of closing shall be refunded to the customer.

Long-term investment plans provided by "KFH" encourage and inspire customers to enhance future planning and saving culture, determine family spending priorities and enhance chances of increasing family income through innovative and flexible solutions with rewarding investment returns.

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo, French designer Thierry Mugler hugs a model after his show in Paris during the Spring/Summer 2001 ready-to-wear collections. French designer Thierry Mugler, who reigned over fashion in the 1980s, died on January 23, 2022 at the age of 73 of 'natural causes'. — AFP photos

French adventurer, dies during solo Atlantic row

A 75-year-old Frenchman attempting to row across the Atlantic "to laugh at old age" was found dead in his cabin at sea Saturday, his support team said. Portugal's coastguard found Jean-Jacques Savin's overturned boat off the Portuguese archipelago of the Azores on Friday. They were able to send a diver down on Saturday to search it, his team added. The former paratrooper's body "was found lifeless inside the cabin", they said.

The avid triathlete set off from mainland Portugal's southern tip on January 1, but there had been no contact with him since overnight Thursday to Friday when he activated two distress beacons. It was just his latest adventure after crossing the Atlantic alone in a custom-built barrel in 2019, a 127-day trip followed by thousands on Facebook.

Savin was hoping again to reach the Caribbean, this time in a rowing boat eight metres long and 1.70 metres wide, with a rowing station at its centre. His team earlier on Saturday said they were "very worried". "We haven't heard from him since 00:34 yesterday (Friday) morning," they said, adding that he had activated "two distress beacons, telling us he was 'in great difficulty'." His daughter in a Facebook post said a search operation "was immediately set in motion in coordination with the French, Portuguese and US sea rescue services".

'Off on holiday'

He was last heard from north of Madeira, Portuguese islands off the north-west coast of Africa, on his way to Ponta Delgada in the Azores. Shortly after leaving on January 1, unfavourable wind conditions had forced the adventurer to extend his trip by 900 kilometers. On Wednesday, he had reported "strong swell and... wind" on Facebook, adding that he had been forced to switch from using an electric water desalinator to a backup one operated by hand. "It's costing me physical energy," he wrote. But "be assured I am not in danger". Savin, who said rowing across the Atlantic was a way to "laugh at old age", celebrated his 75th birthday on Friday last week on board his two-cabin boat.

He had set off with 300 kilos of equipment, including freeze-dried food, a spear gun to fish and a heater, as well as the two desalinators. To celebrate his birthday, he had also brought along his mandolin, foie gras and champagne. "I'm off on holiday to the open sea," he had said before leaving. "I will row eight hours a day and when the wind blows too hard, I'll close myself in," he said. He was looking forward to an extra safety measure that he did not have during his last barrel crossing: a tracker to make him visible to the radars of passing cargo ships.

After returning from his last trip, he had written a book to recount his journey. The following year, when the coronavirus pandemic hit, he gave advice to fellow Frenchmen on how to avoid cabin fever during confinement. "Everyone needs to embrace their passion... Start drawing, learn to play the harmonica, if it doesn't bother the neighbors," he said. — AFP

Paris Fashion Week returns to yet more mourning

The haute couture week in Paris opened under another cloud of mourning yesterday following the death of designer Thierry Mugler, the latest in a string of big-name fashion industry deaths. Last week's menswear shows in the French capital had already seen a highly emotional moment when Louis Vuitton presented the final collection by Virgil Abloh, who died from cancer in November at 41.

Its previous fashion week in October included a memorial show to Alber Elbaz, the Zionist designer who died aged 59 from COVID-19 five months earlier, having only recently launched his new label AZ Factory after years at the head of Lanvin. This coming Sunday will see another memorial show to Pierre Cardin-who died at 98 in December 2020. The latest loss is Mugler, who died suddenly on Sunday from "natural causes" at 73, according to

his Facebook page.

He was a central figure when the fashion industry was in full pomp in the 1980s and 1990s, surrounded by celebrities and supermodels, and bringing wild extravagance to the catwalk from full-body robotic armour to the Venus oyster gown that was recently resurrected by Cardi B. His bold silhouettes helped define the power-dressing look of the 1980s with the inverted triangle of wide shoulders and tight hips that he placed on pop icons like Grace Jones and David Bowie.

surging in COVID cases in France, which just last Tuesday had a record of nearly 465,000 infections over a 24-hour period. More than half - 15 of 29 - are holding live shows, according to the official calendar, including big names like Dior, Chanel and Jean-Paul Gaultier, up from just a handful last year.



In this file photo, French fashion designer Thierry Mugler poses during the presentation of his exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

'Beauty more than ever'

Mugler-full name Manfred Thierry Mugler-stepped away from high fashion in 2003 but continued to collaborate with stars such as Beyonce and Lady Gaga for their shows. And he came out of retirement in 2019 to create Kim Kardashian's show-stopping "wet look" dress at the Met Gala. "Rest in peace," Beyonce's website posted with a photo of Mugler. He had shown no sign of slowing down in recent months. His perfume, Angel, remained among the top-selling in the world, and his career retrospective, Couturissime, was touring the world (it is currently on its last leg in Paris). He told the Business of Fashion magazine just a few months ago that he was still hard at work, saying he wanted to be "even more radical, to be more pure, just to live in beauty, and fight for beauty more than ever."

Continuing with COVID

Meanwhile, the show must go on, with many haute couture labels determined to return to the runway this week despite



In this file photo, designs by French fashion designer Thierry Mugler are displayed during his exhibition 'Couturissime' at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Natalie Portman, French firm bring home the faux bacon

Vegan bacon sizzles on a pan in the office of a French startup whose quest to produce the "holy grail" of the growing plant-based meat industry gained the financial backing of Hollywood star Natalie Portman. Paris-based company La Vie recently raised 25 million euros (\$28.3 million) from investment funds and climate-conscious celebrities like Portman, an avowed vegan.

If not the first to bring plant-based bacon to the market, La Vie's founders are banking their success on mastering imitation pork fat, setting it apart from other brands. "We're the only ones in the world today to have succeeded in developing a vegetable fat that cooks, fries, infuses and browns" like animal fat, enthused the company's chief executive and cofounder, Nicolas Schweitzer.

After several minutes on the frying pan, the rashers of La Vie's imitation smoked bacon were golden brown, crunchy and similar in taste to the real McCoy. Next up are lardons. The chunks of meat and fat also brown up nicely, but are a bit salty. "We have a reduced salt version as well," said Vincent Poulichet, 32, the company's scientific expert and other cofounder. The lardons received a C rating on France's "Nutri-Score" food health rating scale - a middle score on the A to E ranking.

"Worse than broccoli, but better than pork lardons," the company notes wryly on its website. Startups and established food manufacturers alike have been rolling out

a variety of products that aim to replace beef, chicken and pork with plant-based ingredients. But making faux bacon taste like the real thing is another challenge. Ethan Brown, the head of industry leader Beyond Meat, told the Wall Street Journal last year that making bacon, steak and raw chicken were all the "holy grail".

A growing number of consumers are seeking to reduce or eliminate meat from their diets over concerns including animal rights and the industry's impact on the environment. According to a 2021 report by market research firm Euromonitor International, more than one in four consumers globally say they are trying to limit their meat intake, in addition to the 10 percent of people who are vegetarian or vegan. London-based market research firm Fairfield expects the market for plant-based meat to grow by nearly 19 percent annually between 2021 and 2026, to hit \$13 billion.

5,000 trials

La Vie's founders, who created their company in 2019, believe conquering consumers on taste is the real key to success. "After three years of research and 5,000 trials we succeeded in the somewhat crazy challenge of reproducing the taste of pork," said Schweitzer, 34. The fat in La Vie's imitation bacon and lardons is made mostly from sunflower oil and specially-treated water. The meat part contains soy protein, salt, natural colourants derived from radish skins and tomatoes, and natural flavours.

It was after testing La Vie's products at home in the United States that Portman joined the company's financial backers. "It was by giving people a taste of our products that we managed to put together this extraordinary round of financing," said Schweitzer. "Right away, investors said, 'Oh, yeah!'" Venture capitalists like Oyster Bay, Seventure and Partech joined the



Photo shows French startup La Vie's veggie recipe bacon sticks at their headquarters in Paris. La Vie is a start up with patented plant based technology. — AFP photos

funding round, as did the owners of several successful European startups such as Oatly, Vinted, Back Market and BlaBlaCar.

British and US markets

In addition to taste, La Vie believes its bacon is healthier for people and the planet. The company says its products contain less than a tenth the saturated fat of real bacon, and their production has fewer carbon emissions and uses less water. La Vie's imitation lardons are already on sale at Carrefour shops, and it aims to get them on the shelves of all major supermarkets in France in 2022. It also sees vegan and vegetarian restaurants as key to getting more potential clients to taste its products. La Vie aims to get its products on British shelves by April and then rapidly enter the key US market as well. La Vie, which has partnered with an established cold cuts and prepared foods manufacturer, plans to quickly double its staff to 60 employees. — AFP



French startup 'La Vie' co-founders, CTO Vincent Poulichet (left) and CEO Nicolas Schweitzer pose while cooking their veggie recipe bacon sticks at their headquarters in Paris.



French startup 'La Vie' co-founder and CEO Nicolas Schweitzer cooks their veggie recipe bacon sticks at their headquarters in Paris.

Bottles clinking, Turkish party train blazes through the night



Photo shows the Eastern Express train passing through a snowy field near Kars. Festive garlands, red tablecloths and enticing bottles pop out the moment passengers clamber aboard the Eastern Express train before it glides off on an epic voyage across Turkey's snow-capped plateaus along the Euphrates. Called Dogu Ekspresi in Turkish, the train offers one of the expansive country's most coveted new experiences. — AFP photos

Festive garlands, white tablecloths and enticing bottles appear the moment passengers board the Eastern Express for an epic journey across Turkey's snow-capped Euphrates plateaus. Named the Turistik Dogu Ekspresi locally, the train offers one of the expansive country's most coveted new experiences.

Its nine carriages wind their way around mountain bends on a 32-hour, 1,300-kilometre voyage from the capital Ankara to Kars, an ancient city near Turkey's rugged border with Armenia and Georgia. The service was suspended less than a year after starting because of the coronavirus pandemic. But with restrictions easing, the sleeper is back. Tickets, though relatively pricey, are snapped up in minutes.

"The Ankara-Kars line is considered by travel writers to be one of the four most beautiful train lines in the world," Turkish State Railways director Hasan Pezuk told AFP. "It is really a very special moment for me and my family," says Zulan-Nour Komurcu, 26, who is celebrating her birthday with them on board. "It's my present," smiles the brunette, who has decorated her cabin with purple lights, hung a furry wreath on the door and set out biscuits and a porcelain teapot on an embroidered tablecloth.

Three months of snow

The train runs twice a week from December 30 to March 31 to make the most of the snow-covered landscapes. Its route is a miniature version of Russia's Trans-Siberian railway, says engineer Fatih Yalcin. "There is always something to fix," he says, his head deep inside an electrical cabinet. "Last week it was minus 24 degrees Celsius. The water was freez-

ing," he says, adding that it sometimes falls to minus 40.

"I intervene when required and without disturbing the passengers. Seeing them happy is a real pleasure for me." Depending on the compartment, there are prayers or alcohol. In the dining car, rev-

they embarked with their own provisions: a veritable feast of specialities and sweets. Another faster and less festive train runs along the same route in around 20 hours, without the scenic stops. But this train was designed for the sheer joy of travelling through spectacular but hard-to-access

candles and a portable speaker blasting out Turkish rock. "It was an old dream," the smiling 38-year-old says, swaying, his table weighed down by whisky, delicacies and chilled beers.

"We had to make something joyful out of it. We prepared a lot." As the evening

The train brings together an array of Turkish society, with people of all ages and styles, from the reserved to the unrestrained. In Erzurum, the last stop before Kars at an altitude of 1,945 meters, several passengers perform a traditional dance on the frozen platform, with backing from



Passengers of the Eastern Express train eat their breakfast inside their decorated carriage during their journey near Erzincan.



Lawyer Yoruk Giris, passenger of the Eastern Express train poses inside his carriage during his journey, near Ankara.

ellers can feast through the night under a nightclub-style mirror ball. This is where Ithemur Irmak and her retired friends meet for tea as the sun sets in a blaze of color. The 40 women hail from Bursa, a western province on the Sea of Marmara.

"We're in retreat from our husbands and our fathers," says Irmak, triggering laughter all round. Like most passengers,

provinces such as Kayseri, Sivas, Erzincan and Erzurum. And, of course, for partying through the night.

Nostalgia

Lawyer Yoruk Giris and his two friends have made sure their supplies last until the end. A party animal, he has brought out a white light garland, a plaster snowman,

turns to night, people begin meeting up in the corridor to share music and dance. Among them, two couples in their fifties, "friends since high school", intend to "have a good time together". One of them, Ahmet Cavus, admits feeling "nostalgia" for the train rides of his youth. "We revisit the journeys we made as children with our grandparents," Cavus says.

the tea vendor's crackling radio. The station's thermometer shows minus 11C but no one looks discouraged. Resigned, the train conductor delays the departure for Kars with a smile, waving his torch in rhythm.— AFP



A passenger of the Eastern Express train takes pictures of the train before the departure at Ankara train station.



This picture shows the Eastern Express train passing near Ilıc train station.



An aerial view shows the Eastern Express train passing through a snowy field near Kars.



Refugee girls train during a session at the football pitch in the Minawao Refugee camp in Maroua. The girls, ranging in age from 15 to 20, fled with their families to Cameroon years ago, as Boko Haram jihadists wreaked havoc in their country. At a refugee camp in Minawao, in Cameroon's Far North region, the girls took up football, forming a team with whatever equipment came to hand. — AFP photos

'INCREDIBLE': REFUGEE GIRLS JOIN AFRICA FOOTBALL FIESTA

Words are not enough to describe the fun and passion in their eyes as Nigerian refugee girls cheer on their side at the Africa Cup of Nations. The girls, ranging in age from 15 to 20, fled with their families to Cameroon years ago, as Boko Haram jihadists wreaked havoc in their country. At a refugee camp in Minawao, in Cameroon's Far North region, the girls took up football, forming a team with whatever equipment came to hand.

Last weekend, thanks to an initiative of the UN refugee agency UNHCR, the girls got the treat of their lives: they were taken to a match between Nigeria and Sudan. They boarded a bus on Friday for the 200-kilometre and spent the night in a hotel - a totally new experience for them - before heading to the stadium in Garoua on Saturday. As they left, the girls stopped at the hotel entrance, coquettishly checking their reflections in the glass.

En route to the match, they marvelled at the hordes of Nigerian fans flocking to the stadium. In the event, Sudan put up little resistance, scoring only one goal to Nigeria's three. With each goal, the refugee girls erupted in joy, dancing and

waving little Nigerian flags. In an added treat afterwards, the girls were invited to pose on the field with officials of the African Football Confederation. "It's so incredible. I'm so happy," enthused 20-year-old Salamata Timothy, with stars in her eyes.

Camp heroines

The next day the girls returned to the Minawao camp, greeted as heroines by hundreds of children who had seen them on television. The camp, the largest in the region, opened in July 2013 at the height of the Boko Haram insurgency, which prompted a massive influx of Nigerians into Cameroon. Today, housing some 70,000 people, it resembles a little city, with a hospital, several schools, a dispensary and even a market some 50 kilometers away where the refugees sell produce from their farm plots and can buy merchandise from home.

The camp's football pitch is an expanse of compacted earth with blue-colored goals at either end. Saratu Yakubu, 19, said that when she arrived in 2013, the players had jerseys and shoes, but they no longer have proper equip-



ment. "It's become nearly impossible to play even though it is so important for us, for our health and well-being," she said. A recent donation from the German government financed jerseys and balls for the boys, but there was nothing for the girls.

Never left camp

Luka Isaac, who represents the Minawao refugees, told AFP: "Going to the stadium was an unforgettable experience for these girls. They realise that they can dream too. Most arrived here as chil-

dren and it was the first time they left the camp." He regretted that they do not have enough equipment. "Football gives them something to think about besides what they suffered in Nigeria." UNHCR spokesman Xavier Bourgeois noted that now that the crisis seems to be abating in Nigeria, "the big donors are starting to forget" about the refugees.

Lucy Bitrus, 18, one of the footballers in Minawao, sews sheshias - headgear worn by local men - which she hawks at the market. Her mother sells cakes and her father is a monitor at the school. She sleeps on a straw mat on the earthen floor and does her schoolwork using a solar-powered light. Her "favorite possession" is a biology book. The only decoration in her room is a chemistry chart - the periodic table of the elements. "My dream is to become a doctor," she said, speaking wistfully of going to university some day. "We don't just need footballs here - we also want books." — AFP



'Spider-Man' swings into sixth place on all-time box office list

"Spider-Man: No Way Home" powered its way into sixth place on the all-time global box office list, as it returned to the top spot in North American theaters at the weekend, industry data showed Sunday. In its sixth week out, the Sony superhero yarn with Tom Holland in the title role took in an estimated \$14.1 million in the United States and Canada after slipping briefly from the top rung last weekend, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported. Globally, its expected \$1.69 billion total would push it past blockbusters "Jurassic World" (\$1.67 billion) and "The Lion King" (\$1.66 billion) into sixth place on the all-time list, according to Box Office Mojo, a division of the Internet Movie Database (IMDb).

The achievement is all the more notable given that it came during the coronavirus pandemic, when theatergoers have been skeptical about returning to auditoriums amid an Omicron-fueled surge in the number of cases. The only films ahead of it in terms of worldwide box office takes are "Avatar," "Avengers: Endgame," "Titanic," "Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force

Awakens" and "Avengers: Infinity War."

Paramount's latest installment in the "Scream" horror franchise grossed \$12.4 million for second place in the Friday-through-Sunday period. As in the original "Scream" from 1996, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox and David Arquette star. The third spot went to Universal's animated musical "Sing 2," at \$5.7 million. The family friendly film has a big voice cast, including Reese Witherspoon, Scarlett Johansson, Matthew McConaughey, Pharrell Williams and Bono.



Universal also claimed fourth place, with new Christian romance drama "Redeeming Love," at \$3.7 million. Set during the California Gold Rush - though it was filmed in Cape Town - the film offers a parable about sin and salvation that has fared better with audiences, especially in the South, than with critics, analysts say. And in fifth, for the second week, was spy action comedy "The King's Man" from 20th Century, at \$1.8 million. Ralph Fiennes, Gemma Arterton, Rhys Ifans and Matthew Goode star. — AFP

Candid Kanye film premieres at Sundance amid editing row

A new Kanye West documentary featuring candid moments from his early life premiered at the Sundance film festival Sunday, just days after the rapper demanded that Netflix allow him to re-edit the final cut. The first part of "jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy" streamed at Sundance-taking place online due to the pandemic and focuses on his initial frustrated efforts to transition from hotshot young producer to rapper. It also shows West awkwardly removing his retainers when on camera, growing angry at being dismissed because he "grew up in the suburbs," and sharing tender moments with his late mother Donda.

In an Instagram post Friday, West-nicknamed as Ye-wrote that he "must get final edit and approval on this doc before it releases on Netflix," where it launches February 16. "Open the edit room immediately so I can be in charge of my own image," he wrote, in a post liked 1.5 million times. Netflix did not respond to AFP

request for comment on West's demand. In the film's opening scene, West is shown in 2020 on the phone asking for the contracts to sign off the documentary, suggesting he may have later reconsidered his approval.

The project began with filmmaker Clarence "Coodie" Simmons, who started following his friend West with a camera in Chicago in 2001, curious to see how far



the ambitious young rap producer could go. Simmons would amass some 320 hours of footage over the span of two decades. In a virtual panel following the screening, Simmons said West had "let us do our thing," but that he had also tried to reassure the musician about the final film. "When I met with Kanye I asked him, 'you got to trust me bro, like you trusted me all these years with all this footage and just to film you.'"

'Narcissistic'

Running at four-and-a-half hours in total across three episodes, "jeen-yuhs"

(pronounced genius) covers West's rise to international superstardom, mental health issues, support for Donald Trump and run for the US presidency. The first feature-length episode recounts Simmons' first meeting with West at a Chicago party in 1998, and his decision to document West's career after the then-producer lands a breakthrough contribution on Jay-Z's "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)"

West moved to New York in a bid to get signed by Jay-Z's Roc-A-Fella label, but struggled to convince bosses that a producer who lacked the "hardcore" background of many rappers at the time could sell records. "You gonna hold that against me because I never killed nobody?" he asks a music journalist as he drives around New York at night. In one scene, West and the camera arrive unannounced at the label's offices, where he raps "All Falls Down" to bemused workers at their desks, and a receptionist mishears his name as "Cayenne."

While brimming with his trademark self-confidence, a young West also says that he finds making the documentary "a little narcissistic." Simmons and co-director Chike Ozah have directed multiple films together before "jeen-yuhs," while keeping the footage of West ready to go. "In 2006 we was offered a deal to do it and Kanye wasn't ready," said Simmons. "He didn't want the world to see what he had to go through." — AFP

Sports

Tunisia shock Nigeria, Comoros to use outfield player as goalkeeper

Anger, disappointment in Nigeria after early AFCON exit

News in brief

Pope gives Messi signed shirt

VATICAN CITY: Football superstar Lionel Messi has bagged himself a shirt signed by fellow Argentine soccer fanatic Pope Francis, the Vatican's sports association said yesterday. Paris Saint-Germain forward Messi, who returned to action on Sunday after a bout of COVID, had given the pontiff a signed piece of kit in October, via French Prime Minister Jean Castex. In an unusual shirt swap, the yellow jersey of the Athletica Vaticana—the tiny state's multi-sport team—was then given to Messi by French bishop Emmanuel Gobilliard. "A man of faith, Messi told me how important this step was for him. We prayed together," Gobilliard, who will be the Holy See's delegate to the Olympic Games in Paris in 2024, said on Twitter. The scrawled signature in black pen by the 85-year-old head of the Roman Catholic church was a "blessing" for the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner, Athletica Vaticana said on Facebook.—AFP

Leipzig's win over Wolfsburg

BERLIN: RB Leipzig defender Josko Gvardiol marked his 20th birthday Sunday with a late goal to seal a 2-0 home win over Wolfsburg, who have now gone nine Bundesliga games without a win. League leaders Bayern Munich can later restore their six-point lead at the top of the table with an away win at Hertha Berlin after second-placed Dortmund trimmed the gap with a 3-2 win at Hoffenheim on Saturday. In Leipzig on Sunday, Croatia defender Gvardiol tapped in a late effort which was initially flagged offside before the VAR confirmed the goal after centre-back Willi Orban headed Leipzig into the lead 14 minutes from time. Leipzig have now won their last four games in all competitions and are back up to sixth in the league table. The latest away defeat ramps up the pressure on Wolfsburg head coach Florian Kohfeldt, who only replaced his sacked predecessor Mark van Bommel in late October.—AFP

Swafford roars to Tour victory

LOS ANGELES: Hudson Swafford roared to his third PGA Tour victory on Sunday, shooting a final round 64 to win The American Express by two strokes over runner-up Tom Hoge. Swafford capped his roller-coaster final round with his first par on the back nine at the 18th hole after seizing control with an eagle on 16 and a birdie on 17 in the California desert. The 34-year-old American also had four birdies and two bogeys on his back nine to finish with a 23-under 265 and post his second victory at the La Quinta Country Club to go along with his 2017 win. His other PGA Tour win came at a tournament in the Dominican Republic in September. "To win twice is pretty amazing," said Swafford, who earned \$1.3 million for the victory. "I had a good par on the last. I was hitting it so good all day. I was just trying to stay a little taller in my posture. The way I have been rolling it this week I knew if I just kept giving myself chances I would be fine."—AFP

Kang wins as Korda stumbles

MIAMI: Danielle Kang fired a four-under-par 68 to win the season-opening LPGA Tournament of Champions in Florida on Sunday as world number one Nelly Korda faded from contention. Kang, who started the final round one shot adrift of Korda, reeled off six birdies and two bogeys to finish with a 16-under 272 after 72 holes at the Lake Nona Golf and Country Club in Orlando. It was the 29-year-old's first LPGA title since her victory at the Marathon Classic in 2020, taking her tally of career victories to six. Canada's Brooke Henderson, who carded a closing two-under-par 70, finished three shots adrift on 13 under, one ahead of Mexico's Gaby Lopez, who could only card a level-par 72 in her final round. France's Celine Boutier finished six strokes off the pace, tied with Nelly Korda for fourth spot. Korda's hopes of starting the year with a victory evaporated with a three-over-par 75.—AFP

Loeb makes history at 47

MONTE CARLO: Nine-time world champion Sebastian Loeb, 47, made history as the oldest winner of a WRC rally in the season opener in Monte Carlo on Sunday. Loeb, who won his first world rally since 2018, was racing for the first time with 50-year-old Isabelle Galmiche, who became the first female co-driver of a top level winner in 25 years. In the season-opening race over snow and ice in the hills behind Monaco, Ford's Loeb snatched a late lead from French rival Sebastien Ogier as the Toyota man blew a comfortable 20-second advantage with an untimely puncture. The legendary French drivers are only competing in a selected number of races this season. That blow out handed Loeb an 80th victory on the world rally circuit, and made him at the age of 47 years, 10 months and 28 days, the oldest ever winner at that level.—AFP

YAOUNDE: Tunisia shocked Nigeria and Burkina Faso edged Gabon on Sunday to set up an Africa Cup of Nations last-eight showdown. Veteran Youssef Msakni scored two minutes into the second half to give previously unimpressive Tunisia a 1-0 second-round triumph over 10-man Nigeria in Garoua.

Nigerian hopes of equalizing were dealt a huge blow midway through the second half when Alex Iwobi, initially yellow-carded for a stamp on Msakni, was sent off after the referee looked at the VAR monitor. In the other last-16 match, Burkina Faso needed a penalty shootout to eliminate Gabon, who forced a 1-1 draw after extra time having played 56 minutes with 10 men following the dismissal of Sidney Obissa.

Substitute Ismahila Ouedraogo scored to give the Stallions a 7-6 shootout victory after Lloyd Palun had struck the woodwork for the gallant Gabonese in Limbe. With all three goalkeepers unavailable due to positive COVID-19 tests and injury, giant-killers Comoros placed an outfield player between the posts as they tackled hosts Cameroon. Whoever is chosen to don the gloves in Yaounde must face Vincent Aboubakar, the leading scorer so far in the flagship African tournament with five goals in three group matches.

Debutants Comoros, representing an Indian Ocean nation of less than one million people, stunned four-time champions Ghana to reach the second round as one of the four best third-placed teams. "My boys gave their all and I cannot fault them," said caretaker Nigeria coach Augustine Eguavoen, who is now likely to revert to his technical director role with Portuguese Jose Peseiro taking over.

"A slight mistake gave Tunisia their only chance and they scored. We battled to break down their defence. We needed to move the ball quicker and be less predictable. I thought the red card was a bit harsh. It was his first offence and not an intentional foul. However, the referee is the boss on the pitch and we must respect his decisions."

Surprise-riddled tournament

In a surprise-riddled tournament, another one arrived just after half-time in Garoua when Qatar-based Msakni put the one-time Cup of Nations champions ahead. Playing in his seventh Cup of Nations, Msakni dribbled across the edge of the box before unleashing a curling shot that entered the net off the left arm of goalkeeper Maduka Okoye.

In added time, Nigeria had a good chance to level when substitute Umar Sadiq got behind the defense and fired across goalkeeper Behir Ben Said only to see his shot trickle wide of the far post. Burkina Faso appeared to have the victory sewn up in normal time thanks to a first-



GAROUA: Senegalese referee Maguette N'Diaye (center) gives a red card to Nigeria's forward Alex Iwobi (unseen) during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 round of 16 football match between Nigeria and Tunisia on January 23, 2022. —AFP

half goal from captain Bertrand Traore, who had earlier missed a penalty. Gabon were reduced to 10 men when Obissa was dismissed midway through the second half, but they forced extra time as Adama Guira helped the ball into his net in the first minute of added time.

Qualification is a huge boost for Burkina Faso as the west African state deals with a jihadist insurgency. On Sunday, gunfire was reported at army barracks around the country as soldiers staged mutinies to demand the sacking of leading members of the military, prompting fears of a coup. "It was a crazy game and it was not easy to control our emotions," said Burkina Faso coach Kamou Malo. "We had chances to kill the tie earlier but that's football. It could have gone either way, but we are delighted with the outcome."

Gabon have never won a Cup of Nations knockout tie, but the Panthers can be proud of the way they battled in adversity to force extra time and penalties after the dismissal of Obissa. The Panthers go home after a tournament overshadowed by the early departures of star striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and influential midfielder Mario Lemina, both positive COVID cases. "We tried to

make up for losing them but you can't easily replace international-class players like that," said veteran coach Patrice Neveu.

Anger, disappointment

Meanwhile, Nigerians have been left "disappointed" after the national team's surprise last-16 exit to Tunisia at the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon. The Tunisians edged out the three-time champions 1-0 in Garoua on Sunday despite suffering a raft of positive COVID-19 cases. The blame game began back in Nigeria immediately after the final whistle, with goalkeeper Maduka Okoye and caretaker coach Augustine Eguavoen both criticized.

"You need a top goalkeeper to win a tournament and Nigeria didn't have one," said journalist Abiola Shodiya. "I always knew Maduka (Okoye) was a ticking time bomb. It was just a matter of time before he exploded. It didn't take too long." Eguavoen took over as interim boss just two weeks before the tournament after Gernot Rohr was sacked. He was widely praised after he guided the team through the group stage with a perfect record.—AFP

England beat West Indies

BRIDGETOWN: England overcame a late-order rally by Romario Shepherd and Akeel Hosein to beat the West Indies by just one run in the second Twenty20 international at Bridgetown on Sunday. The West Indies appeared down and out when they needed 61 runs from the final three overs to reach a target of 172, with only two wickets standing.

But from 111 for eight, Shepherd and Hosein, who both made 44 not out in an unbroken stand of 72, almost denied England the win that leveled the five-match series at 1-1. Chris Jordan and Saqib Mahmood were repeatedly hit for boundaries, although the recalled Reece Topley conceded just eight runs in the 19th over. West Indies, who had slumped to 65 for seven, needed 30 to win off the last over, bowled by Mahmood. The paceman started the over with a wide

and was lucky not to be called again with his next delivery.

'Games you want to win'

England captain Eoin Morgan was pleased by the way a team, without several T20 regulars, clung on to victory. "I was delighted and even with the last quarter, with a relatively inexperienced international side, those are the games you want to play in," he said. But Pollard was proud of the fight shown by his side. "I can see the confidence with the guys in the changing room," he said. "We will have days like this but my thing is the fight that the guys continue to show." England were bowled out for just 103 on Saturday as the West Indies cruised to a nine-wicket win. But it was a different story when the teams returned to the Kensington Oval a day later, with England making 171 for eight featuring opener Jason Roy's 45.

England off-spinner Moeen Ali then took format-best figures of three for 24 after leg-spinner Adil Rashid removed both Pollard and Darren



BRIDGETOWN: Nicholas Pooran (left) of West Indies drops a hit by Moeen Ali of England during the 2nd T20I between West Indies and England at Kensington Oval on January 23, 2022. —AFP

Bravo. Moeen was named player of the match after also making 31 with the bat, with Barbados-born Jordan's 27 helping England to a competitive total. Recalled left-arm quick Reece

Topley had reduced the West Indies to six for two by having Brandon King, who made an unbeaten fifty on Saturday, lbw for a duck and running out fellow opener Shai Hope.—AFP

Stade, Montpellier, Toulouse squeeze through in last 16

PARIS: Stade Francais and Montpellier squeezed into the European Champions Cup last 16 with victories on Sunday while Wasps went out after a crushing loss in Munster. In Pool B, Stade, needing to win by at least six points and collect a bonus point did both with a gutsy 37-31 victory over Connacht. In Pool A, Sale consolidated their place in the last 16 with a 49-10 thrashing of bottom side Ospreys, while Montpellier jumped from ninth to seventh with a 37-25 win over Exeter, who had already qualified. When Wasps failed to collect a bonus point as they lost 45-7 in Limerick, the Parisians clinched the eighth, and last, qualifying place in Pool B.

The results also allowed Toulouse to finish seventh. The reigning champions were in danger of missing out after their home match with Cardiff was awarded to the Welsh club. Toulouse were incensed saying that, despite a Covid cluster, they could have put out a team. The competition organisers, EPCR, said they had no choice under French health rules but on Sunday evening AFP saw a copy of a letter from the French Sports Ministry to EPCR expressing "incomprehension" at the decision.

"I expect an explanation on the reasons that led you to punish Stade Toulousain while it had a full team to play the match against Cardiff and had scrupulously respected the (health) protocols," wrote the Minister of Sports Roxana Maracineanu. In Paris, Irish province Connacht, who had already qualified for the next phase, opened the scoring through Alex Wootton in the seventh minute. They had another try disallowed by VAR before Stade Francais got into the game with a Nicolas Sanchez penalty and the

first of wing Adrien Lapegue's two tries.

Connacht, however, took a 17-10 halftime lead when scrum-half Caolin Blade wriggled his way through. The Parisians bounced back straight after with Ngani Laumape scoring his first try for the club but were reduced to 14 when Australian hooker Paul Latu was sent off for backchat by referee Wayne Barnes. Connacht scored again through Tom Farrell and Jarred Butler while Stade Francais punched back with touchdowns from Kylan Hamdaoui and Ryan Chapuis and trailed 27-31 with 10 minutes remaining.

But Lapegue scored his second try and two penalties from Joris Segonds to secure victory. Kicking off after the Stade match had finished, Wasps knew they needed just a bonus point but were 17-0 down after 17 minutes and concede six tries. Conor Murray and Simon Zebo scored early tries for the home team before Dan Robson hit back for Wasps, but that was the last of their resistance. Last Sunday, Montpellier fielded a weakened team in Dublin and suffered a record-breaking 89-7 loss to Leinster.

Back to full strength and at home, Montpellier scored three tries in the first 21 minutes and raced to a 24-5 lead after half an hour. Exeter fought back. When Joe Simmonds converted their fourth try, and the third by his younger brother Sam, in the 49th minute the scores were level at 24-24. Sam Simmonds matched his main rival for the England No.8 position in the Six Nations, Alex Dombard, who scored a hat-trick of tries for Harlequins on Friday.

After Louis Foursans kicked the hosts back into the lead with a penalty, Cobus Reinach intercepted an Exeter pass and raced away to score a try that ensured victory. Sale eased through their final pool match with a seven-try bonus-point victory over a depleted Ospreys side who finish the campaign with zero points from their four games. Wing Tom Roeback scored two tries with Aaron Reed, Ewan Ashman, Dan du Preez, Curtis Langdon and Jack Metcalf also crossing. Sale had another four tries disallowed.—AFP



Kuwait's boxer Al-Sanad participates in Asia event

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's boxer Abdelrahman Al-Sanad lost to Pakistan's professional boxer Amir Masoud (on points) during their West Asia Championship match which was held in Islamabad and sanctioned the WBC. Al-Sanad lauded the event which was organized by the Pakistan Professional Boxing League (PPBL). Boxers from 16 Asian countries participated in the event. He said he is satisfied with his performance after a competitive match with a more experienced opponent. A representative of the World Boxing Council (WBC) in Kuwait Mishal Al-Fajji praised the participation of Al-Sanad in the Pakistan international tournament.



Sports

Milan lose ground in title race after Juve stalemate

Napoli thump Salernitana 4-1, go second

MILAN: AC Milan were held to a goalless draw by Juventus on Sunday, losing ground in the Serie A title race and allowing Napoli to move second following their 4-1 thumping of Salernitana. Two points behind local rivals Inter Milan before this weekend, Milan now trail the champions by four after a largely drab affair at the San Siro and have dropped down to third after Napoli drew level with them on 49 points. With the Milan derby straight after the international break which starts on Monday, an already huge match will take on extra significance when Serie A returns next month, with Napoli at relegation-threatened Venezia.

"If we win the derby we can still be close to Inter right to the end," said Pioli to DAZN. "If we don't, the season will be very similar to last year, when we finished second in the end but could have missed out on the Champions League." Juve had the chance to move into the Champions League places with a win following fourth-placed Atalanta's draw at Lazio on Saturday, but Massimiliano Allegri's side didn't manage a single shot on target in a bafflingly uninspired display and stay one point from the top four.

A match of few chances was played on a San Siro pitch which had been criticized by Simone Inzaghi on Saturday following Inter's win over Venezia and post-match was mentioned by both teams as a factor in the poor spectacle. "It was something both teams had to deal with... I'm not sure about playing two matches on the same pitch over two days in the middle of winter," said Giorgio Chiellini,

who marshaled a well-drilled defence which also contributed to the match finishing goalless.

Insigne matches Maradona

Lorenzo Insigne joined Diego Maradona on 115 Napoli goals when he smashed home from the penalty spot in the 53rd minute against Salernitana. The 30-year-old will move to Toronto FC in July after signing a lucrative four-year deal with the Major League Soccer side earlier this month, giving him one last season to emulate Maradona and win a league title with Napoli after spending his whole career at his boyhood club. During his tumultuous time at Napoli, Maradona led the southern club to their only two championship crowns and the 1989 UEFA Cup.

"We'll miss him because he's been a player and a man who's been important for this club... He wants to finish here positively and we need to give him a proper goodbye," said Dries Mertens.

Mertens' club record-extending 144th Napoli goal came after Federico Bonazzoli had levelled Juan Jesus's 17th-minute opener. Amir Rrahmani netted the third less than two minutes after the restart from Mertens' cross and Insigne wrapped things up with his fifth league strike of the season.

Tammy on target

Tammy Abraham was again on target as Roma won 4-2 at Empoli, the England international's brace the start of a first-half goal blitz which moved Jose Mourinho's team up to sixth, five points off the



MILAN: AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud goes for a header during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Juventus on January 23, 2022. — AFP

Champions League places. Abraham, who also netted in Roma's Italian Cup win over Lecce midweek, lashed home the opener in the 24th minute in Tuscany and then nine minutes later poked home his 10th league goal since arriving from Chelsea, making him the first Englishman to hit double figures in Serie A since David Platt three decades ago. "I was brought here to help the team by scoring goals and getting assists and recently me and the team have been in good scoring form. Hopefully it can continue," said Abraham.

His brace was followed up by quick-fire goals from recent signing Sergio Oliveira and Nicolo Zaniolo which put Roma four goals to the good with 36 minutes on the clock, a gap that 12th-placed Empoli couldn't bridge. Daniele Verde earned Spezia a huge victory with the only goal in his team's third straight win, over fellow relegation strugglers Sampdoria, which moved them up to 14th, eight points from 18th-placed Cagliari who missed the chance to climb out of the drop zone after drawing 1-1 with 10-man Fiorentina. — AFP

Ziyech's gem fires Chelsea to victory

LONDON: Thomas Tuchel saluted Hakim Ziyech after the Chelsea winger's "brilliant" strike kept alive their faint Premier League title hopes in a crucial 2-0 win against Tottenham on Sunday. Ziyech broke the deadlock with his dazzling long-range curler early in the second half at Stamford Bridge. Thiago Silva's header killed off Tottenham, who were furious that Harry Kane had a first half goal ruled out for a foul. Third-placed Chelsea are now 10 points behind leaders Manchester City after ending a damaging run of four league games without a victory. "It was a brilliant goal from Hakim. His technique was brilliant. We were working extremely hard for it," Chelsea boss Tuchel said.

"The effort was outstanding and it was a deserved win. We were relentless and kept on believing." Chelsea had beaten Tottenham three times already this season without conceding a goal, including knocking their London rivals out of the League Cup semi-finals. Failing to do so for a fourth time would have been a hammer blow to the Blues' bid to reel in City. Chelsea won't play again in the league until mid-February due to the winter break and their involvement in the FIFA Club World Cup.

But, for the first time since December 26 at Aston Villa, Tuchel's side tasted league success, giving them a much-needed boost at a time when their season was in danger of going off the rails. "The table is the table, it is our responsibility to prove ourselves every third day. It was important to go into the break with a good performance," Tuchel said. "We needed this. The guys are very tired because it was a long run for us." Tottenham's first defeat in 10 league games since Antonio Conte took charge was a blow to their challenge for a top four finish.

They remain in seventh, two points behind fourth placed Manchester United with two games in hand. Fuming over the Kane controversy, Conte said: "I don't want to comment on the referee's decision. But to disallow this goal in England, was incredible for me. "I don't like to lose and defeat is always difficult



LONDON: Supporters celebrate with Chelsea's English midfielder Mason Mount after team mate Chelsea's Brazilian defender Thiago Silva scored their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur on January 23, 2022. — AFP

for me, but I think to have a nine games in a row without defeat was important. "In this moment, the gap with other teams like Chelsea is really an important gap. Now there is a big difference between us and the top teams."

Ziyech magic

Yet Conte must have been fearing yet another loss to his former club after Chelsea made a lively start. Romelu Lukaku hooked a decent chance over the bar from Mason Mount's delivery before Callum Hudson-Odoi nodded Ziyech's cross just wide. Ziyech's swerving drive forced from 25 yards forced a parried save from Hugo Lloris. Tottenham thought they had taken the lead against the run of play when Kane fired home from Ryan Sessegnon's pass. But referee Paul Tierney controversially disallowed it for a slight push from Kane that sent Silva sprawling theatrically as he tried to track the striker's run. Ziyech rubbed salt into Tottenham's wounds as the Moroccan winger produced a moment of magic in the 47th minute. Hudson-Odoi led the charge with a driving run and pass to Ziyech, who curled a sublime strike into the far corner from the edge of the area. —AFP

De Jong's strikes late for Barcelona; Real held by Elche

MADRID: Barcelona needed a late winner from Frenkie de Jong to edge past Alaves in La Liga on Sunday while Real Madrid gave hope to their title rivals by drawing 2-2 at home to Elche. De Jong's 87th-minute winner at Mendizorrotza was the high-point of an otherwise uninspiring performance from Barca but it also secured a crucial 1-0 victory in their bid to catch the top four.

"When we lost to Real Madrid in the Super Cup we left satisfied with the game but we didn't win - this time we're not satisfied with the game but the three points are gold," said Xavi Hernandez. Barcelona move up to fifth, with Atletico Madrid still one point ahead in fourth. The two teams meet next

at Camp Nou on February 6. "We're in the fight and these results will come in very handy," said Xavi.

Real Madrid, meanwhile, squandered an opportunity to move six clear of Sevilla as Karim Benzema missed a penalty and then went off injured at the Santiago Bernabeu. It could have been worse for Madrid, who were two down with 11 minutes left yet managed to rescue a point thanks to a Luka Modric penalty and a 92nd-minute header from Eder Militao. Lucas Boye and Pere Milla had put Elche in sight of a shock victory.

But two dropped points against a team fighting for survival this season will have come as a welcome bonus for Sevilla, who would have expected to be punished for their own draw at home to Celta Vigo on Saturday. "The match was a bit all over the place," said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti. "We dropped two points so we can't be happy but in general we have a break now and we're in a good position. We're in the Copa del Rey, the Champions League and we have a good position in the league." — AFP

Messi returns, Ramos scores and PSG cruise

PARIS: Lionel Messi returned, another marquee signing Sergio Ramos scored as Paris Saint-Germain cruised to a 4-0 victory over Reims on Sunday to restore their Ligue 1 lead to 11 points. "We had a good game, we took three points," said PSG manager Mauricio Pochettino. Earlier, Nice briefly cut the gap with a 2-0 win at Metz. But three of the teams just behind them lost. Messi, returning from Covid, started on the bench while Kylian Mbappe returned to the starting lineup after a groin strain while Ramos made only his second league start of the season.

Marco Verratti put PSG ahead in the final minute of a sluggish first half, drilling home his first Ligue 1 goal since May 2017. "It's good that a player who

doesn't score often, does," said Pochettino. PSG upped the tempo after the break. Ramos, who arrived from Real in the summer, scored his first goal for the club. The central defender reacted quickest to a loose ball from a PSG corner. After his first shot was parried by Predrag Rajkovic, the Spaniard reacted fastest again to slam home the rebound.

"I am happy to have played 90 minutes and I am personally happy because it is my first goal with PSG. I hope there will be many more," said Ramos. "It's been three weeks since I started playing normally with the group," he said. "We have the cup, we have the league, we have the Champions League, this is the best time to arrive in shape." Pochettino was happy with the goal. "It's good that he scored like Marco. He had a good game," said the manager. That goal brought Ramos level with Messi on one league goal this season, it also acted as the cue for Pochettino to send Messi on. In the 67th minute, Messi set up Verratti for a shot that deflected off two defenders and into the top corner. Danilo Pereira added a fourth as PSG matched their biggest league win of the season. — 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
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CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Alba Rodrigues**, r/o H.No. 114/1, Padriguelem Dramapur South Goa 403725, would like to change my name from Alba Kadam to Alba Rodrigues. Hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name Alba Rodrigues. (C 1412) 25-1-2022

I, **Clensy D'Costa**, r/o H.No. 140/1, Francisco Pereira Wado, Utorda, Salcete Goa 403713, holding Indian Passport no. Z3826339, change my name on my passport from Clensy Meville Monteiro (old) to Clensy D'Costa (new). Hereinafter, in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by the name Clensy D'Costa. (C 1411) 24-1-2022

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Sabalenka knocked out of Australian Open

Tempers and temperatures rise as Medvedev grumbles into last eight



MELBOURNE: Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka hits a return against Estonia's Kaia Kanepi during their women's singles match on day eight of the Australian Open tennis tournament yesterday. (Inset) Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return against Maxime Cressy of the US during their men's singles match yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Tetchy title favorite Daniil Medvedev was pushed to the limit before reaching the last eight of the Australian Open yesterday but women's world number two Aryna Sabalenka crashed out after an epic that finished on the stroke of midnight. Men's fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas survived a late-night fright to reach his third Australian Open quarter-final after a pulsating day of marathon matches, frayed tempers and searing heat at Melbourne Park.

Tsitsipas was staring at defeat, trailing two sets to one before clawing back to beat the 20th seed Taylor Fritz 4-6, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in 3hr 23min of classic punch and counter-punch tennis on Rod Laver Arena. "It was an epic match. I gave everything out on the court today. I am very proud of myself with the way I fought," said the 23-year-old Tsitsipas who will now play Italian Jannik Sinner, who beat Australia's Alex de Minaur 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-4.

Sabalenka lost a thriller that went to a final-set 10-point tiebreak as veteran Kaia Kanepi ended the

Belarusian's hopes of a maiden Grand Slam title. Second seed Sabalenka saved four match points before losing 5-7, 6-2, 7-6 (10/7), sending down 15 double faults as her serving yips that have plagued her throughout the Australian summer came back to haunt.

The unseeded Kanepi, 36, made it to the last eight in Melbourne for the first time, a stage she has reached at every other major over a Grand Slam career dating back to 2006. "It was a really tough match," said Kanepi, who defeated three-time major champion Angelique Kerber in the opening round. The Estonian's reward is a quarter-final on Wednesday against seventh seed Iga Swiatek of Poland who battled from a set down to beat Sorana Cirstea of Romania 5-7, 6-3, 6-3.

'It's boring!'

Earlier it took the petulant Russian men's world number two Medvedev 3hr 30min to subdue the unseeded American serve-volley specialist Maxime Cressy 6-2, 7-6 (7/4), 6-7 (4/7), 7-5 to set up a

quarter-final against Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime. "It was long and it was not easy, the scoreline apart from the first set were all tough sets," said Medvedev, who clashed with the umpire, complained of bad luck and screamed "It's boring!" at Cressy's tactics. In the end, The US Open champion was mightily relieved to come through the most severe examination of his title credentials so far.

"If I didn't win the fourth set I would have been in a tough mental shape," he admitted. French veteran Alize Cornet made the quarter-finals of a Slam for the first time in her long career. Cornet ended her last-16 hoodoo in her 63rd Slam and will now face Danielle Collins for a place in the women's singles semi-final after upsetting former world number one Simona Halep of Romania 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 in energy-sapping daytime heat. "It feels amazing. That battle I had with Simona today and the heat," said Cornet, who knocked out world number three Garbine Muguruza in round two.

"After 30 minutes we were both dying and we

kept going for two-and-a-half hours." Collins had an even longer battle, the American outlasting Elise Mertens of Belgium 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 across 2hr 51min of bruising action. "It was really tough for me," said Collins, who made the semi-finals at Melbourne Park in 2019. Men's ninth seed Auger-Aliassime overcame the 2018 Australian Open finalist Marin Cilic 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) in 3hr 35min on John Cain Arena.

He joins Denis Shapovalov in the last eight to make it the first time two Canadian men have reached that stage at the Australian Open, and will now face Medvedev. "It's amazing. It puts my belief even higher, I lost three times to Marin in the past, this is my first win against him," the Canadian said. Sinner, the 11th seed, proved too strong for De Minaur to end Australia's last remaining hope in the men's singles with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-4 win in 2hr 35min. "It's very tough playing against Alex, especially in Australia," said Sinner, who joins compatriot Matteo Berrettini in the quarter-finals. — AFP

Buccaneers crash out; Rams advance; Chiefs down Bills

LOS ANGELES: Matt Gay kicked a last-gasp field goal as the Los Angeles Rams sent Tom Brady and the reigning Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers crashing out of the NFL playoffs on Sunday. Gay drilled a 30-yard field goal as time ran out to give the Rams a thrilling 30-27 win after Brady and the Bucs had recovered from 27-3 down to tie the game at 27-27 just moments earlier. The win means the Rams will advance to an AFC Championship game at home to the San Francisco 49ers next week where a place in the Super Bowl will be at stake.

In Sunday's other playoff action, Patrick Mahomes led the Kansas City Chiefs to an epic 42-36 overtime victory against the Buffalo Bills in a classic shoot-out at Arrowhead Stadium. Bills quarterback Josh Allen looked to have given Buffalo victory after finding Gabriel Davis in the end zone to make it 36-33 with 13 seconds remaining. But Mahomes marched the Chiefs back into field goal range to send it to overtime before hitting Travis Kelce on the first drive to settle a remarkable encounter. The Chiefs advance to an AFC Championship game with the Cincinnati Bengals next week.

Tampa Bay's loss meanwhile ended the 44-year-old Brady's hopes of adding an eighth Super Bowl title to his record haul of seven Vince Lombardi Trophies. "We let them back into the game with a bunch of



TAMPA: Police tackle fans that ran onto the field during the game between the Los Angeles Rams and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the NFC Divisional Playoff game on January 23, 2022. — AFP

mistakes on offense," Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford said. "But we're a tough team, this is what we're all about," added Stafford, who finished with 366 passing yards from 28 of 38 attempts.

Brady, who was sacked three times and hit on six other occasions by the Rams defense, threw for 329 yards with one touchdown. "We were down a bunch and a lot of guys made a bunch of different plays to get us back into it. They just made one more than us," Brady said afterwards. The Rams very nearly were left facing up to the end of their season after an error-strewn second-half display allowed Brady to mount a comeback for

the ages. The Rams had dominated to take a 27-3 lead midway through the third quarter.

Stafford threw for two touchdowns to Kendall Blanton and Cooper Kupp before rushing for a score of his own to give the Rams a 24-point lead. But just when it looked as if the Rams were home and dry, errors crept into the visitors' game and enabled Tampa Bay to come roaring back. A Kupp fumble led to a Leonard Fournette touchdown to make it 27-13. Gay then missed a field goal that would have extended the Rams lead, and Brady soon afterwards picked out Mike Evans with a 55-yard touchdown reception to make it 27-20. — AFP

Tatum snaps slump with 51-point night as Heat beat Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum busted out of a shooting slump by nailing nine three pointers en route to a season-high 51 points to lead the Boston Celtics to a 116-87 blowout win over the Washington Wizards on Sunday. Tatum drained nine-of-14 threes Sunday at Capital One Arena after missing his previous 20 this season from beyond the arc.

He made his first four three-point attempts and finished six-of-seven in the first half on Sunday. This marked his fifth career 50-point game and he also had 10 rebounds and seven assists in front of the crowd of 16,300 in Washington. "To Tatum's credit, he had a night," said Wizards coach Wes Unseld. "Obviously, 51 points, it's a real number. I think he was six-for-eight on pull-up threes, which are tough shots. No excuse. He's been struggling, but he found his rhythm tonight."

Teammate Jaylen Brown tallied four threes as the Celtics went 19-of-39 overall from three-point range

and combined that with a stout defensive effort for the victory. Marcus Smart (11 points) and Grant Williams (10 points) each made two baskets from beyond the arc. Smart also had six assists and four steals. It was the Celtics' best defensive performance since holding the New York Knicks to just 75 points on January 8. The Wizards shot just eight-of-34 from three-point range as Spencer Dinwiddie missed all seven of his three attempts.

Bradley Beal led Washington with 19 points and seven assists. Deni Avdija scored 13 points and Thomas Bryant came off the bench to score 11 for the Wizards. Kyle Kuzma finished with 12 points and seven rebounds. Elsewhere, Jimmy Butler finished with a triple-double of 20 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds as the Miami Heat held on to beat the Los Angeles Lakers 113-107. Butler posted his 10th triple-double with Miami breaking the team record for triple doubles which was held by LeBron James, who led the Lakers with 33 points on Sunday. — AFP