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Govt denies reports of ministers' resignation

Panel approves new bill regulating pensioners' KD 3,000 grant

By B Izzak

Massive fire engulfs Souq Mubarakiya

KUWAIT: A huge fire that erupted in Souq Mubarakiya on Thursday gutted scores of shops, Kuwait Fire Force announced. Up to eight fire squads battled the blaze amid heavy smoke from the burning stores, KFF Public Relations Officer Redha Al-Salman said in a statement. The force was informed about the fire at 3:20 pm, with flames spreading to 20 stores, Salman said, adding the fire engulfed the shops quickly because they were packed with inflammable materials including perfumes and leather products.

Firemen struggled to put out the fire due to the presence of many people at the market, Salman said, urging people to stay away from the scene and affirming that the firemen cordoned off the flames and took measures to prevent the fire from spreading any further. A huge plume of black smoke billowed into the skies from the area, rising above Kuwait City's skyscrapers.— KUNA



KUWAIT: Firemen battle a blaze at Souq Mubarakiya yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem yesterday denied reports on social media that Cabinet ministers who are elected MPs have resigned, amid mounting pressure on the prime minister. "Reports circulating on social media about the resignation of the ministers who are also lawmakers are incorrect," Mazrem said on his Twitter account.

Meanwhile, a joint meeting of the National Assembly's financial and legislative committees and the government approved a new draft law regulating the KD 3,000 grant for all pensioners. Two weeks ago, the Assembly refused to pass the law because the government insisted that it should be linked to an article stipulating to raise the retirement age by three years to 65 for men.

The government yesterday agreed to drop this clause, but insisted on another calling to transfer KD 500 million every year to the pension agency to cover its so-called actuarial deficit. Head of the financial committee MP Ahmad Al-Hamad said the Assembly is scheduled to hold a special session next week to pass the law.

News in brief

6-month absence rule still on hold

KUWAIT: Brig Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari, Director General of the General Department of Relations and Security Media at the Ministry of Interior, affirmed to Kuwait Times on Thursday that iqamas of residents who remain outside the country for more than six months will not be cancelled, except for domestic workers. Prior to the pandemic, any type of residency visa used to expire if its holder stayed outside Kuwait for a period longer than six months. Exceptions were given for students studying abroad.

Zelensky sends greetings to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Envoy of the Ukrainian president and MP Rustem Umerov on Thursday conveyed greetings of President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people to Kuwait's leadership, government and people. During a meeting with Umerov, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah reiterated Kuwait's firm stance towards rejecting any use of force.— KUNA

OPEC+ sticks to modest hike

VIENNA: The OPEC group of oil producing countries and its Russia-led allies agreed on another modest oil output increase on Thursday, ignoring Western pressure to significantly boost production as the Ukraine conflict has rocked prices. While OPEC refused to budge, the US said it would tap its strategic stockpile by a record amount in a bid to cool soaring prices.— AFP

Turkey seeks to shelve case

ISTANBUL: A Turkish prosecutor on Thursday asked an Istanbul court to halt the trial in absentia of 26 suspects in the macabre murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and hand the case over to Riyadh. The prosecutor said the trial should be stopped and the case transferred to Saudi Arabia, at the latter's request.— AFP

Dubai Expo closes in blaze of fireworks

DUBAI: Dubai shuttered Expo 2020 with a colorful closing ceremony punctuated by fireworks on Thursday, leaving a multibillion-dollar mini-city in the desert and heightened expectations for future hosts. Six months after the delayed opening of the \$7 billion, purpose-built site, Christina Aguilera, Nora Jones and cellist Yo-Yo Ma performed at the LCD-lit Al Wasl Dome,

Expo's centerpiece, as pyrotechnics lit up the sprawling site.

Millions of people have flocked to Expo's 192 country pavilions in its final days, pushing visit numbers over 23 million - not far off the 25 million targeted, despite the ongoing pandemic - and making it tough to find a taxi elsewhere in the city. In 30 degrees Celsius heat, long queues have formed at the most popular attractions, including the falcon-themed United Arab Emirates pavilion and the Saudi Arabia building, a slanted slab that appears to hover in the air. "It's been a huge experience, it's been really, really great," said Abbas Masud, 66, a retired banker originally from Pakistan.— AFP (See Page 11)



DUBAI: Dancers perform during the closing ceremony of Expo 2020 on March 31, 2022. — AFP

Tarawih returns to Hagia Sophia after 88 years

ISTANBUL: "Tarawih" prayers which Muslims perform every night during the holy month of Ramadan, are returning to Istanbul's Hagia Sophia mosque for the first time in 88 years, the country's top religious body announced on Thursday. "Thanks be to God. For the first time in 88 years, the mosque... will welcome believers for tarawih prayers this Ramadan," said Ali Erbas head of the

Diyaret, the public body responsible for overseeing religious worship.

"I will witness, God willing, this beautiful moment by leading the first tarawih prayer," he added. The prayers will take place at Hagia Sophia on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays during the holy month of Ramadan, beginning this week, said Diyaret.

Although the iconic building, previously used as a museum, was turned into a mosque in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic prevented the prayers taking place there until now. It's not the first time the building has changed its use. The edifice was first built as a Christian cathedral between 532 and 537 AD under emperor Justinian I and is considered the most important Byzantine structure.

After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople

(now Istanbul) in 1453, it was converted into a mosque before being opened as a museum in 1935 after the secular modern Turkish republic was established in 1923. It was added to the list of UNESCO world heritage sites in 1985.

In June 2020, Turkish authorities converted Hagia Sophia back into a mosque, a move that triggered an international wave of criticism. Last year the World Heritage Committee of the UN's cultural agency UNESCO asked Turkey to submit a report about the state of conservation of the Hagia Sophia, expressing "grave concern" over the consequences of its conversion into a mosque. Turkey swiftly rejected the agency's criticism of the conversion of a revered Istanbul cathedral-turned-museum into a mosque as "biased and political". — AFP

Ethiopians repatriated from Saudi

ADDIS ABABA: Hundreds of Ethiopians arrived back in Addis Ababa on Wednesday, the first contingent of some 100,000 nationals to be repatriated from Saudi Arabia over the coming months. Around 900 returnees, including many mothers with young children, landed at Addis Ababa International Airport throughout the day, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

"It is estimated that about 750,000 Ethiopians currently reside in the Kingdom (of Saudi Arabia) with about 450,000 likely to have travelled to the country through irregular means and will need help to return home," the IOM said in a statement. Human rights organizations have for several years denounced the detention conditions of Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia.

"We were crying daily," said Jemila Shafi, 29, one of the returnees from Saudi Arabia. Most of the women returnees were dressed in black abaya robes, traditional in Saudi Arabia, some with their faces covered by a niqab. Many were carrying babies on their backs or holding children by the

Continued on Page 6



Local

Information ministry unveils special package of programs for Ramadan

Soap operas, serials, talk shows among programs



KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Saud Al-Khalidi speaks during the ceremony.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Performers regale the dignitaries during the event.

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information announced a special package of new programs for the holy month of Ramadan on Wednesday. "This plan was directed and followed by Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouh El-Deen. The plan has many soap operas and various programs that reflect the values of the holy month, including religious, social, cultural and human values," Interior Ministry Undersecretary Saud Al-Khalidi said during the ceremony.

He also warmly greeted TV and theatre personalities. "These icons have enriched our local and Arab culture and art with pioneering works in their distinguished and high-quality productions," he noted. "Our programs this year will reflect the improving pandemic situation in Kuwait, focusing on the efforts and sacrifices

of frontline heroes and institutions. This applies to Ramadan programs on both Kuwait Television and Radio," added Khalidi.

The programs for this year's Ramadan on KTV1 are rich and varied. They include five religious programs broadcast throughout the day and six cultural programs that vary from wildlife and photography to charity and other programs. TV dramas make up the lion's share of programming with six local soap operas, one historical Arab serial and one Syrian social drama. Furthermore, two animated series will be broadcast for kids. A cooking program is a must during Ramadan, and this year it's the 'Kuwaiti Gourmet' show.

The traditional iftar canon show will also be broadcast at the time of iftar. The list of programs also includes two talk shows with many personalities and a competition to give away gifts to winners. All programs will also be broadcast on the Kuwait Drama channel.

Programs to reflect values of holy month

Palestine ambassador sends greetings on advent of Ramadan



By Rami Tahboub
Ambassador of the State of Palestine

The Palestinian community and myself convey our congratulations to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HE Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Kuwaiti people on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. May Allah keep Kuwait and its people in prosperity, security and peace. I also congratulate the Palestinian community in Kuwait and wish them good health and success in their second country Kuwait. I pray to Almighty Allah that Ramadan next year arrives with Al-Aqsa Mosque liberated and the declaration of the State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, so that the Muslim ummah can celebrate the holy month in our first qibla Jerusalem.

Coops to honor consumers' needs in Ramadan

KUWAIT: Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies will be offering food baskets during holy month of Ramadan in a bid to meet consumers' needs throughout the holy month. Union's Chairman Abdulaziz Asad said Thursday. He underlined that the war in Ukraine did not affect supply. Speaking to KUNA, Asad said cooperative societies were selling products worth around KD 1 billion (\$3.3 billion) per year with collective liquidity of KD 400 million (\$1.3 billion), making them major investment outlets nationwide. Cooperative Societies offer cheap products to be affordable by all segments, especially during Ramadan, he added.

Asad said prices differed according to offers presented by suppliers, however, there was a strict monitoring on manipulation of prices in general. The official meanwhile said the conflict in Ukraine was neither affecting availability of products nor prices, emphasizing the strategic storage was enough and there were many alternative products from other countries other than Ukraine and Russia. Asad said cooperative societies were contributing to economic, social and cultural aspects of the lives of people, in addition to guaranteeing food security. A law was issued in 1962 that paved way for creation of cooperative societies with the objective of contributing to national economy.—KUNA

Listing family businesses on Boursa to boost value, attract funds

KUWAIT: The listing of family-owned businesses on Boursa Kuwait is very conducive for boosting the market's capital value and creating a congenial atmosphere for attracting more local and foreign investments, according to economists.

The move will undoubtedly attract more funds and experienced investors into the market, thus positively reflecting on main indexes, economists said in separate statements to KUNA.

They underlined the paramount significance of this step amid liquidity surges in the market, saying that it would pave the way for promising investments and offering more advantages to private companies, mainly capital boost and stronger status. In this regard, Ali Alghanim and Sons Automotive

Increase in number of autism cases alarming: Al-Saad

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait Autism Society, founder of Kuwait Center for Autism and Head of Autism Network International Dr Sameera Al-Saad said millions are still suffering from autism around the world, especially after it had become easier to diagnose the behavioral disorder. On the occasion of World Autism Day, she said the international autism rate is one for every 88 and it might increase in some countries to one for every 50, which is alarmingly high and needed scientific, medical, educational and social care.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neuro-developmental disorder associated with symptoms that include 'persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts' and 'restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.'

She said Kuwait Center for Autism cares for 200 male and female students of various ages, and began this care 30 years ago. There are several special schools that seek to take all those affected with autism in Kuwait. She said we need to close the gap between the theoretical knowledge with many people after spreading awareness about the condition and increase the number of those studying autism and the required practical knowledge about it with the affected.

Many students and higher degree holders



Music band presents a program during the ceremony.

Company has already asked for being listed on the Kuwaiti stock exchange to become the first family-owned business to take such a step. Boursa Kuwait seeks to provide an appropriate platform for listing businesses involving family-owned ones by means of introducing a package of structural and technical reforms in tandem with the world standards.

Commenting on the move, Chairman of the Al-Dorra Petroleum Services Company Waleed Al-Houti highly commended the bourse's efforts to provide a set of financial products and derivatives in a bid to absorb the "big financial liquidity". He voiced hope that further steps could be taken in this regard in order to put attractive options at the disposal of family businesses and oil companies at the region's second largest stock exchange. He spoke highly of the listing decision of Ali Alghanim and Sons Automotive Company, which is a major family-owned business and as it happens when the market is witnessing strong liquidity ranging between KD 75 million (\$255 million) and KD 80 million (\$272 million). The company, he maintained, has long experience in the automobile industry and listing it on the stock exchange could be a landmark event that would undoubtedly create more investment

opportunities, given the promising future of the automobile industry in Kuwait.

Al-Houti also called on other family-owned businesses to follow suit so as to diversify and increase their businesses and promote the Kuwaiti market at both regional and international levels. On his part, Al-Namash Group's Chairman Ali Al-Namash said the registration of family-owned businesses with Boursa Kuwait would enable them to expand and grow at a higher pace. With family-owned firms entering the market, investors will be able to diversify investment in listed firms, particularly family-owned ones, based on their long experience and weight, he said. He expected them to play a major role in the promotion of trading on the market.

Chairman of the Kuwaiti Traders Society Mohammad Al-Tarrah believed that family-owned businesses, once listed on the stock exchange, would cement their status at the capital market, making it easy for them to obtain bank loans. He also noted that family-owned businesses in Kuwait had performed well over the last decades, promoting themselves in the market and steering themselves towards successes and competitiveness.—KUNA

still lack the knowledge and skill to face the difficult behaviors of the affected in practice and correct them.

The need is dire for the trained teachers in dealing with what accompanies autism in the form of behavioral complexities that need patience, accuracy and unlimited love. This is what the Autism Network International is trying to do through organizing international conferences every four years in a different country. It was held in Kuwait in 2014 under the patronage of the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The services in Kuwait especially after the Amiri



KUWAIT: Dr Sameera Al-Saad with children on the occasion of the World Autism Day



Local

Kuwait's Ramadan traditions return after pandemic hiatus

The spirit of the holy month is alive and thriving

By Shakir Reshamwala

KUWAIT: Around the world, Ramadan is a time of piety and prayers, fasting and feasting, and spending time with family and friends. But as is often the case, every nation and community develops a set of traditions and customs over the ages that come to symbolize the culture of the land. Kuwait too has its own unique Ramadan traditions that have been observed by generations of locals and residents of this country, and are a source of comfort and belonging.

Kuwait's rapid transformation from a sleepy fishing and pearl diving backwater to an affluent, modern state also turned many local traditions on their head, while some quietly disappeared. Daq al-harees (crushing of wheat) was a pre-Ramadan tradition in old Kuwait, where a family bought large amounts of wheat that was crushed by skilled women accompanied by folk singing, but the custom now has waned.

The Abu Tubailah no longer walks the streets of the neighborhood with his drum to wake people up for suhour (predawn meal), and has retired to become a cultural figure. And after iftar (breaking of the fast), people nowadays prefer to spend their time watching big-budget soap operas on TV or head to malls and coffee shops rather than stay at home with the family.

Nevertheless, a few of Kuwait's rich traditions of Ramadan have stood the passage of time, continuously evolving to reflect changing social, financial and familial developments. And after two years of disruption due to the coronavirus pandemic, they are set to make a return this year.

Graish

Graish is the traditional pre-Ramadan feast when family members and even neighbors gather before the onset of the fasting month. In the olden days, the women of the house would empty the larders of their homes of foods that are not usually eaten in Ramadan, and extended families would gather to partake in the potluck. These days the food is usually ordered from restaurants and the gatherings are smaller, but the tradition continues.

Girgian

Among Kuwaiti Ramadan traditions, Girgian is



KUWAIT: Ramadan lanterns and decorations are displayed at a shop in Kuwait City in these file photos. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat.

one that is the most popular, and the most evolved. Girgian is marked on the 13th, 14th and 15th of Ramadan, when children go 'trick or treating' to collect candies and nuts door to door. There's a reason why Girgian is celebrated in the middle of the lunar



Kuwait's traditions evolving to reflect changing social ethos

month. In pre-oil - and pre-electricity Kuwait - the full moon would provide illumination for the children to trudge across the neighborhood.

According to late Kuwaiti historian and astronomer Saleh Al-Ojairi, the word Girgian is derived from the word garga, which refers to the loud clanging sound heard when a household pot made of metal is struck. Today, Girgian has become thoroughly commercialized, with the simple confec-

tionery of yore replaced by gourmet chocolates and exotic nuts housed in brand-name bags and pouches that are often more expensive than their contents. Parents also make separate bags with the names of their children printed on them, and try to outdo other families in coming up with the most exclusive presentations.

Ghabqa

A ghabqa is a gathering of family and friends in the evenings of Ramadan. Like Girgian, ghabqas today are lavish corporate affairs where companies invite clients and employees along with their families for a night of fun and feasting, with the media in attendance too.

Iftar cannon

In this modern, technological era of precision timekeeping, astronomical calculations and even mobile apps, the iftar cannon is an unlikely survivor of the bygone era, when the sound of the blast signaled to the faithful it was time to break their fast. The 'midfa al iftar' takes place every day at the beautifully restored Naif Palace in Kuwait City. The firing of the cannon attracts dozens of families and children daily, and is broadcast live on Kuwait TV

and radio. The open yard in the palace where the ceremony takes place is set up to resemble pre-oil Kuwait, complete with vintage cars, artisans and children in traditional garb. The firing is conducted by three uniformed guards in red livery.

Qiyam al-layl

In line with the trend across the Arab and Islamic world, the Kuwaiti society has become more conservative and religious. Though not a social tradition, congregation tahajjud prayers during the last ten nights of Ramadan are observed in most mosques across the state. But the popularity of qiyam al-layl prayers has skyrocketed in the past decade, with the Grand Mosque leading the renaissance.

Thousands attend the nightly prayers daily, with well over 100,000 worshippers converging on Kuwait's largest mosque on the night of 27th Ramadan. The best reciters of the Holy Quran lead the prayers, headlined by Sheikh Meshari Al-Afasi, who has become famous across the Muslim world for his mellifluous recitation of the holy book.

As they say, the only thing constant in this world is change, and Ramadan traditions are no exception. Some customs may have died, but the spirit of this holy month is alive and thriving.

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Indian ambassador's greetings on advent of holy Ramadan



By Sibi George
Indian Ambassador to Kuwait

Ramadan Mubarak to all. As we start the Holy month of Ramadan, I pray for the safety, well-being and prosperity of everyone. My greetings to the leadership of the State of Kuwait, all members of the Indian community in Kuwait and all our Kuwaiti friends.

May this holy month of Ramadan bring with it abundance of kindness, harmony and compassion. May this holy month also further strengthen the bonds of unity at all levels.

Ramadan is a particularly special month in India, a land with great diversity of religions and beliefs, with people from different socio-cultural, religious backgrounds living in complete harmony. Ramadan is a month of special importance to India which has the second largest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia. One can witness an abundance of kindness, harmony and compassion in this Holy month.

Ramadan is a month of inner reflection, patience, gratitude, love, humility and self-restraint. It gives an important message of serving the needy and underprivileged. It also reaffirms the importance of equality and compassion. It teaches collective commitment towards society at large.

Once again to all my dear brothers and sisters from India and my dear friends in Kuwait, Ramadan Mubarak: Ramadan Kareem!

Indian ambassador meets KAC chief



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George met Ali M Al-Dukhan, chairman, Kuwait Airways Corporation on March 30. They discussed bilateral relations, means of enhancing cooperation between Kuwait and India in the civil aviation sector, diaspora related matters and other issues of mutual interest.

ABK joins KU Career Fair, boosts Kuwaitization

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) continues to make strides in achieving its Kuwaitization agenda. Playing a pivotal role in developing Kuwaiti youth, ABK participated in the Kuwait University Career Fair, held on 27 March at the Al-Shadadiya - College of Business Administration campus.

Kuwait University is the first public higher education institution to be opened in Kuwait with a mission to keep, develop, and disseminate human knowledge, as well as develop national human resources. The Kuwait University career fair bridges the gap between students and the private sector, and opens a direct channel of communications, which enables institutions to highlight job opportunities for students and recent graduates.

ABK's participation in the career fair is part of its ongoing efforts to nurture young Kuwaiti talent and boost the national talent pool within the banking industry. ABK representatives at the Kuwait University career fair introduced graduates and job seekers to the banking sector working model and shed light on professional opportunities within the organization. The Bank conducted on-the-spot interviews for candidates aspiring for a career in the banking sector and explained the process of joining ABK.

ABK's dedication to recruit, develop and retain the best talent continues to reinforce its position as an 'Employer of Choice' that promotes an inclusive work environment and provides an outstanding career trajectory for its employees. ABK places significant emphasis on ensuring that Kuwait nationals are given meaningful job opportunities that are enhanced with tailored on-the-job training, whereby we enable the creation of qualified, skilled, and competent industry leaders for tomorrow. Notably,

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A view of the Kuwait Towers Thursday. The Towers have become an integral element of the Kuwait City skyline, occupying a focal position on the Sea Front along the Arabian Gulf Road. Known to residents fondly as "Al Abraj" (simply the Towers), they are a must-visit destination for residents and tourists alike. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Co key contributor to food security

KUWAIT: Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company (KFMB) is a major supplier to local market throughout the year especially during the holy month of Ramadan, which is due next week, providing a variety of products with very reasonable prices, contributing to food security, the firm's CEO said. KFMB's factories will increase production of products mostly used throughout Ramadan as well as offering new products, Mutlaq Al-Zayed said in an interview Thursday.

Elaborating on production, Al-Zayed said KFMB would be producing more white and brown Ruaq (thin) bread, macaroni, vegetable oil, peeled and crushed wheat, and bakery products. He said KFMB offered new fresh and frozen products like mini-pizza foundation dough, plain croissant or stuffed with chocolate, mozzarella cheese, strawberry, thyme, and pistachio cream. These products, he added, were already being sold at the Ramadan food fair, held at International Fair Grounds in Mishref Area, and due until April 2.

Al-Zayed noted that demand for bread usually dropped early in Ramadan but returned to its normal levels half-way through the month. KFMB, said Al-Zayed, has been keen on honoring consumers' needs and was also offering new products like protein bread, potato hotdog rolls, cream filled lemon biscuit, brioche, as well as sandwiches stuffed with cheese or labna and zaatar. The company was established in 1961 and was known as Kuwait Flours Company. Production began in 1965. The company was merged with Kuwait Bakeries Company in 1988 to become KFMB and has been representing one of the major

contributors of food security. The company has managed to focus on innovation in products and businesses in order to maintain its ability to achieve food security for Kuwait.

Al-Zayed added that thanks to proactive plans, the company was able to contract with international advisory offices to build iron silos with a storage capacity of 50,000 tons, explaining that during the pandemic it was keen to stabilize the sale prices of subsidized goods and restructure the prices of unsupported goods despite a rise in global prices of barley, corn and vegetable oils, which began since the last quarter of 2020. "The company will continue its efforts in the face of these challenges," he said.

Meanwhile, KFMB announced Thursday net profits of KD 43.6 million (\$141 million) in 2021, with a seven percent rise in shares despite obstacles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the general assembly, Chairman of the board of directors, Osama Al-Furaih attributed the success of KFMB in achieving national food security and sustainability to the way it transformed challenges into opportunities of growth and perseverance.

He explained that 2021 was riddled with hardships and economic uncertainties, citing continuation of pandemic, produce price increase, and unprecedented inflation of cargo tariffs. Al-Furaih commented that last year was a true testament to KFMB's resilience and flexibility in facing global changes, as it not only ensured national food security but it also managed to create products amidst uncertain times. The company managed to secure growth and strengthening of assets, which reached KD 651.2 mil-



Mutlaq Al-Zayed

lion (\$2.1 billion), a nine percent increase from 2020's KD 597.4 million (\$1.9 billion) as sales registered a strong KD 497.7 million (\$1.6 billion) compared to the KD 416.9 million (\$1.3 billion) in 2020, marking a 19 percent increase, the chairman said.

On his part, Al-Zayed added that KFMB, since its establishment 60 years ago, has worked tirelessly and diligently to ensure food security. He added that the company helped in curbing negative impact of pandemic as it successfully inaugurated a couple of bakeries and a chilled storage space to be operated this current year. Al-Zayed further illustrated that the company stabilized subsidized commodity prices and refashioned unsubsidized commodity prices despite global rise in prices, and it also contracted with an international consultancy company to build metal silos. Al-Zayed forecast that challenges will continue throughout this current year as prices of seeds, oils, and imports and exports continue to rise, affirming that KFMB will continue to introduce new high-quality products to the market. Kuwait Flour Mills Company was established in 1961, as strategic step by the government to ensure food security, and in 1988 it merged with Kuwait Bakeries company to become one of the biggest foodstuff companies in Kuwait and the Gulf. — KUNA



Afrah Al-Arbash

76% of ABK's employees are Kuwait Nationals and it continues to work towards further increasing that percentage.

Commenting on ABK's focused approach to Kuwaitisation, Afrah Al-Arbash, Acting General Manager for Human Resources said, "ABK always looks forward to participating in local career fairs and initiatives in local universities. Events like Kuwait University's Career Fair provide us with a platform to engage with Kuwaiti youth and to interact with the best and most brilliant talents. In addition to working to recruit young talent to join the bank. We also remain fully committed to our goal of developing the next generation of leaders and we are aligned with the Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" to boost Kuwaitization in the private sector."

The Bank also runs a training program named the Young Kuwaiti Development Program. The program is geared towards developing the leadership pipeline at ABK by identifying the talent pool of potential future leaders and empowering them to go through structured developmental streams, as well as undertake multiple aptitude and psychometric assessments to customize their career aspirations and performance goals.

Al-Arbash also said, "We recently celebrated the graduation of the 32nd batch of ABK Academy students. Since the launch of the ABK Academy, 695 candidates have completed the four-week intensive program. These candidates have benefited from being immersed in the work environment of various departments within the Bank and day-to-day operations, giving them a more hands-on experience. Cultivating and refining our workforce's skills is crucial for our business strategy. We have established a high benchmark for recruiting young Kuwaitis."



KUWAIT: People watch as fire-tenders battle a huge blaze that broke out in Mubarakiya market in downtown Kuwait on Thursday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh.



Strained Moldova keeps doors open for Ukraine refugees

'Finally we can protect women': Japan's HPV vaccine battle

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SHANGHAI, China: Workers from a public service organization wearing protective gear deliver vegetables to residents of a neighborhood in lockdown, in Jing'an district, in Shanghai. —AFP

COVID-hit Shanghai grinds to a halt

Top official concedes financial hub had been 'insufficiently prepared'

SHANGHAI: A top Shanghai official conceded Thursday the Chinese financial hub had been "insufficiently prepared" for its latest COVID outbreak, as criticism mounts over lockdowns that have caught residents off guard.

The eastern megacity of 25 million has been split in two as part of a rolling lockdown plan to battle China's worst outbreak in two years. The spread of the Omicron variant is testing the country's zero-COVID strategy, which aims to crush virus clusters as soon as they emerge.

Residents in the eastern half of Shanghai have been confined to their homes since Monday and subjected to testing, before the restrictions are switched to the more populated western half on Friday. The curbs, which kicked in hours after being announced on Sunday evening, spurred panic-buying at supermarkets and sent vegetable prices surging.

And some residents in western Puxi said they were already being ordered to stay at home days before the official lockdown. One of Shanghai's top officials, Ma Chunlei, made a rare admission of failure Thursday, saying in a statement that authorities had been "insufficiently prepared for the substantial increase in infected people."

"We sincerely accept everyone's criticism, and are working hard to improve," Ma said in a briefing. He added that the city was beefing up its resources for COVID testing and patient isolation.

Puxi resident Dong Jun said his district was unexpectedly placed under lockdown Wednesday, two days ahead of the official start date.

"I've been keeping my fridge full because of my previous experience of lockdown, but it still caught me off guard when I woke up and heard a lockdown was announced," he told AFP.

"It's quite a hassle to maintain a certain amount of life necessities."

Residents complained online about a lack of food, problems accessing medical services, and fears that positive cases were not being transferred out of residential buildings quickly enough. Two separate asthma patients have died after reportedly being refused medical services due to COVID restrictions.

Pandemic 'exit strategy'

Shanghai reported more than 5,600 positive cases Thursday, most of them asymptomatic. Several exhibition halls in the city have been converted into mass quarantine centres, lining up thousands of beds for patients with mild symptoms.

Ma said authorities were "speeding up the transfer and isolation of infected people, minimising the

time they remain in the community".

He cautioned that the lockdown of Shanghai's western half will involve a larger group of about 16 million people and asked for patience. "Regular life will surely return soon," he said.

The World Health Organization's emergencies director Michael Ryan said it was important for all countries including China to have a plan to wind down pandemic restrictions.

"That exit strategy, for any country, has to be careful, especially when you have been so successful up to that point," he said at a Geneva press conference on Wednesday night. He pointed out that there is one seventh of the world's population in China, and authorities will have to "define a strategy that allows them to exit safely, with their population having maximum protection while re-engaging with social and economic life". — AFP

Three dead as West Bank violence escalates

WEST BANK: Zionists security forces on Thursday raided a West Bank city after three fatal attacks rocked the Jewish state in over a week, with two Palestinians shot dead and a third killed after launching a stabbing attack on a bus.

The violence comes after a Palestinian armed with an M-16 assault rifle killed five Zionist civilians in the streets of Bnei Brak, an Orthodox Jewish city near Tel Aviv, on Tuesday night.

That shooting took to 11 the number of people slain in attacks carried out since March 22 by Zionist Arabs and Palestinians, including two killings linked to the Islamic State group.

The latest bloodshed erupted in the West Bank city of Jenin on Thursday morning when Zionist soldiers mounting an operation to arrest suspects linked to the Bnei Brak attack returned fire after being shot at, the army said.

"During the activity, Palestinian gunmen opened fire at the troops (who) responded with fire," the army said, adding one soldier was hospitalised.

The Palestinian health ministry said "the Zionist entity occupation forces" killed two Palestinians,



JENIN: Palestinian mourners surround the body of Sanad Abu Atiyeh at a hospital in the town of Jenin on March 31, 2022 after he was killed during a Zionist entity's raid in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

males aged 17 and 23, in Jenin, and that another 15 were wounded. The Zionist army later confirmed to AFP that security forces had "carried out an operation" in Jenin to apprehend suspects linked to the Bnei Brak attack.

Afterwards, a Palestinian stabbed a Zionist civilian on a bus south of the West Bank city of Bethlehem, the army said, before "a civilian on the bus shot the terrorist dead". Police said later that he

used a screwdriver. Shaare Zedek hospital in Jerusalem said it treated a man aged about 30 for stab wounds to his torso. The Palestinian health ministry identified the alleged assailant as Nidal Jumaa Jafara, 30. The Gaza Strip-based secretary general of the Islamic Jihad, Ziad Al-Nakhala, announced the group's armed wing would step up activities "in light of the storming of Jenin camp by the Zionist enemy army". — AFP

UN urges world to halt worsening Afghanistan crisis

GENEVA: The United Nations urged the world to stand by Afghanistan at a pledging conference on Thursday where it is seeking a record \$4.4 billion in humanitarian assistance to the broken country. The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan on August 15 amid the hasty withdrawal of US-led foreign forces, and the country's humanitarian crisis has rapidly worsened since. The donor conference comes a week after the hardline Islamists closed down girls' schools, to widespread international dismay, despite promising a softer version of their previous harsh regime, from 1996 until 2001.

While condemning the closures, the UN, Britain, Germany and Qatar, which are co-hosting the virtual pledging event, insisted the international community must not abandon the Afghan people, with 60 percent of the population needing aid to stay afloat. And they also urged donors not to fall into the trap of neglecting the crisis in Afghanistan while seized by Russia's war in Ukraine.

"Ukraine is of vital importance but Afghanistan calls to our soul for commitment and loyalty," UN humanitarian coordinator Martin Griffiths told reporters, speaking from Kabul.

'Avert the worst'

The UN is seeking triple the amount requested in 2021, but its biggest-ever single-country appeal for funds has so far only secured 13 percent of the money needed. It said Afghanistan was on the brink of economic collapse, with more than 24 million people needing humanitarian assistance to survive.

"We need to avert the worst in Afghanistan and that's why we're calling on donors to step up and be generous," said Griffiths. The British diplomat said basic services like health and education were now "on their knees", while millions had no access to work and people were taking out loans to survive, with 80 percent of household expenditure going on food. Furthermore, "as if things couldn't get any worse", the country is suffering its worst drought in decades, he said.

The Taliban sparked outrage after ordering girls' secondary schools to shut down just hours after allowing them to reopen for the first time since seizing power. "We very much look forward to those positions being rescinded in the near term," said Griffiths. "I hope it will not mean that the pledges we hear for this conference are limited by that." — AFP

Dutch police arrest man for McDonald's shooting

THE HAGUE, Netherlands: Dutch police arrested a man on Thursday in connection with the gunning down of two men in a busy McDonald's restaurant, confirming a possible targeted assassination. The 32-year-old man handed himself in to a police station in Deventer about 32 kilometres (20 miles) from the northern city of Zwolle, where the shooting happened a day before.

"Police are now probing his role in the incident," law enforcement authorities said in a statement. Dutch media reports meanwhile identified the victims as two brothers, aged 57 and 62. Huseyin and Ali Torunlar were two local businessmen involved in the hospitality industry and have Turkish-Dutch backgrounds, several Dutch newspapers said.

Police have not yet officially confirmed the men's identities. Shocked patrons—including school children

who had just finished football practice fled in panic as the gunman opened fire, with witnesses saying he emptied an entire pistol magazine on the victims.

Witnesses told the RTL Oost broadcaster the gunman sat at a table across the men before the shooting started. "The suspect was watching the two Turkish victims for some time," RTL Oost said. "This looks like a cold-blooded and well-planned double liquidation." Police and medical workers swarmed the scene shortly afterwards, where shocked relatives and patrons could be seen being consoled by others. Police have opened a large-scale investigation into the shooting.

"But from the investigation police believe that the two victims were targeted," authorities said. "Police would like to speak to any people who were inside the restaurant or on its premises just before and during the time of the incident." Shootings are rare in the Netherlands, although the capital, Amsterdam, has seen some murders relating to its ongoing underworld battles to control the cocaine drug trade. In 2019, Turkish-born Gokmen Tanis shot dead four people on a packed tram in the central city of Utrecht in a terror attack. Tanis was later sentenced to life in prison for the shooting. — AFP



ZWOLLE, Netherlands: Employees working for a McDonald's restaurant react near the crime scene, after two people were killed when a gunman opened fire at a McDonald's restaurant as reported by police and Dutch media, in Zwolle, north of Netherlands, on March 30, 2022. —AFP

International

'Finally we can protect women': Japan's HPV vaccine battle

Vaccine is free for girls aged 12-16 in Japan

TOKYO: Thousands of lives could be saved as Japan begins to actively promote the HPV vaccine—which can prevent cervical cancer—after a decade of misinformation and weak policy left inoculation rates dismally low, advocates say. The percentage of teenage girls getting the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine has been close to zero since the country's 2013 decision not to promote the jab as panic erupted over alleged side effects. But from Friday, authorities will actively recommend and share information about the vaccine, which is free for girls aged 12-16 in Japan and has been found safe in extensive trials.

"Finally we can protect the lives of young women," ruling party politician Junko Mihara, a former vice health minister and cervical cancer survivor, told AFP. Even then, "we will lose so many lives because of the past eight years," she said. Nearly always caused by sexually-transmitted HPV, cervical cancer is the fourth most common type of the disease in women globally. In Japan, around 10,000 women develop cervical cancer each year, and it causes nearly 3,000 deaths.

Yet the World Health Organization regards the disease as "preventable and curable" and has outlined a strategy to eliminate it, which includes having 90 percent of girls inoculated by the age of 15 by 2030. More than 100 countries have started using the vaccine, including Britain, where cervical cancer cases have already plummeted among women who received the jab, according to a recent study in *The Lancet* medical journal.

Misinformation

When Japan added the HPV vaccine to its national program of routine inoculations in April 2013, initial uptake from the target group, girls aged 12-16, was

around 70 percent. But the government stopped actively promoting the jab just two months later, as sensationalist reports of alleged harmful side effects spread fear among the public. It was still available for free, but without official endorsement, take-up soon dropped to less than one percent. "The health ministry placed more emphasis on public opinion than scientific evidence," said Kanako Inaba, a gynecologist who runs an organization providing information on the HPV vaccine.

This week's policy shift follows years of campaigning by medics and advocates like Mihara, a former actress who went into politics in 2010 to advocate for the new HPV vaccine. But she struggled to battle misinformation, with media reports failing to make clear the difference between health problems that occurred after vaccination, and side effects directly linked to the jab. Families gave emotional accounts on TV claiming the HPV vaccine had left their daughters unable to walk, and pro-vaccine campaigners like Mihara found themselves the target of angry abuse.

'Not afraid'

"People came to my office, and faxes kept coming," she recalled. While there have been concerns over Japanese vaccine hesitancy in the past, the success of the country's Covid-19 vaccine drive—with 80 percent of the population double-jabbed—shows how influential government policy can be, according to Inaba. "The government should have also taken a firm stance on the HPV vaccine, by providing evidence," like they did with the Covid vaccine, the doctor said. Now, as more HPV shots are given, healthcare workers should "understand that girls might be anxious" about side-effects, and "provide information in an empathetic way," she added.



TOKYO: This picture shows junior high school students returning home from school in Tokyo. —AFP

A 2020 study in *The Lancet* predicted that Japan's "HPV vaccine crisis" could result in an additional 5,000 cervical cancer deaths among girls born between 1994 and 2007, compared to if uptake had remained at 70 percent. The health ministry is trying to minimize the damage by offering free HPV vaccines to women who missed the shot over the past nine years, when they were

of target age.

University student Utako Kawakami, 20, wishes she had been vaccinated before becoming sexually active. Her mother was wary about giving her the shot as a teen due to media reports, although she has now changed her mind. Kawakami got her second HPV vaccine dose last year, however, and told AFP she "wasn't afraid". —AFP

Nine foreign judges to stay on Hong Kong's top court

HONG KONG: Nine foreign judges from Britain, Australia and Canada confirmed Thursday they will stay on Hong Kong's top court after two senior British justices resigned to avoid endorsing China's crackdown on political freedoms in the financial hub. Judges from common law jurisdictions are invited to sit as non-permanent members at Hong Kong's top court, which is separate from mainland China's opaque, party-controlled legal system.

UK Supreme Court President Robert Reed and fellow judge Patrick Hodge resigned from the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal on Wednesday, saying the government had "departed from values of political freedom and freedom of expression". Nine of the ten remaining overseas judges—who unlike Reed and Hodge are retired—have said they will remain, including five from the UK, three from Australia and one from Canada. British judge Robert Walker is yet to declare his decision.

The five British judges who will stay are Leonard Hoffman, Jonathan Sumption, Lawrence Collins and two former presidents of the UK Supreme Court, Nicholas Phillips and David Neuberger. In a joint statement sent to AFP, the five British judges said they were "entirely satisfied" with the independence and integrity of the Court of Final Appeal. "At a critical time in the history of Hong Kong, it is more than ever important to support the work of its appellate courts in their task of maintaining the rule of law and reviewing the acts of the executive," they said.

Australian judges William Gummow, Anthony Murray Gleeson and Robert French as well as former Canadian chief justice Beverley McLachlin would also retain their seats.

"We do not intend to resign and we support the judges of the Court of Final Appeal in their commitment to judicial independence," Gummow, Gleeson and French told AFP in a joint statement.

McLachlin also told Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper that said she would remain. City leader Carrie Lam described the resignations on Thursday as a "political plot" by the British government which has repeatedly criticised China's clampdown in Hong Kong. "I remain very confident that we still have very fine judges in the judiciary, both local and from overseas. Hong Kong will continue to benefit significantly," she told reporters. —AFP

World Bank urges support for poor as food prices soar

DUBAI: A senior World Bank official called for more support for poor people globally Thursday as the war in Ukraine sends food prices soaring. Developing and import-dependent countries have been heavily impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine—the two countries that account for more than a quarter of the world's annual wheat sales. "It's not so much about food availability," Mari Pangestu, the World Bank's managing director for development policy, told AFP during Middle East and North Africa Climate Week in Dubai. "The production at the moment is adequate, whether we're talking about wheat, rice or maize, which are the main food products.

"It's more about affordability. Apart from making sure the flow of goods and fertilizers are not impeded, we really need to make sure that affordability of food for the poor households is also going to be addressed." Net food importers will suffer the most from the economic repercussions of the war, according to the United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development, which lists 36 countries as highly dependent on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia—mostly in Africa and the Middle East. Among those affected are Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia and war-torn Yemen, whose humanitarian crisis is already considered the world's worst.

Rising climate risks

Supply chain problems caused by the COVID pandemic have quickly worsened since the invasion, further adding to the price of food. The cost of freight has shot up by 34 percent since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, according to UNCTAD. Pangestu, a former Indonesian trade minister, said it was important to maintain and expand programs to provide food support, especially in the face of rising climate risks. "This really means social protection schemes in countries which are the most affected—to be able to provide support to the poor households... and then for the farmers, to make sure they can get access to fertilizers and inputs (so) they can produce for the next season," she said.

Pangestu was speaking after an International Monetary Fund report released on Wednesday found temperatures in the Middle East and Central Asia have risen 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) since the 1990s, twice the global average. It warned that the region is on the "frontlines" of the



climate crisis, with food security and public health in danger, and increased risks of poverty and conflict. "The fall in food production in (the Middle East) region has been an issue related to climate change even before the (current) crisis," Pangestu said, urging governments to focus on sustainable agriculture practices to address food security longer-term. —AFP

Biden set to order record release of US oil reserves

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden was expected Thursday to announce the release of a record million barrels of oil a day from US strategic stockpiles in a dramatic attempt to cushion the political fallout from soaring crude prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Multiple US media reports said Biden's plan could see the US drawing from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for as long as 180 days, dumping a significant amount of supply onto the overheated global oil market, which has sent inflationary shockwaves through the American economy.

Struggling with bad poll numbers and November's looming midterm elections, when Republicans are forecast to take over Congress from the Democrats, the White House is scrambling to find a way to show Americans that Biden has a solution to a problem rooted in aftershocks from the

COVID pandemic and President Vladimir Putin's brutal war. A six month release of a million barrels daily would be by far the largest and most sustained ever tapping of the stockpiles in US history. The release would amount to augmenting global supplies by about one percent.

The White House press office declined to confirm the reports. However, Biden was scheduled to deliver a speech on "actions to reduce the impact of Putin's price hike on energy prices and lower gas prices at the pump for American families." Oil prices fell sharply on the reports, which came as the OPEC+ group of petroleum exporters decided to raise output only modestly despite the jump in crude prices in the wake of key energy supplier Russia's decision to invade Ukraine.

The release would dwarf earlier uses of the strategic stockpile announced by the Biden administration in tandem with other countries on March 1 following the Russian invasion, and also last year in response to rising inflation. Despite a strongly rebounding economy and rapidly receding Covid-19 pandemic, Biden is getting little credit from voters, who instead blame him for rising prices everywhere from the supermarket to

car dealerships.

Supply chain snags related to the different pace of economic recoveries around the world are part of the inflation phenomenon. Also underlying the politically perilous trend, however, are ever higher fuel costs, which in turn push up prices for transport of almost all goods. And for US motorists, the price shock as they fill cars in gasoline stations is a constant irritation. "I did this," reads a sticker featuring a picture of Biden that has been fixed next to pump handles in many stations.

Gasoline prices currently stand at an average of \$4.23 a gallon, up 47 percent from their level a year ago. The price of US benchmark West Texas Intermediate was down 4.6 percent to \$102.89 a barrel, while Brent oil futures were down 5.5 percent at \$107.20 a barrel. Oil prices surged close to \$140 a barrel in March on worries about lost Russia crude supply as some "self-sanctioning" oil buyers shunned Russian crude in the wake of international sanctions on Moscow. Prices have retreated somewhat since the United States banned Russian energy imports on March 8, but have lingered above \$100 a barrel most of the subsequent period. —AFP

Ethiopians repatriated...

Continued from Page 1

hand, with their meagre belongings crammed into plastic bags as they queued up to be registered after they got off the plane.

"We are back in our blessed country after six months in prison," rejoiced Medina, a 28-year-old woman who was among those coming off the plane. "But many of our brothers continue to suffer especially in the men's prisons," she added. The Ethiopian foreign ministry has said it will repatriate about 100,000 of its citizens from Saudi Arabia over the next seven to 11 months, under an agreement recently signed between the two countries.

Wednesday's returnees "were assisted and registered by IOM staff and offered, among others, food, temporary accommodation, medical help and counselling services," the UN migration agency said in its statement. "These are our citizens," said Hana Yeshingus, a representative of the Ethiopian ministry of Women and Children. "Our citizens have come back home" after going through a very painful time, she added.

The IOM stressed that "meeting the needs of the



An Ethiopian woman repatriated from Saudi Arabia reacts as she disembarks from the airplane. — AFP

100,000 returnees is going to be an enormous challenge for the government, IOM, and partners". Over the last four years Saudi Arabia "has returned nearly 352,000 Ethiopians back home," it added. — AFP

Pak PM slams US meddling

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday accused the United States of meddling in Pakistan's politics as a debate on a no-confidence motion against him in parliament was postponed. No Pakistan premier has ever seen out a full term, and Khan is facing the biggest challenge to his rule since being elected in 2018, with opponents accusing him of economic mismanagement and foreign-policy bungling.

The government is also battling to contain a rise in militancy by the Pakistan Taliban, which on Wednesday announced an offensive against security forces during Ramadan, due to begin within days with the sighting of the next new moon. Fighting for his political life, Khan addressed the nation late Thursday, appearing to blunder when he named the United States as the origin of a "message" he said showed meddling in Pakistan's affairs.

"America has - oh, not America but a foreign country I can't name. I mean from a foreign country, we received a message," he said. Local media have reported the message was in a briefing letter from Pakistan's ambassador to Washington recording a senior US official telling him they felt relations would be better if Khan left office. "They say that 'our anger will vanish if Imran Khan loses this no-confidence vote'," he said.

Khan first raised the issue Sunday - citing an

unnamed "foreign power" - at a huge rally of his supporters in the capital, Islamabad, capping weeks of political turmoil since the opposition raised the idea of a no-confidence vote. He has long complained that Pakistan was asked to sacrifice too much in joining Washington's "war on terror", launched in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, with too little recognition or reward. "Has anyone said 'thank you Pakistan' for what we did?" he asked in Thursday's address.

Khan spoke off-the-cuff for around 45 minutes, touching on several favorite topics including his efforts to get Islamophobia recognized as a global threat, and charting an independent path for Pakistan on the world stage. Khan raised Western ire by visiting Moscow the day Russia invaded Ukraine, but he defended the trip, saying: "Even European leaders went to Russia, but Pakistan in particular is asked 'why did you go' as if we are their servants."

Debate on the no-confidence motion was due to start Thursday, but the deputy speaker - from Khan's party - suspended proceedings when legislators declined to first address other items on the agenda. "The deputy speaker has once again dishonored the parliamentary norms by not allowing the agenda item for a debate," opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif, tipped to replace Khan if he goes, told reporters.

Parliament will sit again on Sunday morning. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party (PTI) effectively lost its majority in the 342-member National Assembly Wednesday when a coalition partner said its seven lawmakers would vote with the opposition. — AFP

International

Strained Moldova keeps doors open for Ukraine refugees

80% of those who have fled housed by private individuals

SIRETI, Moldova: Retired teacher Vera Vranceanu is one of thousands of Moldovans who have taken those fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine into their own homes, but the strain is starting to show in one of Europe's poorest countries. "Thank God for the moment we are not short of anything," Vranceanu, 66, tells AFP in the central town of Sireti, admitting only that she will gladly turn the heating down as the weather warms up to save a little on the bill. A small former Soviet republic of some 2.6 million people sandwiched between Ukraine and Romania, Moldova has seen some 350,000 people arrive since the start of the invasion. Around 93,000 have stayed and have found a warm welcome.

"We are like a family," says Vranceanu, while playing with 18-month-old Ilona, one member of the Ukrainian family that she is hosting. "Moldova has given a truly remarkable example of solidarity," Dima Al-Khatib, resident representative in Moldova for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), told AFP. Around 80 percent of those who have fled are being housed by private individuals, she added.

Resources running out

However, this situation, coming along with the economic impacts of the war and the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the energy crisis, will have a "heavy impact" in a country where the average salary is around 360 euros (\$400) a month, Al-Khatib said. Just over 12 percent of Moldovans live below the poverty line, and that is projected to rise to 30 or even 50 percent in a worst-case scenario. "The challenge is enormous," admits Leonid Boaghi, Sireti's young mayor. The town had around

7,000 inhabitants of whom 1,500 have left to find work abroad. It has now taken in around 60 Ukrainians.

"Moldovans are used to keeping spare food at home, just in case," he says, an allusion to frequent shortages of goods under communism. "But how long will we be able to last? Until our resources run out?" he asks. For now, everyone is pitching in without waiting for the intervention of the government, which is hoping for help at an international donors' conference planned for April 5 in Berlin.

At Sireti's Astera restaurant, for example, the kitchen has swapped cooking gourmet dishes for weddings, engagement parties and baptisms to preparing hearty traditional fare for refugees. Owner Diana Dumitras, helped by a handful of volunteers, has cooked more than 4,000 meals for refugees to be distributed in the capital Chisinau. "We've got enough food for another week and then I don't know if we will be able to carry on," she says, piling ragout into meal containers.

'God spare us'

There were similar scenes in the town of Sipoteni. There, the meeting room of the town hall has become a makeshift collection point for boxes full of apples, pots of jam, clothes, hygiene products and other donations. At the moment, mayor Vasile Rata has a donation of \$2,000 from the UNDP to fall back on. "It's not a huge amount, but it means we can pay for the refugees' transport and also reimburse part of peoples' gas bills," he says. His brother, who has emigrated to Western Europe, has opened his house for refugees to use.

One of them is a 41-year-old Ukrainian called

she said, describing it as a "closed and opaque process". The court had "deferred its verdict", she added. Cheng could face life imprisonment if deemed to have committed serious violations of China's national security laws. A statement from her family said "her two children and elderly parents miss her immensely and sincerely hope to reunite with her as soon as possible".

Concerns have swirled over her welfare and detention conditions. Payne said Canberra was also advocating for Cheng to be allowed to speak to her two young children in Australia, who she has not had contact with since being detained in 2020. Born in central China's Hunan province, Cheng emigrated to Australia as a child and later acquired citizenship of her adoptive country—likely ditching her Chinese passport as Beijing does not permit its citizens to hold dual nationality. After returning to China and joining the state broadcaster in 2012, she became a familiar face on CGTN and hosted interviews with noted CEOs from around the world.

Broader tensions

Beijing said Thursday that Cheng's case was "going through the judicial process and the court will choose a date to announce the verdict". Her "suspected crime is illegal provision of state secrets abroad and her case involves state secrets", said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin, justifying the closed-door trial. Canberra "should

And wherever you travel in Argentina, there are constant reminders of the state policy: signs proclaiming "Las Malvinas son Argentinas," using the Spanish name for the Falklands and asserting ownership. Murals also show the shape of the islands, often painted in the sky blue of the Argentine flag and with the words "We will return" emblazoned next to it—a reference to the Argentine belief that it once had a settlement in the islands. In many towns and cities, road signs specify the distance to the Falklands. Every April 2, a day marking the Argentine invasion, school children sing the official 1941 hymn claiming the islands.

Falklands bring Argentines together

Throughout the country, football stadiums, towns, hundreds of roads and even the 50 pesos bill carry the name "Argentine Malvinas." "Argentina is a complex country with many cracks, there are few issues that" bring people together, said Edgardo Esteban, director of the Malvinas Museum in Buenos Aires. "The Falklands is one, it's like the national football team."

In a 2021 survey of 5,000 people, more than 81 percent said the country should continue to claim sovereignty over the islands. Only 10 percent said it should stop. Governments also have been keen to continue, although not always in the same way. Argentina has clung to a non-binding 1965 United Nations resolution that recognized a sovereignty dispute, dating

start Thursday, but the deputy speaker suspended proceedings when legislators declined to first address other items on the agenda. "I and the whole nation demand an immediate voting on the motion of no confidence," said Marriyum Aurangzeb, a senior opposition leader, to chants of "vote." "It seems that no one is interested in the question-answer session, therefore the session is suspended," said deputy speaker Qasim Khan Suri, from Khan's ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

Shehbaz Sharif, tipped to become the next prime minister if Khan is ousted, condemned the suspension. "The deputy speaker has once again dishonored the parliamentary norms by not allowing the agenda item for a debate," he told reporters outside the parliament. The PTI effectively lost its majority in the 342-member National Assembly Wednesday when a coalition partner said its seven lawmakers would vote with an opposition alliance. More than a dozen PTI lawmakers have also indicated they will cross the floor, although party leaders are trying to get the courts to prevent them



PALANCA, Moldova: Refugees from Ukraine enter the Republic of Moldova at Palanca-Maiaki-Udobne border crossing point between Moldova and Ukraine. —AFP

Yulia, who did not want to give her last name. She broke off from watching the news from home to explain that she and her parents had refused to travel to join relatives in Germany because they wanted to stay as close as possible to their homeland. Back in Sireti, Larisa Ciobanu, 56, wipes away

tears as she tries to put herself in the shoes of the 10 or so people she has taken in since the war broke out. "Our mission is to help. God spare us from finding ourselves in their situation," she says, a common sentiment in a country where many fear they could be next in Moscow's sights. —AFP

Australian TV anchor has closed China trial on state secrets charges

BEIJING: The sentencing of Australian journalist Cheng Lei by a Chinese court over accusations of supplying state secrets overseas was deferred on Thursday, with Canberra decrying the trial of a woman detained for 18 months so far as "closed and opaque". Cheng—a mother-of-two and a former anchor on Beijing's state broadcaster CGTN—has been detained since August 2020. In February last year she was formally arrested for "illegally supplying state secrets overseas". But Chinese authorities have given no further information on the allegations against her and on Thursday denied the Australian ambassador to China and other diplomats access to the court.

"Regrettably, the Ambassador was not permitted entry to the court," Australian foreign minister Marise Payne said in a statement after Thursday's hearing. "The continuing lack of transparency is concerning and further undermines confidence,"

Argentina's Falklands obsession thrives 40 years after war

BUENOS AIRES: Whether it is found in children's school books, on bank notes, murals and road signs, tattooed on people's bodies or even as an article in the constitution, Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands is a national obsession. Forty years since Argentina launched its disastrous invasion of the tiny South Atlantic archipelago, which covers 12,000 square kilometers (4,600 square miles), the political powers in the South American country show no signs of giving up hope of somehow claiming the islands, as well as the island of South Georgia.

"The recovery of the said territories and the full exercise of sovereignty... constitute a permanent and irrevocable objective of the Argentine people," says the Constitution, written in 1994. Lying about 300 miles (480 kilometers) from the Argentine coast, the rocky wind-beaten islands are home to 3,500 mostly British people, some of whom can trace their ancestry on the islands back 10 generations. It is officially a British Overseas Territory, but Argentina claims that the islands should be theirs.

Pakistan PM to address nation as no-confidence debate postponed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was to address the nation Thursday night as debate on a no-confidence motion against him in parliament was postponed. No Pakistan premier has ever seen out a full term, and Khan is facing the biggest challenge to his rule since being elected in 2018, with opponents accusing him of economic mismanagement and foreign-policy bungling. The government is also battling to contain a rise in militancy by the Pakistan Taliban, which on Wednesday announced an offensive against security forces during Ramadan, which is due to begin with the sighting of the next new moon.

Debate on the no-confidence motion was due to



BEIJING: This undated frame grab shows Australian journalist Cheng Lei in Beijing. —AFP

not interfere with Chinese judicial organs' handling of cases in any form", he added. Cheng's detention came as relations between Australia and China plunged to their lowest level in years.

Beijing has lashed out at Australia's use of foreign interference laws to block Chinese investment in sensitive sectors and examine Chinese influence on the country's public life. Canberra's repeated calls for an independent enquiry into the origins of Covid-19 — which first emerged in China over two years ago—have also raised Beijing's hackles. —AFP



ARGENTINA: This file photo shows a view during the awards ceremony of the Davis Cup 2008 World Group final series, at the Islas Malvinas stadium in Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires Province. —AFP

back to the 1830s, and invited the Argentine and UK governments to negotiate a solution.

The South American country has been less enthusiastic to acknowledge the right to self-determination enshrined in the UN Charter—and which the Falkland islanders exercised in 2013 when 99.8 percent of them voted to remain British. Argentina long sought to achieve its claims by diplomatic means, but that was dramatically abandoned by the military dictatorship in its ill-fated 1982 invasion. —AFP

from voting. In the past, parties have resorted to physically preventing lawmakers from voting against key legislation by blocking access to the national assembly, leading to cat-and-mouse chases and even accusations of kidnapping. The opposition is headed by the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) — two usually feuding dynastic groups that dominated national politics for decades until Khan forged a coalition against them. He was elected after promising to sweep away decades of entrenched corruption and cronyism, but has struggled to maintain support with inflation skyrocketing, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Some analysts say Khan has also lost the crucial support of the military—claims both sides deny—and Pakistan's army is key to political power. There have been four military coups—and at least as many unsuccessful ones—since independence in 1947, and the country has spent more than three decades under army rule. —AFP

UN urges donors to avert 'death spiral' for Afghans

LONDON: Afghanistan's economy risks falling into a "death spiral" without urgent aid, with some Afghans already forced to sell their children and body parts to survive, UN chief Antonio Guterres said Thursday. The United Nations is seeking a record \$4.4 billion in funding for the conflict-wracked country this year but so far has reached less than 13 percent of its goal. At a virtual conference of donors co-hosted with Britain, Germany and Qatar, Western nations in particular were urged not to abandon the Afghan people, even as attention has turned to Ukraine and elsewhere.

"Wealthy powerful countries cannot ignore the consequences of their decisions on the most vulnerable," Guterres said, after US-led forces withdrew from Afghanistan last year. The UN secretary-general and others painted a desperate picture of starvation, penury and oppression under the Taliban, who seized power last August in the wake of the Western pull-out. Some 95 percent of Afghans do not have enough to eat and nine million are at risk from famine, Guterres said. "Without immediate action, we face a starvation and malnutrition crisis in Afghanistan. People are already selling their children and their body parts, in order to feed their families," he added. "The first step in any meaningful humanitarian response must be to halt the death spiral of the Afghan economy." Britain pledged \$380 million in the coming financial year from April 1, with at least 50 percent of the aid targeted towards Afghan women and girls.

Germany said it would provide an additional 200 million euros in humanitarian funding. The conference comes a week after the Taliban provoked international outrage by closing down girls' secondary schools, despite promising a softer version of their harsh 1996-2001 regime. UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and her German counterpart Annalena Baerbock both spoke at the event, after co-signing a letter last week denouncing the Taliban move.

'Hanging by a thread'

"No nation can succeed if half of its population is held back," said Truss, urging women and girls to be put "at the heart" of the international response. Baerbock said 20 years of progress since US-led troops ousted the Taliban after the September 11, 2001 attacks "must not be washed away like ice melting in the sun". The UN's target is triple the amount requested in 2021 and comes with Afghanistan on the brink of economic collapse, with more than 24 million people said to need humanitarian assistance to survive.

UN humanitarian coordinator Martin Griffiths, speaking to the conference from Doha, told how he had been left "speechless" by the level of suffering in Afghanistan. Life was "hanging by a thread for more than half of the people in Afghanistan", he said. "We are only just managing to stave off extreme food insecurity, preserving some essential services and barely preventing a complete meltdown of the country. "The situation is incredibly fragile."

Griffiths, a British diplomat, met Taliban leaders in Kabul this week and said it was his "firm belief" the door was still open for talks with the international community. That included on resolving the issue of girls' education, he added. But he said "sustained, unconditional, flexible funding" was needed to reach more people, and to put money back into the economy and into ordinary Afghans' pockets. The international community has frozen nearly \$9 billion in Afghan assets overseas since the Taliban takeover. Ways of getting the country back into the international banking system would be vital towards delivering humanitarian aid, Griffiths added. —AFP

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2022

Zain Platinum Sponsor of COMFEST 2022

Company featured its Zain Esports brand at the event



From COMFEST.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its platinum sponsorship of COMFEST 2022, Kuwait's biggest gathering of gaming, pop culture, and comics enthusiasts. The event, which the company supports for the third year running, welcomed huge crowds at the Arena in 360 Mall.

Zain continues to support COMFEST as the company is eager to shoulder and encourage any initiative that offer a unique entertainment and social experience for the youth, given that they are society's most vibrant segment. Zain is also committed to supporting and empowering young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs who own small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), whom many of which were present at the event.

Zain took part in the event via its dedicated booth, through which it showcased its Zain Esports brand. The company hosted many exciting video game competitions and mini championships for visitors who enjoyed competing in a thrilling setting, where Zain presented valuable prizes to the winners.

COMFEST 2022 is considered Kuwait's biggest gaming and comics event, having featured many of the entertainment and gaming industry's biggest brands. The event also hosted many popular international celebrities from the world of gaming and entertainment, where audiences had the chance to

meet and greet them. The event witnessed the participation of many Kuwaiti SME owners who are comic and pop culture fans and featured their unique products at the event.

Zain Esports is a regional gaming powerhouse launched in December 2020 by Zain, and to date, the brand has hosted numerous multi-national tournaments in the Middle East, such as the 'EA SPORTS FIFA 21 Tournament: Middle East Challenge'. Zain Esports has also organized the 'PUBGM Champions Squad Season 1 & 2', 'Zain Summer Series', and the CSGO 'Final Clash' and most recently partnered with the Kuwait Olympic committee to manage a first-of-its-kind four-week-end esports event.

These and other tournaments have attracted the participation of over 15,000 players from across the region and have been viewed by over 35 million on Zain Esports' YouTube, Twitch and other social media channels.

Zain is aware of the important role private sector companies play in encouraging such initiatives that support the SME segment, especially that it is one of the leading national companies in the private sector. Zain's participation at this event further reflected its keenness in developing the Kuwaiti entrepreneurial community, which bursts with young talents who have vibrant ideas that offer viable solutions for the market needs.



Zain Esports at the event.

Stocks slide, oil rises as Germany cuts growth outlook

NEW YORK: World stock markets struggled Wednesday after strong gains during the previous session, as Russia downplayed hopes of a breakthrough in peace talks with Ukraine, Germany's growth outlook darkened and oil prices rose. Germany was the main eurozone laggard, with the DAX index ending the session down 1.5 percent after Berlin slashed its economic growth forecast for 2022, warning that the war in

Ukraine and soaring energy prices would hit Europe's biggest economy.

Equity markets elsewhere were mixed, with Paris and New York joining Frankfurt in retreat. The Dow snapped a four-day winning streak in a retreat tied to skepticism over Ukraine peace prospects, as well as profit taking after earlier gains.

Deepening the gloom was news that German inflation had reached a four-decade high as consumer prices rose by 7.3 percent annually, up from 5.1 percent in February. The Ukraine conflict had a "considerable impact on the high rate," said federal statistics agency Destatis.

The last time inflation hit such levels was in the autumn of 1981 in what was then West Germany, when oil prices increased "sharply" as a consequence of the

Iran-Iraq war, the agency said. Germany's fellow eurozone economy Spain also saw its inflation rate hit an almost four-decade high. Official data showed it jumping to 9.8 percent in March from 7.6 percent in February, its highest level since 1985.

The war in Ukraine has also seen oil prices soar. Brent North Sea crude and West Texas Intermediate both added some three percent Wednesday on persistent supply worries linked to the conflict. "The prospect of heavy pressure on European consumers from higher energy prices is driving down the Dax and others, although the FTSE 100 has escaped the worst of it for now," said Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at online trading platform IG, as London just about bucked the negative trend.

Analysts said it was expected that OPEC and other

major producers including Russia would decide against lifting oil output at their monthly meeting on Thursday.

After apparent progress in negotiations with Russia lifted equities Tuesday, stocks pulled back as authorities in the northern Ukraine city of Chernigiv said the area was "shelled all night" despite Moscow's pledge to "radically" reduce fire there and around the capital Kyiv. Russian officials also played down hopes of a breakthrough, saying there was nothing "too promising" from the discussions. "It seems the Russians are continuing with military operations," said Oanda's Edward Moya. "Talks have been deemed positive, but many traders are expecting a prolonged period of time before a breakthrough in reaching a peace agreement will happen." —AFP

EU raids Gazprom's German offices in antitrust price probe

BRUSSELS: EU antitrust investigators raided the German offices of Gazprom, sources said on Thursday, on suspicion that the Russian energy giant had illegally pushed up prices in Europe. The European Commission, in a statement, said its teams carried out unannounced inspections on Tuesday "at the premises of several companies in Germany active in the supply, transmission and storage of natural gas".

Two sources familiar with

the matter said that a main target of the operation was Gazprom, the state gas giant that is accused of sparking an energy crunch in the European Union. According to a report by Bloomberg, officials visited offices of companies that included the giant's Gazprom Germania GmbH and Wingas GmbH, which supply about 20 percent of the German market.

The commission, the EU's powerful antitrust authority, is currently looking into allegations that Gazprom



BERLIN: File photo shows view of the building housing the Russian gas giant German branch Gazprom Germania headquarters in Berlin. EU antitrust investigators raided the German offices of Gazprom, sources said on March 31, 2022. — AFP

squeezed its European clients by limiting supply, causing prices to skyrocket. Gazprom has a powerful hand over the EU with Russia providing roughly 40 percent of its gas supply, mainly to German, Italy and a few eastern

European countries.

The gas flow to the EU has become an object of discord in the war in Ukraine, with Kiev calling on the Europeans to cut off their Russian supply line to punish the Kremlin for its invasion. — AFP

Russian economy to shrink 10% this year: EBRD

LONDON: The economies of Russia and Ukraine will contract by 10 percent and 20 percent respectively this year as the war between the two countries causes "the greatest supply shock" for 50 years, the European development bank, EBRD, said on Thursday. Before Russia invaded its pro-Western neighbour on February 24, the London-based European Bank for Reconstruction and Development had been pencilling in growth of 3.5 percent for Ukraine and 3.0 percent for Russia.

The EBRD, issuing emergency forecasts, said it was the first international financial institution to update its guidance since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine last month. The latest

prognoses "assume that a ceasefire is brokered within a couple of months, followed soon after by the start of a major reconstruction effort in Ukraine," it said.

Under such a scenario, Ukraine's gross domestic product should rebound by 23 percent next year. But the heavy economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the West would mean that it would register zero growth. "Sanctions on Russia are expected to remain for the foreseeable future, condemning the Russian economy to stagnation in 2023, with negative spillovers for a number of neighbouring countries in eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia," the EBRD said. — AFP

Business

Tariffs have not forced China to change its ways, US trade chief says

‘We can’t just wait for China to change’

WASHINGTON: Rather than pressuring China to change its “unfair” trade practices, US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai said Wednesday the economy would better served by policies to encourage domestic manufacturing. In a four-hour hearing before the House Ways and Means Committee, President Joe Biden’s trade chief acknowledged that Washington’s strategy of imposing massive tariffs on Beijing—which began under former president Donald Trump—has had little to no effect on its policies.

“That has not incentivized China to change,” she said. “It is very clear to us, I think, collectively, that we can’t keep doing what we have been doing.” Washington has accused Beijing of subsidizing its exports and wiping out industries both in the United States and Europe, forcing companies to transfer technology in exchange for doing business in China, and stealing intellectual property.

In 2020, the countries signed the “phase one” trade agreement under which Washington agreed to ease off tariffs the Trump administration imposed two years earlier, in exchange for China buying \$200 billion in American exports through 2021.

However Beijing fell short of those targets when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and Tai told lawmakers, “While we continue to keep the door open to conversations with China... we also need to acknowledge the agreement’s limitations, and turn the page on the old playbook with China, which focused on changing its behavior.”

Making amends

Since taking office in January 2021, Biden has resolved a number of trade disputes with US allies, including a deal announced last week to lift tariffs on British steel and aluminum that Trump imposed. However there’s been no similar breakthrough with China, despite Tai’s renewed negotiations with its officials. Last week, Washington agreed to extend tariff exemptions on 352 products imported from the Asian country after businesses complained the levies were driving up costs as the United States grapples with high inflation.

In her appearance before Congress, Tai stressed that the US strategy must now “expand beyond only pressing China” into abandoning trade practices Washington views as unfair. The new approach must

“include vigorously defending our values and economic interests from the negative impacts of the PRC’s unfair economic policies and practices,” she said, using the official term for the People’s Republic of China. “We can’t just wait for China to change,” she said, calling for “the reshoring and the rebuilding of our manufacturing base.” “That is the plan that we need to pursue going forward,” Tai said. China is aiming to grow its industries making products like electric cars and semiconductors, and Tai said the United States should make “strategic investments” to match them.

“We have seen what happened in the steel and solar industries when existing mechanisms were too slow or ill-suited to effectively address the distortions wrought by China’s targeting of those sectors,” she said.

The trade chief called on lawmakers to approve the Bipartisan Innovation Act, which has been approved by the House and Senate and is now in conference committee. The measure would spend \$52 billion on domestic semiconductor production and research as well as spurring manufacturing and strengthening supply chains. Tai also credited the



WASHINGTON: US Trade Representative Katherine Tai testifies on the “Biden Administration’s 2022 Trade Policy Agenda” during a House Ways and Means Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, March 30, 2022. —AFP

American Rescue Plan stimulus measure passed shortly after Biden took office last year with making “significant progress” in helping businesses grappling with the pandemic. —AFP

CBK honors distinguished employees for ninth consecutive year

KUWAIT: To foster excellence and outstanding performance, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) honored distinguished staff on Thursday 31 March 2022 under the participation of the CBK Governor, Dr Mohammad Y. Al-Hashel.


The distinguished employees awards ceremony is held for the ninth year in a row in recognition of distinguished and top-performing employees, and helps motivate more dedication and enhance employee loyalty.

Honored staff was selected against objec-

tive, clear, and detailed criteria that cover, among other factors, staff performance and output, timeliness and discipline, sense of responsibility, initiatives and contributions, and personal effort to improve skills and performance.

In a message addressed to CBK staff, Dr Al-Hashel expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all the distinguished employees wishing them continued success, and handed over the prizes and certificates of appreciation to the CBK-level distinguished employee, Ms Sarah A Alkhatrash, and the other four sector-level distinguished employees: Ms Jouri A Aldhubaib (Governor’s Sector), Ms Farah A Alsaraf (Supervision Sector), Ms Maryam M Almkhaizeem (Operations and Economic Research Sector), and Khaled M Alkandary (Organization and Administration Sector). The names and photos of the honorees were posted in the Hall of Excellence designated for this purpose at CBK HQ and on the Bank’s portal.





شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 31 MARCH 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,096	1,099	1,102	1,078	24	22,454,809	3.7	0.34%	10.23%	1,092	1,102	23.8	2.30	2.7%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	320	321	323	318	5	15,048,135	-2	-0.62%	15.05%	316	324	25.8	1.50	2.2%	1.12
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	245	252	254	245	9	22,893,785	6	2.44%	15.60%	246	254	NM	1.10	1.6%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	293	291	296	291	5	9,112,137	-3	-1.02%	15.94%	291	298	22.0	1.32	1.7%	1.04
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	1,030	1,071	1,075	1,030	45	50,778,932	45	4.39%	28.73%	1,065	1,075	42.0	4.69	1.1%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	955	939	958	935	23	3,012,197	-16	-1.68%	18.86%	931	950	69.3	5.42	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	385	444	475	375	100	34,322,299	59	15.32%	102.74%	440	475	14.1	1.88	10.1%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	200	201	206	195	11	81,503,266	2	1.01%	41.55%	200	207	45.8	2.49	2.3%	0.60
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	135	135	136	134	2	22,322,425	0	0.00%	14.41%	134	137	NM	0.82	6.3%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	159	160	161	158	3	12,030,859	0	0.00%	-10.61%	160	166	24.7	1.16	1.7%	0.96
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	929	919	930	910	20	2,105,215	-9	-0.97%	15.89%	916	930	20.3	2.09	1.5%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	285	281	296	281	15	15,752,687	-4	-1.40%	-0.71%	272	284	5.5	1.01	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,400	1,457	1,494	1,330	164	3,089,206	57	4.07%	67.28%	1,450	1,490	51.4	1.48	3.4%	0.95
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	997	1,000	1,018	994	24	3,372,812	1	0.10%	17.37%	995	1,010	28.4	2.35	5.3%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	382	384	385	380	5	4,124,472	0	0.00%	10.66%	382	388	NM	1.04	3.9%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,100	1,105	1,111	1,086	25	23,616,652	21	1.94%	16.93%	1,092	1,111	2.5	1.20	1.7%	1.47
605	Zain	Telecommunications	630	628	630	618	12	14,785,584	-2	-0.32%	5.55%	626	634	14.4	2.29	3.7%	1.33
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,624	3,229	3,640	3,119	521	2,113,564	-400	-11.02%	0.16%	3,229	3,250	7.0	3.52	12.3%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	317	317	222	216	6	5,840,209	1	0.46%	45.41%	217	222	NM	0.69	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,698	1,698	1,699	1,655	44	902,739	-1	-0.06%	31.63%	1,680	1,700	NM	16.10	1.9%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	318	332	334	317	17	15,044,059	19	6.07%	19.42%	325	332	22.8	2.57	3.6%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	280	282	284	278	6	13,204,685	1	0.36%	2.92%	280	286	21.5	2.79	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	585	581	589	580	9	1,532,531	-4	-0.68%	-1.36%	581	590	18.1	1.64	2.7%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	398	398	401	392	9	2,568,951	2	0.51%	2.30%	391	400	NM	1.67	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	225	223	226	223	3	4,343,505	-3	-1.33%	-2.19%	222	227	18.9	3.95	4.0%	0.59
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,775	2,710	2,778	2,709	69	671,840	-52	-1.88%	34.16%	2,690	2,787	34.7	9.64	2.4%	0.70

* As of end of week closing

Business

Kuwait PM receives LuLu Group chairman at WGS 2022 Summit



DUBAI: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met and exchanged cordial greetings with the Chairman of LuLu Group, Yusuff Ali MA.

DUBAI: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, during his current visit to attend the World Government Summit (WGS 2022) being held at the Expo 2020 venue in Dubai, met with and exchanged cordial greetings with the Chairman of LuLu Group, Yusuff Ali MA.

Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad, who led Kuwait's delegation to the World Government Summit, in his keynote address to the gathering called for collective global action to tackle major challenges facing governments around the world, including climate change, geopolitical upheavals,

health crises and others.

LuLu Group, which operates a chain of hypermarkets, supermarkets, and Express stores in Kuwait is the leading retailer in the country and the region. LuLu Hypermarkets in the country have contributed to the national economy by sourcing fresh foods and other items produced locally, and providing employment opportunities for the national cadre. The brand also remains committed to providing customers in Kuwait with an ideal shopping destination that offers high quality products from around the world at competitive prices.



HE Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain handing over the Bahraini Golden Visa to businessman Adeb Ahamed, MD of LuLu Financial Holdings.

LuLu Financial Group head receives Bahraini golden visa

MANAMA: Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of Lulu Financial Group, received the Bahrain golden residency visa. Adeb Ahamed was awarded the honor by HE Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain. "I am humbled and delighted to receive this honor today. I thank

His Majesty King Hamad bin Eisa Al Khalifa, His Royal Highness Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain and the government and people of Bahrain, for bestowing this recognition on me," Adeb Ahamed said, after receiving his Golden Visa.

Launched in February this year, the Golden residency visa for non-Bahrainis is part of the country's economic recovery plan to attract global talent and boost investment to Bahrain. "The Golden Visa is a benchmark of recognition that will boost Bahrain's image as a business hub, in traditional and new-age sectors," Adeb added.

Spend KD 10 to win KD 10,000 at IKEA

KUWAIT: IKEA Kuwait announces the biggest Raffle Draw in its history, with KD 10,000 every 20 days. Everyone can participate in IKEA Raffle Draws starting today. You only need to spend KD 10 or multiple of KD 10 at any IKEA in Kuwait. Every KD 10 you spend, will give you one entry to the Raffle Draw to win KD 10,000. You can participate as many times as you want. The more you shop the more chances to WIN!

There will be one grand prize for each draw equivalent to a home makeover worth of KD 10,000 consisting of IKEA products and services, including



planning services, delivery and assembly and IKEA on Wheels.

You can shop in all IKEA customer meeting points (The Avenues, 360 and The Assima Mall) and online (IKEA.com and IKEA App) in Kuwait. By the way, if you are an IKEA Family member, you get a double entry in the draw for every KD 10 spent. You've got to be in it to win it, so don't forget to fill the form to enter the draw.

What are you waiting to start shopping at IKEA? The draws will be conducted through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The ministry rules and regulations are applicable.



IBS conducts 'What it takes to be world class'

KUWAIT: Prof. Yaqoub Alrefaai, Director General of the Institute of Banking Studies (IBS), stated that the institute conducted a virtual program titled "What it Takes to be World Class" with Prof. Scott Snook, Senior Lecturer from Harvard Business School, on March 29th, 2022. This program was sponsored by the National Bank of Kuwait, Gulf Bank, Burgan Bank and Warba Bank.

Participants from different sectors attended this program such as: The banking sector, services and the oil sector. Scott Snook shared his wisdom about leadership and development based on his unique experience as both a leader and a scholar. He spent 22 years leading soldiers in the United States Army and retired as a Colonel. He has led soldiers in combat and taught leadership at the US Military Academy at West Point. He also has an MBA & PhD from Harvard University and for the past twenty years has taught courses on authentic leader development at the Harvard Business School and to executives around the world.

Prof Alrefaai also indicated that this program is

one of the important programs the IBS conducted this year. Scott discussed very important topics during the program he spoke about the counterintuitive role that vulnerability plays in leading and discussed the practice of personal reflective exercise. He also explored what it takes to be world class.

The Institute of Banking Studies frequently invites renowned world speakers to present programs/seminars/workshops for executives across the private and public sectors in the State of Kuwait. Over the last 8 years, IBS has invited the following international experts and speakers to present professional programs, seminars and workshops: Robin Sharma, Dr John C. Maxwell, Tom Peters, John Baldoni, Mark Sanborn, Adrian Gostick, Michael Neill, Joel Garfinkle, Steve Farber, Dave Ulrich, Erik Qualman and Michael Wade. IBS also invited James Dowd, Senior Fellow, Managing Director, Executive Education Linda A. Hill, Professor of Business Administration, Faculty Chair, Leadership Initiative and Francesca Gino from Harvard Business School, and Mohd Al Qahtani, holder of the world championship in diction and rhetoric, 2015, and Mrs Latifa Al Loughni from Kuwait.

Plenty of fish but no catch as Sri Lanka economic crisis bites

NEGOMBO, Sri Lanka: The sky and seas off Sri Lanka's coast are crystal blue but a worsening economic crisis has kept fishermen moored at Negombo harbour, out of gas and unable to reel in the day's catch. The waters nearby are a tropical bounty of fist-sized prawns and mackerel that normally find their way into the island nation's staple seafood curries.

But the crisis has left coastal communities short of fuel to send their vessels out to the ocean, and the repercussions are rippling down to dinner tables around the country. "If we queue up by five in the morning, then we will get fuel by three in the afternoon, on good days," Arulanandan, a seasoned member of Negombo's close-knit fishing community, tells AFP.

"But for some, even that is not possible, because by the time they get to the end of the queue, the kerosene is gone." Around the local estuary, idle crew members sun themselves on deck or lean against the rails of trawlers bobbing in the water, puffing on cigarettes as they list-

fish market—a bustling open-air warehouse that usually serves as a hub for wholesale buyers from across the country. The consequences of Sri Lanka's shrinking catch are being keenly felt here, with far less seafood making its way to stallholders and far fewer customers passing through.

"The buyers come from far away, and because of diesel and petrol shortages, they haven't shown up," says Mohammed Asneer, a young shrimp vendor. "Our sales have gone down and our expenses have gone up."

Asneer grows exasperated while bemoaning his straitened circumstances and says he would seize any opportunity to leave for abroad. "I don't want to be in this country anymore," he tells AFP. "We work in the fish market and we can't even afford to buy a kilo of fish. So what will everyone else do?"

'Everything is expensive'
Sri Lanka's government admits that the cur-



NEGOMBO: In this picture taken on March 24, 2022, workers process salted fish at a fishery harbour in Negombo. The sky and seas off Sri Lanka's coast are crystal blue but a worsening economic crisis has kept fishermen moored at Negombo harbour, out of gas and unable to reel in the day's catch. — AFP

lessly wait for news of a fresh diesel shipment.

Their ships are equipped to go deep into international waters for weeks at a time but the shortages have prevented most from setting sail. Other fishermen work closer to land, on smaller kerosene-powered motorboats like Arulanandan's, but locals say three in every four of these vessels are not working on any given day.

The adversity has knock-on effects—if a crew specialising in catching bait has no fuel, then other boats fortunate enough to source kerosene are also forced to stay on land. "When I can't bring money home, my children ask me, 'Why are you not feeding me?'" Arulanandan says. "But they don't understand the problems we are going through."

'What will everyone else do?'

An hour's drive south, on the outskirts of the capital Colombo, stands the country's biggest

rent economic crisis is the nation's worst since independence from Britain in 1948. Inflation is running rampant. The cost of diesel—when the fuel is available—has almost doubled in a matter of months, and official figures show the average price of food shot up by 25 percent in January.

"Now everything is expensive—for us it's very difficult to do business," says K.W. Shiromi, the owner of Mama's Place seafood restaurant in the bucolic southern coastal town of Weligama. By the roadside, a smattering of foreign tourists select a fish for Shiromi's brother to scale and gut before it is dispatched to the kitchen to be sauteed in chilli and spices.

As a few satisfied customers watch the waves roll in at their tables, Shiromi tells AFP that the rising cost of her catch has forced her to jack up prices. "If the government does something to make things better, then everyone will be happy," she says. "Otherwise everyone in Sri Lanka will suffer." — AFP



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: People wait in a queue to buy diesel at a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Colombo on March 31, 2022. — AFP

Sri Lanka runs out of diesel, faces blackout

COLOMBO: Diesel was no longer on sale across Sri Lanka on Thursday, crippling transport as the crisis-hit country's 22 million people endure record-long power blackouts. The South Asian nation is in the grips of its worst economic downturn since independence, sparked by an acute lack of foreign currency to pay for even the most essential imports.

Diesel—the main fuel for buses and commercial vehicles—was unavailable at stations across the island, according to officials and media reports. Petrol was on sale but in short supply, forcing motorists to abandon their cars in long queues.

"We are siphoning off fuel from buses that are in the garage for repairs and using that diesel to operate serviceable vehicles," Transport Minister Dilum Amunugama said. Owners of private buses—which account for two-thirds of the country's fleet—said they were already out of oil and that even skeleton services may not be possible after Friday.

"We are still using old stocks of diesel, but if we

don't get supplies by this evening, we will not be able to operate," chairman of the private bus operators association Gemunu Wijeratne told AFP. The state electricity monopoly said they would be forced to enforce a 13-hour power cut from Thursday—the longest ever—because they did not have diesel for generators.

"We are promised new supplies in two days and if that happens, we can reduce the length of power cuts," Ceylon Electricity Board chairman M. M. C. Ferdinando told reporters. He said hydro reservoirs, which provide more than a third of electricity demand, were also dangerously low.

The lengthy power cuts forced the Colombo Stock Exchange to limit its trading by half to two hours, while many offices asked non-essential staff to stay at home. The electricity rationing also hit mobile phone base stations and affected the quality of calls, operators said, adding that their stand-by generators were also without diesel.

The shortages have sparked outrage across Sri Lanka, with local television reporting protests across the country as hundreds of motorists block main roads in several towns. Several state-run hospitals have stopped surgeries as they have run out of essential life-saving medicines, while most have stopped diagnostic tests which require imported chemicals that are in short supply. — AFP

EXIT EXPO: DUBAI TO CLOSE SHUTTERS ON LAVISH WORLD FAIR



People visit the Expo 2020, less than a week before it comes to a close, in the Gulf emirate of Dubai. —AFP photos



Members of a European troupe perform at the Expo 2020.



Members of an Emirati troupe perform at the Al-Wasl dome in Expo 2020.



Visitors walk next to an anti-war sculpture of a pistol with the barrel tied-up in a knot at the Expo 2020.

Dubai will bid farewell to its extravagant Expo 2020 world fair on Thursday, leaving a multi-billion dollar mini-city in the desert and heightened expectations for future hosts. Six months after the delayed opening of the \$7 billion, purpose-built site, the Middle East business hub will close the shutters with performances from Christina Aguilera and DJ Tiesto, and fireworks that will go on past 3:00 am local time. Millions of people have flocked to Expo in its final days, pushing visit numbers over 23 million—not far off the 25 million targeted, despite the ongoing pandemic—and making it tough to find a taxi elsewhere in the city.

In 30 degrees Celsius (86 Fahrenheit) heat, long queues have formed at the most popular attractions, including the falcon-themed United Arab Emirates pavilion and the Saudi Arabia building, a slanted slab

that appears to hover in the air. Expo, housed on a circular site twice the size of Monaco, has been a point of pride for Dubai's monarchical rulers and one of a number of projects aimed at grabbing world attention. Dubai, the commercial heart of the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, is famously home to the world's tallest building, the 830-metre (2,723 feet) Burj Khalifa. In February, it opened a Museum of the Future—in the shape of a silver ellipse decorated with Arabic calligraphy—that promotions insisted was “the most beautiful building on earth”.

Inauspicious start

Expo, which started with the 1851 Great Exhibition in London and has showcased innovations such as the telephone and microwave down the years, now moves to Osaka in Japan which will hold the next edition on a

man-made island in 2025. “It’s clear that we have set a new bar here—it’s something I believe (Osaka) will look to aspire to,” said Dimitri Kerkenzes, secretary-general of the Bureau International des Expositions,

according to UAE’s The National newspaper. The event started inauspiciously, with a year’s pandemic delay and a boycott appeal from the European parliament, which criticised the UAE’s human rights record and “inhumane” practices towards immigrant laborers.

Three workers died and more than 70 suffered serious injuries building Expo, officials later revealed, insisting safety standards were “world-class”. Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Novak Djokovic were among the sports stars to visit, along with Saudi Arabia’s de facto ruler and crown prince Mohammed bin Salman and the leaders of France, Brazil, Turkey and Morocco. The site, with its

canopied walkways and speakers playing soothing music, is now envisaged as a car-free “15-minute city”, with all parts accessible by foot or bicycle within a quarter of an hour.

Eighty percent of the structures will remain, including the self-powering ‘Sustainability’ pavilion and a giant water feature that gives the impression of water flowing upwards. District 2020, as the Expo site will be known, is attempting to attract high-tech and digital companies to become a centre for innovation. “It was never an investment to host an Expo,” the show’s director-general Reem Al Hashimy told AFP in September. “It was an investment to create a new city that is equal distance between Dubai and (UAE capital) Abu Dhabi and really the city of the future. “That investment goes into a city to 2040, 2050 and beyond.”—AFP

ECLECTIC NEW ARTIST GRAMMY NODS SIGNAL INCLUSION, WITH OR WITHOUT WINS

When the Brooklyn-based Pakistani singer-songwriter Arooj Aftab learned last fall she was among the nominees for the best new artist Grammy, it was a shock. “I didn’t think that something like that could happen,” the 37-year-old told AFP before heading to Las Vegas for Sunday’s gala, before adding: “I felt like it’s something that should happen.” Aftab will be attending the Grammys for the first time, with two nominations under her belt on the heels of her 2021 album “Vulture Prince.”

The Recording Academy in recent years has made overdue attempts to diversify the genres and backgrounds of artists honored at its annual awards show, now in its 64th edition. Most notably, they’ve expanded the field in the top four categories—best album, record, song and new artist—from five, then to eight and now 10 nominees, which has resulted in one of the most eclectic new artist crops in recent memory.

“We’re all so cool—the group itself is kind of like a win,” said Aftab, who has been steadily gaining acclaim for her work that fuses ancient Sufi traditions with inflections of folk, jazz and pop. She said the category this year “feels like it’s the most rightfully representative.”

Aftab joins rapper Baby Keem, country singer Jimmie Allen, British rockers Glass Animals, experimental pop act Japanese Breakfast, Australian rapper The Kid Laroi, British singer Arlo Parks, rapper Saweetie and singer-songwriter Finneas—best known for the creative partnership he shares with his sister, Billie Eilish—in the best new artist running. Of course, also in the category is Olivia Rodrigo, the overnight pop

sensation who shattered streaming records on her ascent to superstardom and is widely tipped as a shoo-in to win the coveted award.

And if the 19-year-old who’s already a household name receives the trophy as expected, whether the Academy is really achieving its goal of promoting diversity in its recognition of the year’s best work remains an open question.



In this file photo US singer Olivia Rodrigo arrives for the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures opening gala in Los Angeles, California.—AFP

For Tarriona “Tank” Ball of the New Orleans group Tank and the Bangas—which received a new artist nomination for the 2020 gala, when Eilish won the category—just being included “carries weight.” “I don’t feel like I lost to anyone that night,” Ball told AFP. “We feel like winners.”

‘A big deal’

Darius Van Arman—the founder of

Secretly Group, a conglomeration of indie labels whose best new artist nominees include 2012 winner Bon Iver, Phoebe Bridgers and this year’s Japanese Breakfast—warned against letting industry awards “be the definition of success in the music marketplace.”

“There is no ranking of great art; there’s no winner or loser in the game



Brooklyn-based Pakistani singer-songwriter Arooj Aftab

of art. It’s all artists spending their best talents to make extraordinary pieces of expression that make the world better.” That said, Van Arman added that “awards shows do open doors for some artists though, and create career opportunities they wouldn’t have otherwise.”

When she first learned of her group’s nomination in 2019, Ball said the initial reaction was “shock”—a feel-

ing she called common for “underdogs” who perhaps never expected or aspired to such an accolade. But then it sinks in as “the cameras start coming, and then the news hits you up, and they find you wherever you’re at,” Ball continued. “And you’re just like, ‘Wait a minute, this is a big deal.’”

Aftab, who also scooped a nod for best global performance for her song “Mohabbat,” said these days “wherever I go... it’s just like, ‘Two-time Grammy nominee, two-time Grammy nominee!’” “It’s just, like, now attached to my name,” she laughed. “And you know, it is one of the biggest and most coveted, even just nominations... in the world for music.” “I think it is definitely doing something to my career.”

‘Realistic’ expectations’

Van Arman nodded to “strides” he said the Academy has made in recent years to “be more inclusive of artists whether they’re on major labels or independent labels.” “Our companies have felt that directly with Japanese Breakfast and Phoebe Bridgers and Bon Iver receiving best new artist nods.” At the end of the day, Aftab said it comes down to a question of aim.

“What is the ethos of the Grammys? Is it to be so fair and to really represent everybody?” she asked. “Or are they just part of industry and ratings... and giving the masses the thing that they want, which is Olivia Rodrigo or Taylor Swift?” “We just also have to be very realistic about our expectations of them, I think.” The first-time nominee joked that at this point she’s focused on “not grimacing in pain in heels.” “I’m looking forward to having a good time, meeting people,” Aftab said. “It’s going to be lit.”—AFP



Tom Parker

The Wanted singer dies of brain tumor aged 33

Tom Parker, one of five members of British-Irish boy band The Wanted, died on Wednesday aged 33, less than two years after revealing he was suffering from an inoperable brain tumor. The singer from northwest England announced the diagnosis in October 2020 and, after undergoing treatment, joined the rest of the band on a reunion tour in March.

But his actress wife Kelsey Hardwick wrote on Instagram: “It is with the heaviest of hearts that we confirm Tom passed away peacefully earlier today with all of his family by his side.” The remaining four bandmates said: “He was our brother, words can’t express the loss and sadness we feel. Always and forever in our hearts.”

Parker and Hardwick have two small children, including one born after his diagnosis. “I’m going to be here,” he told OK! magazine at the time. “I’m going to fight this.” Formed in 2009, The Wanted had number-one singles in Britain with “All Time Low” and “Glad You Came”, the latter also reaching number three in the US Billboard chart.—AFP



A general view shows the newly-inaugurated 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum in the capital Doha. —AFP photos



A Ferrari driven by Formula One champion Michael Schumacher is on display.

QATAR OPENS HUGE SPORTS MUSEUM FOR WORLD CUP YEAR



Gloves worn by late boxing giant Mohammed Ali, when he won a gold medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics, are on display.



A shirt worn by Brazilian football legend Pele is on display.

Qatar on Wednesday opened one of the world's biggest sports museums with artefacts from some of the most famous Olympic heroes but also gives prominence to local athletes hoping to boost efforts to attract a new generation into sports. The 19,000 square meters 3-2-1 Museum Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, next to one of the stadiums to be used in this year's World Cup, has taken more than 15 years to get off the planning board and fill.

After scouring private collections and negotiating with the International Olympic Committee and other federations, its 17,000 objects include a glove worn by late boxing giant Mohammed Ali, when he won a gold medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics, a Ferrari driven by Formula One champion Michael Schumacher and a shirt worn by Brazilian football legend Pele. There is also a cricket bat that belonged to Indian hero Sachin Tendulkar and a torch from each of the modern Olympic Games. The museum is part of a billion dollar-plus drive by the Qatar government to build the Gulf state into a cultural haven alongside its big spending on sports events.

But museum director Abdulla Al Mulla denied the museum only intended to put the spotlight



A partial view shows an artefact related to the ancient Greek Olympics at the newly-inaugurated 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum.

on Qatar's energy wealth. "We are not showing off," he told AFP. "We have the confidence, we earned the confidence of international federations." Al Mulla also said Qatar's ruling family wanted the museum to show off the state's sporting legacy.

A prince who has ridden horses at the Olympics is seen alongside the likes of Sheikh Hassan bin Jabr Al-Thani, who set a speed record by taking a catamaran power boat to 244 miles (395 kilometers) an hour in 2014. Al Thani,



A partial view shows an artefact related to the ancient Greek Olympics.

a member of the Qatar ruler's extended family who raced from 2003 until 2015, also said the museum was an "icon" through its recording of all Qatar's athletes and their rankings.

"If I knew that there was a wall with a local athlete on it, for sure I would want to be better than that athlete. So I will do 110 percent to be on that wall as well. Now I am a target, I am behind there, and so people can work hard and remove my picture and put someone else's on it," Victoria Cosgrave, curator for the museum's



People visit the newly-inaugurated 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum.

Olympic gallery, said the museum was also different because it did not shy away from controversy such as drug taking by athletes, corruption and the killing of athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. "I think one of the biggest challenges that we faced—and this is not just in Qatar, it's everywhere—is balancing the controversial aspect of sports, wanting to be honest about sport and sports people but also wanting to be respectful, being honoring and to be inspiring," she said. —AFP



'Game of Thrones' prequel 'House of the Dragon' to hit screens August 21

"House of the Dragon," the new HBO series set 200 years before the events of the mega-hit show "Game of Thrones" will premiere August 21, the network announced Wednesday. The 10-episode drama series debuts Sunday, August 21 on HBO and will be available to stream on HBO Max in the United States and in other countries where the WarnerMedia platform is available, a statement said. "House of the Dragon" is based on the book "Fire and Blood" by George R.R. Martin, and tells the story of the Targaryen family—relatives of a key "Game of Thrones" character, Daenerys Targaryen.

Stars of the new series include Emma D'Arcy of "Wanderlust", Matt

Smith of "Doctor Who" and "The Crown", Rhys Ifans from "The King's Man" and "Spiderman" and Olivia Cooke, known for appearances in "Bates Motel" and "Ready Player One."

A global success that commanded legions of fans and was showered with awards, "Game of Thrones" made television series history with its mix of fantasy and medieval worlds over eight seasons that aired from 2011 to 2019, though the show's non-stop sex and gore also sparked controversy. The new show's release date gives HBO the jump on rival streamer Amazon's release of its big-budget fantasy series adapted from J.R.R. Tolkien's saga "The Lord of the Rings," scheduled for a September 2 debut. —AFP

'Love hormone' oxytocin turns fierce lions into kittens

Scientists who spent years spraying oxytocin up the noses of lions found the big cats became much friendlier with their neighbors and less prone to roaring at strangers when dosed up on the so-called "love hormone." The results, published in the journal *iScience* on Wednesday, could have major benefits for conservation efforts as unfamiliar prides are increasingly forced by urban sprawl to live together in reserves. "I've always loved lions," neuroscientist and first author Jessica Burkhart told AFP, explaining she became involved in the research because she had grown tired of examining the animals' brains in the lab and wanted to study them in real life.

Cats in general have a reputation for independence, but lions buck that trend—living socially in prides as they win and defend prized territories on the African savanna. "If you think about male lions, for example they will leave the pride when they're a couple of years old and they will meet up with other male lions they don't know and they're not related to, and they will form lifelong bonds," said Burkhart. These types of behaviors indicated that lions—unlike solitary cheetahs or leopards—are biologically programmed to be social in some situations, making them an interesting test species for oxytocin intervention.

'Cuddle chemical'

Across mammals, oxytocin is the chief molecule strengthening social bonds. Sometimes called the "cuddle chemical," it surges inside the brain of a mother when she gazes into her newborn's eyes, promoting feelings of well-being and happiness—while

causing the baby to want to latch on to its mother's breast. Similar effects have been documented in other species, as well as between dogs and their human owners. Therapists even suggest couples experiencing problems can benefit from increased eye contact, which releases oxytocin.

Working on a wildlife reserve in Dinokeng, South Africa in the summers of 2018 and 2019, Burkhart and colleagues from the University of Minnesota ran a test using hunks of raw meat to lure lions to a



fence. The hormone had to be sprayed directly up the nose, using a device that looks like an antique perfume bottle, so it would travel straight to the brain.

After the treatment, the 23 lions given oxytocin became more tolerant of lions in their space. This was measured by seeing how close a lion who has possession of a desired object, in this case a toy, will let others approach it. "After the lions were treated with oxytocin, and we gave them their favorite pumpkin toy to play with, we saw the average distance between them drop

from about seven meters with no treatment to about 3.5 meters after oxytocin was administered," said Burkhart. Lions didn't roar back when played recorded roars of unfamiliar intruders—unlike those in a control group who either weren't sprayed with anything, or were sprayed with a saline solution.

Conservation benefits

The lowered hostility towards strangers was a particularly encouraging finding, said Burkhart, because oxytocin is known to have a dark side in humans: while it promotes positive feelings to those within a group, it can increase rivalry against outsiders. The treatment could be helpful in a number of scenarios, she said. First, it could help bond unfamiliar lions rescued from abusive situations, such as from circuses or zoos in war zones, who are then placed in sanctuaries. Second, as cities in Africa sprawl and encroach upon lions' territory, conservationists are forced to transport the cats to fenced refuges where unfamiliar prides are housed together—and oxytocin might help prevent conflict.

It could also help relocations to the wild, helping lions "become more inclined to their new social environment so they're more curious and less fearful, leading to more successful bonding," said Burkhart. One fear is that unscrupulous operators—in the vein of infamous "Tiger King" Joe Exotic—might try to use the chemical to help run zoos that promote cub petting, heavily criticized by animal welfare advocates. "The truth is people are corrupt...but hopefully in this case it'll help more than it'll ever hurt," said Burkhart. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

ACTION HERO BRUCE WILLIS TO RETIRE BECAUSE OF ILLNESS

Action hero Bruce Willis, star of the "Die Hard" franchise, is to retire from acting after developing a cognitive illness, his family announced Wednesday. A post on Instagram said Willis had aphasia—a language disorder that robs people of their ability to communicate. "Bruce has been experiencing some health issues and has recently been diagnosed with aphasia, which is impacting his cognitive abilities," read the post. "As a result of this and with much consideration Bruce is stepping away from the career that has meant so much to him." Aphasia is typically caused by a stroke or head injury—though in more rare cases can come on gradually and progressively.

The condition affects a person's ability not just to speak and understand verbal communication but also their reading and writing. The Los Angeles Times reported that questions about Willis's short-term memory have recently circulated. The paper noted that he

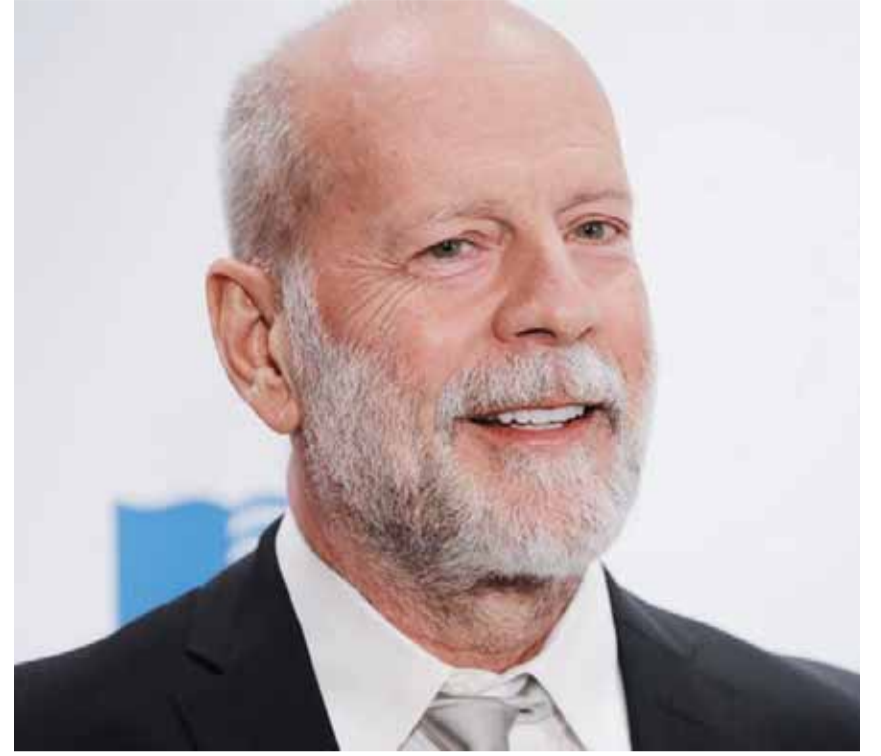
was not at the Oscars on Sunday when several other stars of "Pulp Fiction," including Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman and John Travolta, took to the stage.

Willis has been a fixture on the small and large screen since the 1980s, coming to public prominence in the TV series "Moonlighting." But it was as hard-bitten hero John McClane in "Die Hard" that he became a bankable major star of the cinema, sparking a career that has generated billions of dollars of box office receipts. Willis, who this month turned 67, provided the voice for the baby in popular family flick "Look Who's Talking." Another of his best-known roles was as the dead person that child actor Haley Joel Osment could see in "The Sixth Sense."

Willis won a Golden Globe and two Emmys during his career, but last weekend was the recipient of a far-less welcome honor—a specially devised category in the

Razzies for "Worst Performance by Bruce Willis in a 2021 Movie." The Instagram post announcing the news of his retirement is signed by Willis' current wife, Emma Heming Willis, as well as former wife, actress Demi Moore, and his children Rumer, Scout, Tallulah, Mabel and Evelyn.

"This is a really challenging time for our family and we are so appreciative of your continued love, compassion and support," it adds. "We are moving through this as a strong family unit, and wanted to bring his fans in because we know how much he means to you, as you do to him. "As Bruce always says, 'Live it up' and together we plan to do just that." Reaction was swift from fellow stars. Jamie Lee Curtis wrote: "grace and guts! Love to you all", while Cindy Crawford posted an emoji of praying hands. Actress and former co-star Elizabeth Perkins wrote: "Sending so much love to you all."—AFP



In this file photo Actor Bruce Willis arrives for the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize Honoree's Tribute Concert in Washington, DC. —AFP

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT APHASIA, BRUCE WILLIS' DIAGNOSIS

The news that film star Bruce Willis has retired from acting due to aphasia has shone a spotlight on the poorly understood communication disorder. Here's what you should know.

What is aphasia?

"Aphasia just means that someone has a problem with language that they weren't born with," Hugo Botha, a neurologist at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota explained. The most common cause is stroke or head injury—and experts stress that while it can affect the production and comprehension of both speech and written words, it normally doesn't impact intelligence. It affects some two million Americans, according to the National Aphasia Association, making it more common than Parkinson's Disease, cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy. A 2016 survey carried out by the same group found that fewer than nine percent of people knew what was.

While it's normally caused by a specific one-time event such as stroke, "there are other possibilities, such as from a neurodegenerative disease," or a growing tumor, explained Brenda Rapp, a cognitive scientist at Johns Hopkins University. In such cases the damage is progressive and therapy focuses on preventing further loss of function. Willis' family did not share the cause of his diagnosis in their statement.

What are the different forms?

The brain system governing language is a "very complex machine" that involves selecting the right words, moving the mouth appropriately to vocalize them, and on the other end hearing and decoding their meaning, said Rapp. Everyone occasionally struggles to find the right word, "but you could imagine in aphasia, this happens a lot," she added. Doctors sometimes split aphasia into broad clinical categories which correlate to where in the brain injury occurred.

In expressive aphasia, people "usually understand fairly well but have trouble getting words out," said speech pathologist Brooke Hatfield, of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). A person with this type of aphasia might use simple sentences like "want food" to be understood. In receptive aphasia "the words come easily, but they might not be the right words. And it's difficult for that person to understand what they're hearing," added Hatfield. Global aphasia has components of expressive and receptive.

Speech therapy

The good news, says Hatfield, is



In this file photo actor Bruce Willis attends the premiere of Universal Pictures' "Glass" at SVA Theatre in New York City. —AFP

people can improve over the long term. "There are people who had their stroke 30 years ago, who still work at their language and communication and they still make gains." The brain is extremely plastic, and speech therapy can engage other parts of it to "bypass the roadblocks" of the damaged areas, and forge new connections, said Rapp. Such therapy also teaches people to talk around the subject if they get stuck on a specific word.

Family members can also develop strategies to make themselves better understood: "Things like shorter sentences, and making sure that you're talking to the person in full view instead of the other room, and minimizing background noise," said Botha. Some people do well with assistive devices because their ability to write isn't affected in the same way.

Over the horizon, there are experimental treatments that combine electrical stimulation of the brain with speech therapy that have shown promise in recovering function, said Rapp. In the case of progressive aphasia, developing drugs that target the build up of protein plaques and tangles in the brain that cause neurodegenerative disease are thought to be the way forward.

Bottom line

All the experts emphasized patience. Aphasia can be frustrating and isolating, because "our relationships with others depend so much on being able to talk to them and communicate with them," said Rapp, leading to a person or their caregivers withdrawing. "It's similar to all of a sudden waking up in a country where you don't speak the language," said Hatfield, rather than a change in underlying cognitive abilities —AFP

WILL SMITH REFUSED TO LEAVE OSCARS AFTER ROCK SLAP: ACADEMY

Will Smith refused to leave the Oscars ceremony after attacking comedian Chris Rock, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences revealed Wednesday, as it began disciplinary action against the mega star. Smith could face expulsion from the Academy for the open-handed slap, which came moments before he was handed the best actor award for his role in "King Richard"—an announcement greeted with cheers by the audience.

"While we would like to clarify that Mr Smith was asked to leave the ceremony and refused, we also recognize we could have handled the situation differently," a statement said. The Academy, the body that hands out the Oscars, said it would hold a vote on what action should be taken against Smith over the globally televised assault, which marred Hollywood's most important evening.

"The Board of Governors today initiated disciplinary proceedings against Mr Will Smith for violations of the Academy's Standards of Conduct, including inappropriate physical contact, abusive or threatening behavior, and compromising the integrity of the Academy," the statement said. "Mr Smith is being provided at least 15 days' notice of a vote regarding his violations and sanctions, and the opportunity to be heard beforehand by means of a written response."

"At the next board meeting on April 18, the Academy may take any disciplinary action, which may include suspension, expulsion, or other sanctions permitted by the Bylaws and Standards of Conduct." The group is under intense pressure to respond appropriately to the slap, which has dominated coverage of the glitzy awards and taken the spotlight from several notable firsts—including for the mainly deaf cast of "CODA," who won best picture.

Expulsion from the exclusive club is rare, but not unheard of: Harvey Weinstein was kicked out in 2017 after

reports emerged of decades of sexual assault. Director Roman Polanski was expelled in 2019 after years of controversy about his 1978 conviction for the rape of a 13-year-old girl. Neither man was stripped of their Oscars.

Joke

Attendees of the ceremony Sunday watched agape as Smith stormed onstage and hit Rock, who had cracked a joke



In this file photo an Oscar statue is seen near the red carpet area ahead of the Oscars Award show at the Dolby Theater on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

about his actress wife's closely cropped head. Jada Pinkett Smith has alopecia, a condition that causes her to lose hair. Rock managed to keep the gala on track, but the atmosphere at the event had shifted unmistakably. Less than half an hour later, when accepting the movie world's highest honor for an actor, Smith tearfully claimed: "Love will make you do crazy things."

The star of "Men in Black" and "Aladdin" subsequently apologized to

Rock in an Instagram post, and Pinkett Smith posted on the platform that now was "a season for healing." Rock finally spoke publicly about the episode to a sold-out crowd in Boston on Wednesday. "How was your weekend?" he asked the audience as he took to the stage, before adding that he didn't have any material about the slap.

"If you came to hear that, I have a whole show I wrote before this weekend," Variety reported him saying. "I'm still kind of processing what happened. 'At some point I'll talk about that,'" he added. "And it will be serious and funny." In its Wednesday statement, the Academy offered its apologies to Rock over the "deeply shocking, traumatic event." "Mr Rock, we apologize to you for what you experienced on our stage and thank you for your resilience in that moment," the Academy said.

'Traumatized'

Oscars' co-host Wanda Sykes, one of three women whose turn at the helm of the show has been widely praised, revealed Wednesday she felt sick after the attack and thought Smith should have been ejected. "It was sickening. It was absolutely physically felt ill, and I'm still a little traumatized by it," she told talk show host Ellen DeGeneres. "And for them to let (Smith) stay in that room and enjoy the rest of the show and accept his award, I was like, 'How gross is this?' This sends the wrong message."

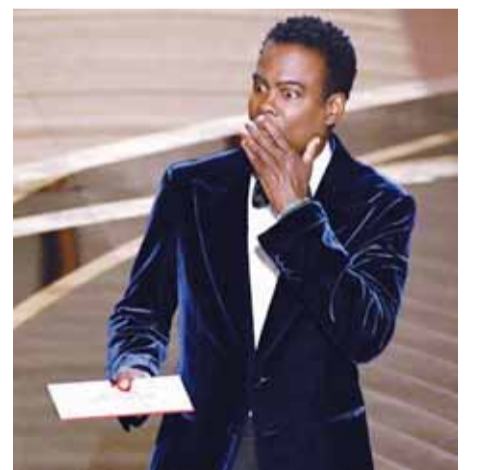
"If you assault somebody, you get escorted out the building and that's it. But for them to let him continue, I thought it was gross," she said. She also told DeGeneres that she had spoken to Rock after the show. "The first thing he said is, 'I'm so sorry.' I was like, 'Why are you apologizing?'" He was like, "It was supposed to be your night." "You and Amy (Schumer) and Regina (Hall) were doing such a great job. I'm so sorry this is now gonna be about this," Sykes said Rock told her. —AFP

CHRIS ROCK SAYS 'STILL KIND OF PROCESSING' OSCARS SLAP: VARIETY

Comedian Chris Rock broke his silence on Will Smith slapping him at the Oscars ceremony during a stand-up show in Boston Wednesday, the trade publication Variety reported. When Rock took the stage of the sold-out show, he started by asking the audience, "How was your weekend?" His opener brought a wave of laughter. But he then said he did not have any jokes about the slap because he was "still kind of processing what happened," according to Variety.

"At some point I'll talk about that... and it will be serious and funny," he added.

Attendees of the ceremony Sunday watched agape as Smith stormed onstage and hit Rock, who had cracked a joke about his actress wife's closely cropped hairstyle. Jada Pinkett Smith has alopecia, a condition that causes her to lose hair. The audience was initially unsure if the powerful slap was part of a skit, until Smith shouted profanities from his seat. Rock managed to keep the gala on track, but the atmosphere at the event had shifted unmistakably. Smith subsequently apologized to Rock in an Instagram post, and Pinkett Smith posted on the platform that now was "a season for healing." —AFP



US actor Chris Rock speaks onstage during the 94th Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. —AFP

RUSSIAN SOPRANO NETREBKO CONDEMNS WAR, TO RESUME PERFORMING IN MAY



In this file photo Russian opera soprano singer Anna Netrebko performs during the 27th annual Victoires de la musique classique (Classical music award) ceremony at the l'Arsenal de Metz, in Metz, northeastern France. —AFP

Russian superstar soprano Anna Netrebko on Wednesday condemned the war in Ukraine and said she would return to the stage after canceling concerts in the wake of criticism that she was close to the Kremlin. As many Russian artists face pressure to publicly denounce Putin's invasion or risk losing their engagements, Netrebko—one of the world's best-known opera singers—said on Facebook that she wanted to set the record straight and did not support President Vladimir Putin.

"I expressly condemn the war against Ukraine and my thoughts are with the victims of this war and their families," she wrote. Netrebko, 50, said she was "neither a member of a political party nor am I linked to any leader of Russia," and admitted that she "recognizes and regrets that my actions and statements in the past could in part be misconstrued". Netrebko, who has voiced pro-Kremlin views over the years, and in

2014 posed with a rebel flag in the contested Donetsk region, said she had met Putin "only a handful of times, mainly to accept awards for my art or at the opening of the Olympic Games".

The singer said she had "never received financial support from the Russian government" and lives in Austria "which is also my tax home". "I love my homeland Russia," Netrebko said, adding that she "aimed only to foster peace and unity with my art". Netrebko's website lists upcoming appearances in Paris on May 25, Milan on May 27 and Luzerne on June 5.

But the Metropolitan Opera in New York said it was not ready to revisit Netrebko's status. "Having read Anna's statement, we're not prepared to change our position," said a statement from Met General Manager Peter Gelb. "If Anna demonstrates that she has truly and completely disassociated herself from Putin over the long-term, I would be willing to have a conversation."

In the immediate wake of the Russian invasion, Netrebko said she was opposed to the war, but stopped short of directly criticizing Putin—something her latest statement also avoided. On March 3, the Met said Netrebko withdrew from upcoming New York performances for "not complying with the Met's condition that she repudiate her public support for Vladimir Putin while he wages war on Ukraine." Russian conductor and Kremlin loyalist, Valery Gergiev—also the man who discovered Netrebko—was last month stripped of his role at the Munich Philharmonic and declared persona non grata at several prestigious concert halls for failing to criticize Putin.

Other Russian stars have been vocal in their opposition to the war. Prima ballerina Olga Smirnova last week quit the Bolshoi in Moscow to join the Dutch National Ballet, after saying she was against the war "with all the fibres of my soul". —AFP

Sports

Heat, Mavericks book playoff berths, Warriors still waiting

LOS ANGELES: The Miami Heat rallied to beat the Boston Celtics 106-98 and clinch an NBA playoff berth on Wednesday as the post-season picture began to get clearer. Dallas also secured a playoff spot after Luka Doncic scored 35 points and handed out 13 assists to lead the Mavericks to a 120-112 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. The Cavs' defeat meant either the Eastern Conference-leading Heat or Celtics would be sure of a berth, and it was a tense finish in Boston.

Jimmy Butler scored 24 points and Kyle Lowry added 23 as Miami came out on top in a game that featured 16 lead changes. Bam Adebayo finished with 17 points and 12 rebounds for the Heat, who pushed a one-point halftime lead to as many as 11, but trailed 83-79 going into the final quarter. Jaylen Brown scored 28 points and pulled down 10 rebounds, and Jayson Tatum added 23 points and six assists for Boston.

But the Celtics couldn't hold off Miami, who took a 102-96 lead on Butler's dunk with 1:43 remaining. Tatum answered with a layup but on his next attempt was called for an offensive foul, and the Heat finally sealed it with a string of free throws. "We really had to step up and make multiple efforts," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "They just keep on attacking regardless of what your scheme is."

But Spoelstra said the tight finish was just what his team needed to prepare for the playoffs. "That's why I like going through a lot of these type of games in the regular season," he said. "We had some big-time performances down the stretch." The Mavericks' playoff spot was assured with their win as well as the Toronto Raptors' 125-102 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Doncic scored 20 points in the third quarter, when Dallas out-scored Cleveland 39-22 to claw back from a six-point half-time deficit. The Slovenian star received a rapturous welcome in Cleveland, which has a large Slovenian population, and finished one rebound shy of his second 30-point triple-double in as many nights. "When all the people come to see you, you want to put on a show," Doncic said.

Dorian Finney-Smith added a career-high 28 points, including six three-pointers for the Mavericks, who are in the playoffs for a third straight year. The Cavs were led by Caris LeVert's 32 points. But they were without rookie of the year contender Evan Mobley, who will miss at least three games with a sprained ankle. Cleveland are seventh in the East, two games behind the Raptors and Chicago Bulls in the battle for the last direct entry into the playoffs.

Suns hold off Warriors

The seventh through 10th-placed teams will battle in a play-in tournament for the remaining two spots from each conference. The Golden State Warriors missed a chance to punch their playoff ticket, falling 107-103 to the Western Conference top seeds Phoenix. Devin Booker and Mikal Bridges scored 22 points apiece as the Suns matched a franchise record with their 62nd win of the season. It was touch and go, however, with six lead changes in the fourth quarter alone before the Suns put it away. "It's big," said Chris Paul, who contributed 15 points and eight assists. "Games like this can help you in the post-season, it makes you trust."

Jordan Poole scored 38 points to lead the



CLEVELAND: Darius Garland #10 of the Cleveland Cavaliers dribbles the ball during the game against the Dallas Mavericks on March 30, 2022 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse. —AFP

Warriors as star Stephen Curry missed a seventh game with a sprained foot. The Memphis Grizzlies locked up the second seed in the West behind Phoenix with a 112-111 victory over the Spurs in San Antonio. Tyus Jones scored 25 points for the Grizzlies, who won the Southwest Division title for

the first time in franchise history despite the fact that star Ja Morant missed his sixth straight game with a right knee injury. The defeat dropped the Spurs a half-game behind the reeling Los Angeles Lakers for 10th in the West and the last berth in the play-in tournament. —AFP

England set up World Cup final with Australia

CHRISTCHURCH: England continued their fairytale revival at the Women's World Cup Thursday when Danni Wyatt's century set up a 137-run semi-final thrashing of South Africa to set up a final showdown with Australia. Wyatt's outstanding 129, aided by five dropped catches and supported by Sophia Dunkley's 60, saw England post an imposing 293 for eight off their 50 overs at Hagley Oval in Christchurch.

Sophie Ecclestone then produced the best bowling figures of the tournament with six for 36 as South Africa folded for 156 in 38 overs. After being on the brink of elimination after losing their first three matches, the defending champions have since won five in a row and will now face unbeaten Australia in Sunday's final, also at Hagley Oval. Australia cruised into the final with a crushing 157-run win over the West Indies in Wellington on Wednesday.

"That was a complete performance from us today, what we've been searching for," said captain Heather Knight who rated her side as "under-

dogs" against Australia. "But we're all equal on the morning of the game and what a story is written for us if we can do it." Player of the match Wyatt, who scored only 12 fours in her 129 off 125 deliveries - the third highest score of the tournament-said it was a difficult ground for batting.

"I tried to capitalize on the width provided by their bowlers. The boundaries were pretty big," she said. "It was a weird wicket. We just said run well between the wickets and just be positive." It was the second consecutive World Cup that England have beaten the Proteas in the semi-finals and continued South Africa's last-four hoodoo with no men's or women's team having reached an ODI or Twenty20 World Cup final.

Wolvaardt duck

They started well when they won the toss and reduced England to 77 for three but opener Wyatt was standing firm. At 126 for four, Wyatt was joined by Dunkley and the pair put on 116 for the fifth wicket more than six runs an over to set England up for a formidable total. Wyatt was eventually out off the bowling of Masabata Klaas, caught by Lizelle Lee who had dropped the first chance offered by Wyatt when she was on 22.

Dunkley made her 60 off 72 deliveries and the innings was finished in



CHRISTCHURCH: England's Sophie Ecclestone bowls to South Africa's Trisha Chetty during their 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup second semi-final at Hagley Oval on March 31, 2022. —AFP

style by Ecclestone's quickfire 24 off 11 balls. The all-rounder smacked three consecutive fours in the final over before being bowled by Shabnim Ismail, who finished with the best South African figures of three for 46. South Africa's run chase started disastrously when the tournament's highest run-scorer Laura Wolvaardt was out without scoring in the second over and big-hitting opening partner Lee followed in the fourth over for two.

From eight for two, South Africa were in further trouble when captain Sune Luus went for 21, leaving them 44 for three in the 12th over and well behind the required run rate. At the halfway stage they were 95 for four with the rising required run rate of 7.96 proving beyond them as the tournament's leading wicket-taker Ecclestone ran through the tail to take England to their sixth appearance in a World Cup final. —AFP

Swiatek cruises into Miami Open semifinals

MIAMI: Iga Swiatek's dream season continued as she defeated Petra Kvitova 6-3, 6-3 in the Miami Open quarterfinals to close in on a third successive WTA 1000 crown. The new world number one won the title in Doha and then Indian Wells and now has an excellent chance of becoming only the fourth woman in history to win the Sunshine Double - triumphing in California and Florida in the same year-following Steffi Graf (1994 and 1996), Kim Clijsters (2005) and Victoria Azarenka (2016).

Swiatek, who has now won 15 successive WTA tour matches, is the form player in the women's game at the moment and American Jessica Pegula, who reached the last four earlier in the day after fifth seed Paula Badosa was forced to retire because of illness midway through the first set, will have her work cut out attempting to stop the Polish 20-year-old when they meet on Thursday for a place in the final.

Formula 1 returns to Las Vegas after 4-decade absence

LAS VEGAS: Las Vegas will host a night-time Formula 1 Grand Prix along its iconic Strip in 2023 with the sport's top official describing the event as "an incredible moment". The race returns to the city for the first time since 1982 and will become the third grand prix in the United States on next year's F1 calendar, alongside Miami and Austin. "This is an

Czech star Kvitova was on the back-foot once she was broken in the first set as Swiatek's excellent hitting, especially from the back of the court, and her serve ultimately proved the difference. The two-time Wimbledon champion fought hard, but Swiatek was able to maintain her aggressive, attacking game and when she broke for 3-2 in the second set it was always going to be an uphill battle for the 32-year-old now ranked 32nd in the world.

"I want to use the confidence I have had since the start of the year and I am on a roll," Swiatek said after winning in one hour and 14 minutes at Hard Rock Stadium. "I am just so happy I can compete against legends like Petra. I knew I had to keep up with the pace as she plays fast and I think my first serve was the key."

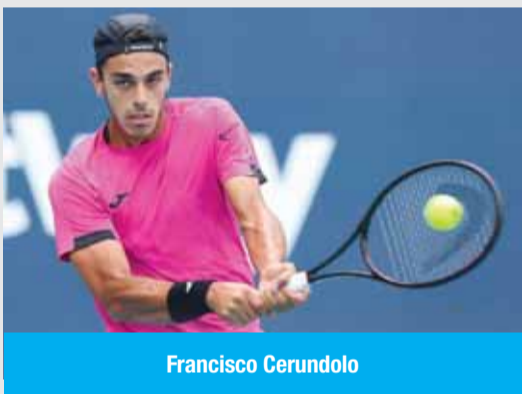
Pegula goes into her second WTA 1000 semi-final well rested after her round of 16 match against Anhelina Kalinina only lasted a set before the Ukrainian retired. The same fate then befell Spain's fifth-seeded Badosa in the quarters on Wednesday, as she conceded the contest with the score at 4-1 to the American. Pegula, whose parents own the Buffalo Bills NFL franchise, has spent just three hours and 22 minutes on

incredible moment for Formula 1 that demonstrates the huge appeal and growth of our sport with a third race in the US," said Stefano Domenicali, the president of Formula 1.

"Las Vegas is a destination known around the world for its excitement, hospitality, thrills, and of course, the famous Strip. There is no better place for Formula 1 to race than in the global entertainment capital of the world." The race will take place at night, on a Saturday in November. The track will be 6.12km long from start to finish with top speeds estimated to be over 342 km/h.

It will take in the city's most famous landmarks, hotels and casinos. There will be 50 laps with three main straights and 14 corners, including a high-speed

cornering sequence and a single chicane section. "Iconic Las Vegas and Formula 1, the pinnacle of motorsport, is the perfect marriage of speed and glamour," said Greg Maffei, president of F1's owners Liberty Media. Las Vegas twice hosted F1 races in 1981 and 1982 on the car park of Caesar's Palace after Watkins Glen in upstate New York lost its rights after two decades. The Miami Grand Prix debuts this year on May 8 while the United States Grand Prix takes place at Austin, Texas on Oct 23. The famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway previously played host to the US Grand Prix between 2000 and 2007. This year will be the first time since Dallas and Detroit in 1984 that the United States has staged two races. —AFP



Francisco Cerundolo

Nalbandian advice buoys Cerundolo in Miami Open run

MIAMI: Francisco Cerundolo is using the help of his boyhood hero to boost an unlikely run to the Miami Open semifinals. The Argentine arrived in south Florida with an 0-2 tour-level record on hard courts, but after 11th-ranked Italian Jannik Sinner retired trailing 4-1 in the first set of their quarter-final the 23-year-old is now one win away from Sunday's final.

Cerundolo, ranked 103rd in the world, grew up idolizing Argentina tennis legend David Nalbandian. Now that 40-year-old Nalbandian is coaching Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic, who takes on 18-year-old Spanish sensation Carlos Alcaraz in the quarterfinals on Thursday, he has never been too far away for a chat and some advice at Hard Rock Stadium.

"This year I started having a better relationship with him and all of the guys that were at the top level when I was a kid," said Cerundolo, whose brother Juan Manuel was knocked out in the third round by Frances Tiafoe before Cerundolo beat the American himself. "As I'm improving and playing at the biggest events, I'm able to meet them more often, so it's amazing. When I was young, my idol was Nalbandian. I love the way he played and look up to him."

"Of course we are going to have a chat. They can give me some thoughts and experience they had in the past, so it's really nice to be able to, I don't know, to just hang around with them, and they are gonna give me some tips. It's fantastic." Cerundolo has really hit his groove in Miami, beating Tallon Griekspoor, Reilly Opelka (second-set retirement), Gael Monfils and Tiafoe before seeing Sinner, with whom he had practised over the last couple of days, suffer so badly with a blister on his right foot that he was unable to continue.

With both men's and women's matches during the Wednesday day session ending early with retirements, there wasn't much to cheer but one group of very loud, flag waving Argentine fans were at least able to see the Buenos Aires native move into the biggest match of his life. Former US Open champion Juan Martin del Potro had a huge South American following in Miami and Cerundolo hopes to use it to his advantage.

"I don't know those guys in the stand but maybe I can meet them," he smiled. "There's such a huge Argentine population here and they're very supportive of Argentine players. Yesterday I played an American guy, and I think more people were cheering for me than for him. I love to play with my people, Argentine people, Latin people. It's fantastic. I think it brings my best inside the court."

Sinner, who was forced out in Indian Wells earlier this month before a last 16 match against Nick Kyrgios because of illness, felt the problem in his foot when playing the Australian in the fourth round on Tuesday and quickly realized he wouldn't be able to compete as the match with Cerundolo progressed. "It's a blister, and I couldn't move," he said. "It's tough because I was playing well." —AFP



MIAMI GARDENS, Florida: Iga Swiatek of Poland returns a shot to Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic during the women's singles match of the 2022 Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 29, 2022. —AFP

court in her four matches so far and said: "I've definitely played really, really clean tennis the last two sets."

"I think that's helped. I don't want to say get a retirement, but sometimes you just never know how someone is going to react when they get out there, even though you know they are not feeling well. I think from Paula's last match I

could tell that she probably wasn't going to be 100 percent by today, but again, I have no idea what happened or how she was feeling or if she recovered or if it was quick. It's just hard to know in those situations. It can be kind of awkward. I am just trying to focus on myself and play the best tennis I could, and I've been able to do that." —AFP

Sports

Liverpool, Man Utd to clash in Bangkok as Premier League clubs resume tours

BANGKOK: Liverpool and Manchester United will meet in a high-profile friendly in Bangkok in July, the clubs said on Thursday, as Premier League teams resume lucrative pre-season tours which stopped when COVID hit. After the July 12 clash in the Thai capital, Cristiano Ronaldo and his United team-mates will fly to Australia for two more friendlies, including a clash with Crystal Palace, at the 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Before the pandemic shut down overseas tours, usually to Asia and the United States, they were a regular money-spinner for Premier League sides - even if managers don't like the travel, hot weather and sometimes questionable pitches. "It will be the same players as you see now with a few additions if transfer deals happen," said legendary United striker Andy Cole, predicting the two sides' historic rivalry would continue in Bangkok. "I'm not sure it will be played like a pre-season friendly," he said.

The clash between United and Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool, currently nipping at the heels of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League, at the Rajamangala National Stadium has been dubbed the "Red War" by Thai media and fans. Both clubs have a strong following in Thailand, with Liverpool shirts and logos especially visible - the Anfield outfit's official Thai language Facebook page has more than 38 million followers. Former Liverpool defender Phil Babb said he expected Klopp to bring a full-strength squad.

But with tickets ranging from 5,000 to 25,000

baht (\$150 to \$750) many ordinary Thai fans have complained of being priced out of seeing their heroes play in the flesh. Earlier this month senior officials from the two clubs visited Bangkok to check the facilities at the 51,000-seat ground. Premier League teams touring Asia in the past have complained about substandard pitches, and photos released by the organizers showed Liverpool general manager Ray Haughan on his knees making a detailed inspection of the turf.

Vinij Lertratanachai, chief executive officer of Fresh Air Festival, which is organizing the match, said the stadium would get a "makeover" to meet the clubs' standards. Organizers hope to recreate an English matchday atmosphere on Thai soil, though with likely temperatures in the low 30s Celsius and humidity around 70 percent, the chilly damp of northwest England will feel a long way away.

As well as Patrick Vieira's Crystal Palace, United's tour in Australia will also see them take on A-League club Melbourne Victory at the MCG. When Liverpool played Victory there in 2013, 95,000 fans streamed through the turnstiles and organizers are tipping similar crowds when United visit Melbourne for the first time since 1999. The tour will come after a miserable season for United, who will likely have a new manager in charge by then following the interim appointment of Ralf Rangnick. Reports say that United have held talks with Ajax coach Erik ten Hag, with Paris Saint-Germain boss Mauricio Pochettino and Spain's Luis Enrique also in the frame. — AFP



BANGKOK: (From left) CEO of Bitkub Jirayut Srupsrisopa, former football player Andy Cole, former football player Phil Babb and CEO of Fresh Air Festival Vinij Lertratanachai pose during a press conference on March 31, 2022. — AFP

Juventus Academy win Kuwait women's league

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Juventus Academy's women football team became champions of the first-ever women's league in Kuwait, while the Schools Association was second and Fatayat Al-Oyoun third. Kuwait Football Association Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousuf, Member of the Board and Chairwoman of the Women's Committee Fatima Hayat, Head of Marketing Communications Khuloud Al-Faily and Director of Sports for All Sectors at the Public Authority for Sport Hamid Al-Hazeem attended the final and handed prizes to the winners.

A friendly match between the girls national team and the league champions Juventus Academy ended in a goalless draw. Juventus Academy was awarded KD 2,500, Schools Association KD 2,000 and Fatayat Al-Oyoun KD 1,500. Muneera Khalid was selected best local player, while the prize for best



foreign player went to Joelle Zuhir. The top scorer was Haifa Al-Qadeeri and Kabir Saeed was best goalkeeper, while the fair play award went to Tadhamon club. Hana Farmer was best coach and Nuha Mamdouh best administrator.

The tenth and final round of the women's league saw the Schools Association team defeating Tadhamon 7-1, Fatayat Al-Oyoun drew 0-0 with Gulf

site and podcast the Roker Report. "Home games haven't been fun since we left the Premier League really." The club's fall from grace gained a wider audience thanks to the "Sunderland 'Til I Die" documentary that aired on Netflix, detailing the internal dysfunction at the club. But it also highlighted the importance of football to a former shipbuilding city that often feels ignored by the political elite. Hopes were high for a new beginning when last year Kyril Louis-Dreyfus, son of late Marseille owner and billionaire Robert Louis-Dreyfus, bought a stake in the club and became the youngest chairman in English football at just 23.

Fan passion

It was the famous Sunderland support that attracted him to England's northeast. "The fervor of the people is reminiscent of that of Marseille," Louis-Dreyfus told L'Equipe. "In the third tier, before the health crisis, there were more spectators on average than in half of the Premier League clubs. "You can't buy this. In cities like Zurich, Monaco, nobody is interested in football. It limits the possibilities of expansion."

A year on he has been credited with some major structural improvements to the club's academy and women's team, but there has been little sign of improvement for the men's senior side. Fans also felt misled when it was revealed in February that the "controlling stake" he was understood to have purchased turned out to be just 41 percent. Unpopular former

Academy, and Juventus Academy defeated Salwa Al-Sabah club 3-0. Hayat thanked the players' parents for their support and their presence at all matches. She said Kuwaiti women have proved their ability to succeed in various sports, adding the women's league represents a new beginning for women's football in Kuwait and hoping to gain the necessary support from various society establishments.



STOKE-ON-TRENT, England: In this file photo taken on April 30, 2016, Sunderland fans celebrate after English forward Jermain Defoe scored the equalizing goal during an English Premier League football match against Stoke City at the Britannia Stadium. — AFP

owners Stewart Donald and Charlie Methven retain a combined 39 percent, with Uruguayan senator Juan Sartori holding the remaining 20 percent. A change of manager following an embarrassing 6-0 defeat to Bolton in January has only made a marginal impact on the club's fortunes. Alex Neil is unbeaten in his past six games, but three of those have been draws - against Burton, Charlton Athletic and Lincoln. — AFP

Mexico, USA clinch World Cup berths

LOS ANGELES: The United States and Mexico booked their tickets to the World Cup finals in Qatar on Wednesday after securing the results needed to claim the last two automatic qualifying places from the CONCACAF region. The USA were beaten 2-0 by Costa Rica in San Jose to finish third in the standings while Mexico eased past El Salvador 2-0 in Mexico City to finish second overall.

Costa Rica finished qualifying in fourth place and will face New Zealand in a playoff for a World Cup berth. Canada, who completed their successful qualifying campaign with a 1-0 defeat in Panama on Wednesday, had already qualified for the World Cup on Sunday. Both the US and Mexico had all-but sealed qualification after wins on Sunday meant only a freak set of results in Wednesday's final round would see either side relegated to a playoff place.

Costa Rica needed to beat the US by six goals or more in San Jose to have a chance of qualifying. Two second-half goals in eight minutes by Juan Vargas and Anthony Contreras raised hopes of a miracle for the home fans, but the United States regrouped to close out the game, qualifying ahead of Costa Rica on goal difference.

"I'm extremely proud of this group," US star Christian Pulisic said after Wednesday's defeat. "It's a bit of a weird feeling right now because I hate to lose so much. But I'm really proud and I can't wait to go to the World Cup. It's definitely been a roller coaster. It's never easy to come down and play in these countries, we know that. We battled through most of it. And at the end of the day, we're at the top three and we're going to the World Cup so we should be proud."

The United States qualification comes after their shock failure to reach the 2018 World Cup in Russia, when an upset defeat to Trinidad and Tobago shattered their campaign. Gregg Berhalter's side had put themselves into an almost unassailable position on Sunday after demolishing Panama 5-1 at home in Orlando thanks to a hat-trick from skipper Pulisic. That result meant Costa Rica would need a massive win to overtake the Americans for one of the two remaining automatic qualifying places.

But the US kept 'Los Ticos' at bay for long periods during the first half to leave Costa Rica's hopes dwindling rapidly. The US almost took the lead early in the second half when Miles Robinson's header from Pulisic's free-kick was parried away by Costa Rica goalkeeper Keylor Navas, before Timothy Weah's follow-up was blocked. — AFP

Sunderland struggling to recapture glories

SUNDERLAND: Rows of empty red seats in the upper tiers of Sunderland's Stadium of Light offer a persistent and painful reminder that one of English football's sleeping giants remain mired in the third tier. There has been no bounce in the Black Cats since back-to-back relegations sent them down to League One in 2018. Sitting seventh in the table and facing a fight just to make the end-of-season playoffs, there is a serious risk that Sunderland could spend a fifth straight year facing Lincoln City and Morecambe rather than Manchester City and Liverpool.

Despite prolonged spells in the doldrums, the northeastern club remain one of the best supported in England - as witnessed by the 30,000 fans who recently braved the winter chill to watch their side battle to an uninspiring 1-1 draw against Burton Albion. Average attendances remain the envy of the other clubs in the division but much of the atmosphere gets lost in a 49,000-capacity stadium built to host glitzy Premier League games and England internationals.

"It's weird," said James Lowson of Sunderland fan

Classifieds

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Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
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Shuwaikh	24814507
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DOHA: FIFA President Gianni Infantino delivers a speech during the 72nd FIFA Congress in the Qatari capital on March 31, 2022. — AFP

FIFA heads for record \$7bn revenues

Infantino to stand for re-election, backs away from biennial World Cup plans

DOHA: FIFA is on target to reap record revenues of seven billion dollars on the back of this year's Qatar World Cup, president Gianni Infantino said Thursday as experts predicted a long-term financial boom for football. Infantino told the annual congress of the sport's world governing body that FIFA's finances were "great" and that it would beat its target of making \$6.4 billion in the four years up to 2022 by \$600 million.

The governing body has seen revenues from television, sponsors and marketing take off despite past scandals and the coronavirus pandemic when spectators have turned more to television screens and other new platforms. FIFA said in its accounts that it expects "television broadcasting rights to have set a new record" by the time of the World Cup final on Dec 18.

FIFA, whose finances run on a four-year cycle between World Cups, reported revenue of \$766 million for 2021 - level with 2019 and up from a pandemic-hit \$266 million in 2020 - and by the end of last year already had \$6.11 billion of its target income contracted. Most income falls into FIFA accounts in the year of the World Cup tournament. And despite the controversy over giving this year's World Cup to Qatar-which has faced criticism over its labor rights - revenues have boomed since the last World Cup in Russia.

The finances were so good that FIFA spent more than one billion dollars on pandemic recovery measures in football and still increased its cash and asset reserves by 21 percent to \$5.5 billion. "The financial position of the organization remains healthy and robust," the global body's accounts said modestly. Infantino also announced on Thursday he will stand for re-election for a third term as president of FIFA. "I want to tell you that I will be standing for re-election next year," Infantino said at the congress.

Meanwhile, Infantino on Thursday tried to distance himself from a highly controversial project to hold the World Cup every two years as he suggested the plan had never actually been proposed by world football's governing body. "Let me be very clear that FIFA has not proposed a biennial World Cup," Infantino said on the stage.

Despite that, Infantino has pushed the project in recent months along with Arsene Wenger, the former Arsenal manager who is now FIFA's head of global development. Infantino claimed at a virtual global summit to discuss the topic last December that playing the World Cup more regularly would offer enormous financial benefits for member federations.

Then, FIFA promised an extra \$19 million every four years for each national federation, based on

feasibility studies projecting major revenue increases. Yet Infantino had to put off holding a vote on the subject due to vociferous opposition from all sides. It had initially been thought the subject would feature prominently at Thursday's congress in the Qatari capital, but the agenda was instead dominated by the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as the build-up to the World Cup.

The project has been lambasted by almost all sides, with UEFA and South American governing body CONMEBOL uniting in their opposition and even moving towards organizing a transatlantic Nations League after 2024. The European Club Association as well as leagues and players have voiced their disapproval too. The Confederation of African Football did give its backing, but even the International Olympic Committee expressed concerns about more frequent World Cups drawing attention away from other sports.

However, Infantino later indicated that there was still some hope of eventually reviving the project. "We are looking at all options. We will take the time it takes with the utmost understanding of all positions," he said. He also said that plans for an expanded, 24-team Club World Cup remain alive despite the pandemic forcing the indefinite postponement of the first edition. — AFP

Qatar's World Cup gets real as Doha hosts tourney draw

DOHA: The countdown towards the most controversial World Cup in history really begins on Friday as the draw for Qatar 2022 takes place in Doha, less than eight months before the start of the tournament itself. As pandemic restrictions ease, some of football's biggest names will be there for the draw at a Doha convention center among the skyscrapers of the city's West Bay district, as holders France and their rivals find out who they will face in the group stage of the first World Cup to be held in November and December.

The dust has still not settled on qualifying, with final matches in the North, Central American and Caribbean zone only concluding late on Wednesday and three berths to be decided in play-offs in June. Seedings for the draw are based on the latest FIFA world rankings published on Thursday, and the seven highest-ranked qualifiers, including France, are in Pot One along with the host nation, despite Qatar being one of the lowest-ranked participants. The tiny Gulf state of under three million people stunned the planet when it won the right to host the World Cup at a vote in 2010.

Off-field issues

The obvious issue was the extreme heat in June and July, when the World Cup is traditionally held, and so the decision was taken to move the tournament to the northern hemisphere winter. Then there has been the criticism of the working conditions of hundreds of thousands of migrant laborers in the country, including those who built the stadiums.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino is fully embracing Qatar's World Cup. "It will not only be the best World Cup ever, but also a truly unique one," claimed Infantino, who has even temporarily moved to Doha. "I have never seen a country so ready to host the World Cup as Qatar." For all the issues, there is excitement as a World Cup approaches, and FIFA announced on Wednesday that over 800,000 tickets had been snapped up so far.

Seven of Qatar's eight World Cup stadiums are brand new. Most will be reduced in size after the tournament, while one will even be dismantled altogether. This week organizers have been eager to show off the gleaming infrastructure as the world's media descend on Doha.

Even the draw itself cannot be separated from bigger issues beyond football. Russia's invasion of Ukraine threw the European play-offs to decide the final three of UEFA's 13 qualifying places into some chaos. Russia were suspended from all international football until further notice, preventing them from featuring in the playoffs. — AFP

World Cup flags spark noisy celebrations

DOHA: Traffic police nervously watched a World Cup crowd make a mark in Qatar's capital Wednesday as FIFA set the scene for even bigger gatherings at the event by announcing that 800,000 tickets have already been sold. Security conscious Qatar authorities had wanted to keep big groups from nine newly-qualified countries - Cameroon, Canada, Ecuador, Ghana, Morocco, Poland, Portugal, Senegal and Tunisia - away from a flag raising ceremony on a seafront plaza where a World Cup countdown clock showed 236 days to kick off.

"The embassy regrets to inform Canadian soccer fans that due to space constraints, we have been advised that spectators will not be allowed to participate in the flag raising ceremony," the Canadian embassy said in a social media post. But organizers and ambassadors were given a noisy surprise when more than 200 chanting, banner waving fans from Qatar's migrant worker communities - and 50 media - took over the plaza in a boisterous but peaceful and happy show of World Cup fever.

Football songs heard in stadiums around the world, but rarely in Doha, rang out as the flags went up. Nobody held back the fans. "It is a day of joy," said Adnan Zakaria, one of the 20,000 Moroccans in Qatar, who strutted about with a Moroccan flag and national team shirt around his shoulders. "We are going to win, we are going to win," he shouted. "It is the first World Cup in an Arab country and we are Arabs so we are celebrating," added one of his fellow supporters.

"There are only 250 Senegalese here," said the



DOHA: People pose for a picture during the flag-raising ceremony of the qualified countries for the 2022 World Cup in the Qatari capital on March 30, 2022. — AFP

African country's ambassador Mouhamed Habibou Diallo. "But our people will come from Senegal and the other Gulf states. People will hear us when the tournament starts." There are about 700 Poles, 9,200 Canadians, 3,200 Cameroonians and 600 people from Ghana in Qatar, according to their embassies, and all expect a huge influx for the tournament which runs from Nov 21 to Dec 18.

Qatar is predicting that more than 1.2 million people will visit the energy-rich Gulf state for the first World Cup to be held in an Arab country. Nasser Al-Khater, chief executive of Qatar's World Cup organizing committee, said the crowd was a

sign of the growing expectations. "There is a lot of excitement, a bit of apprehension as well, but that is healthy," he told AFP.

FIFA said meanwhile that 804,186 of the three million World Cup tickets had gone in the first round of sales. Fans in Qatar the United States, England, Mexico, United Arab Emirates, Germany, India, Brazil, Argentina and Saudi Arabia were the top 10 buyers. A second round of sales will open on April 5. Demand is expected to be higher as supporters will know the groups and match schedule after the World Cup draw is held on Friday. — AFP