



3 Long queues at grocery stores as Ramadan begins



6 Zionists kill three Palestinian militants as violence spirals



15 Grizzlies stun Suns; Lakers fall despite return of James, Davis



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	04:16
Shurooq	05:36
Dhuhr	11:51
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:07
Isha	19:25



Kuwait leadership exchanges greetings as Ramadan begins

Amir congratulates Arab and Muslim leaders, prays for peace



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, congratulating him on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow good health and wellness on His Highness the Amir, and goodness and blessings on the dear nation and both Muslim and Arab worlds.

His Highness the Crown Prince also wished everlasting security, peace, development and prosperity for Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. In reply, His Highness the Amir sent His Highness the Crown Prince a cable, thanking him for sincere fraternal sentiments, wishing him well and security and prosperity for the dear nation.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received messages of congratulations from senior state officials, expressing their sincere congratulations to His Highness on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Furthermore, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shared congratulatory cables with Arab and Muslim leaders on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow goodness and blessings on both Arab and Muslim nations.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest sites started the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on Saturday. "Saturday, will be the first day of the blessed month of Ramadan," the kingdom said Friday, in a statement carried by the official SPA

news agency. Traditionally, many Muslim-majority countries have followed dates set by Saudi religious authorities, but in recent years many have used their own astronomic calculations. Four other Arab countries of the Gulf, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE also announced Saturday as the start of Ramadan, while Oman said it is expected to begin a day later. The starting date of the dawn-dusk fasting month of Ramadan is determined by both lunar calculations and physical sightings of a new moon. Observant Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk, and traditionally gather with family and friends to break their fast in the evening. It is also a time of prayers, during which Muslims converge in large numbers on mosques, especially at night. — Agencies (See Page 2)

Ramadan Kareem

Abundant rewards in the holy month

By Oladapo Ishola Olayinka

The Concept of Reward in Islam: Reward is an incentive plan to reinforce the desired behavior of workers or employers in return for their service to the organization. The month of Ramadan can be viewed in the light of work, where we expect Almighty Allah to evaluate our worship and bestow upon us the maximum rewards according to His infinite Mercy and Generosity.

In the Islamic context, thawab (ie, reward) refers to spiritual merits or rewards that accrue from the performance of good deeds and piety in Ramadan and beyond Ramadan. Rewards of worship are multiplied up to 700 times. The Infinitely Generous Allah, in His infinite Mercy, will multiply the good deeds of His righteous servants up to seven hundred times and even more depending on the sincerity of His worshipper and the efficacy with which he performs the good deeds.

Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed which grows into seven spikes, in each spike is a hundred grains. Allah multiplies His rewards for whomever He wills. And Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing." (Al-Baqarah 2:261)

Types of Rewards: Rewards in Islam are of two types: requital in this world (for good or bad actions), and rewards in the Hereafter. To attain the good and pleasurable forms of rewards, one must devotedly believe in the All-Merciful, Allah, and worship Him sincerely, which will create an intrinsic value that will stimulate actions which are a manifestation of a true and sincere belief.

Intrinsic reward: The most desired form of intrinsic reward is to have peace in your soul; where you don't feel any form of stress whatsoever. Basically this refers to incentives that satisfy a believer or individual internally. Attaining the intrinsic reward will prompt you to motivate people where it is important, and is quite rewarding. To achieve this noble goal, money is not enough. Intrinsic incentives can materialize - for example - in an instance where autonomy is given to employees; allowing them to take responsibility in areas of their expertise and prove themselves with developmental opportunities. There are guides in Islam, acts of worship, and examples that will encourage believers to derive these intrinsic rewards that protect them from the punishment of Allah.

Almighty Allah definitely recognizes our efforts and acknowledges the performance of each person in intrinsic or extrinsic ways.

Continued on Page 6

Cash-strapped Lebanon struggles to turn lights on

BEIRUT: Lebanon's electricity company is charging \$16 million to supply power on the day of the May 15 parliamentary polls, a sum that exceeds the overall election budget by nearly 30 percent, the interior minister said. Holding credible elections is one of the main steps Lebanon's major donors are insisting on to deliver more assistance to the country, which is mired in a deep financial crisis fuelled by endemic corruption.

The state-owned Electricite du Liban (EDL) presented a quote of \$16 million to the government, which is trying to provide just half a day's worth of power to polling stations for the critical vote. "I held several meetings with EDL, which apparently couldn't provide electricity except at a very high cost," Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said.

Continued on Page 6



BEIRUT: Photo shows a view of a mesh of raised electricity lines along a street in a suburb of Lebanon's capital Beirut. — AFP

FIFA urged to kick Iran out of World Cup

PARIS: FIFA on Friday faced calls to sanction Iran and even throw its team out of the 2022 World Cup finals over the Islamic republic's renewed failure to allow women to attend an international football match. Iranian news agencies this week confirmed that 2,000 women who had bought tickets for Tuesday's World Cup qualifier against Lebanon in

the northeastern city of Mashhad could not enter the stadium.

Activists based outside Iran accused the authorities of using pepper spray at close range to disperse women who then protested the ban outside the venue. The United for Navid group of exiled Iranian athletes and activists, set up after the execution of wrestling champion Navid Afkari in September 2020, said Iran should be suspended from international football until it changes its stance.

"We formally request that FIFA immediately suspend Iran and prohibit its participation in the World Cup 2022"

Continued on Page 6



MASHHAD: Supporters watch the 2022 Qatar World Cup Asian Qualifiers football match between Iran and Lebanon, at the Imam Reza Stadium in the city of Mashhad. — AFP

Kuwait Times Ramadan quiz competition!

Test your Islamic knowledge in this special month with the Ramadan quiz. One question a day. Challenge your family and friends! Correctly answer the daily Ramadan Quiz question on Kuwait Times' Instagram account and you could win KD 50 every day, along with a one-year subscription to Kuwait Times newspaper! Like and share the post and tag 3 friends to enter the contest. The winner should be residing in Kuwait and following our account on Instagram.



Metaverse grapples with harassment conundrum

PARIS: Nina Jane Patel felt confined and under threat as the male avatars closed in, intimidating her with verbal abuse, touching her avatar against her will and photographing the incident. The abuse took place in a virtual world but it felt real to her, and this kind of story is causing severe headaches for architects of the metaverse - the 3D, immersive version of the internet being developed by the likes of Microsoft and Meta. "I entered the shared space and almost immediately three or four male avatars came very close to me, so there was a sense of entrapment," Patel said.

Continued on Page 6

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives Ramadan greetings from top state officials

Sheikh Nawaf shares Ramadan greetings with Arab, Muslim leaders

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received messages of congratulations from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Head of the National Guard, and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, expressing their sincere congratulations to His Highness on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent them letters of thanks in reply, thanking him for good feelings and sincere supplications on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, in his name and on behalf of the ministry's military and civilian employees, congratulations and blessings on the occasion of Ramadan. The Ministry of Defense said in a press statement that Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, in a congratulatory message, wished His Highness the Amir well, and goodness and blessings for the dear nation and both Arab and Muslim nations.

Furthermore, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shared con-

gratulatory cables with Arab and Muslim leaders on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Amir received a phone call from King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, congratulating him on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. In the call, the King of Bahrain wished goodness and blessings for both brotherly countries and Arab and Muslim worlds, hoping good health and wellness for His Highness the Amir, and more progress and prosperity for Kuwait under his wise leadership. In reply, His Highness the Amir thanked the King of Bahrain for this fraternal contact and good initiative that reflected historical and distinguished relations between both countries and both peoples, wishing him well and further development and prosperity for his country.



Crown Prince receives greetings

During the call, Prince Fahad expressed sincere congratulations and fraternal feelings to His Highness the Crown Prince on the holy month of Ramadan. He wished His Highness the Crown Prince everlasting wellbeing, and Kuwait and its people further progress and prosperity, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince congratulated the Saudi prince on the same occasion, wishing him



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

good health, and Saudi people further advance and prosperity under the wise leadership of King Salam bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister. —KUNA

Kuwait welcomes two-month truce in Yemen

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait yesterday welcomed the announcement by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg of a two-month cessation of hostilities in Yemen and along the borders with Saudi Arabia. A statement by the Foreign Ministry said that the State of Kuwait was in total sup-

port of the efforts led by the UN to resolve the conflict in Yemen, commending the efforts by Grundberg, which led to the truce. The step came in line with the initiative announced by Saudi Arabia in March of 2021 for Yemen, indicated the ministry, affirming that the cessation of hostilities would create the adequate atmosphere to reach a just political solution according to approved upon international accords. The State of Kuwait reiterated its support to all efforts to safeguard the security and sovereignty in Yemen, aching stability to the whole region, the statement concluded.

Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf hailed the

announcement of cessation of hostilities inside Yemen and along the borders with Saudi Arabia for two months on the eve of the holy month of Ramadan. Earlier Friday, Grundberg and the Yemeni government stated that the parties to the conflict agreed to the truce, which came into effect as of Saturday at 19:00.

"The detailed arrangements, stated by UN Envoy and sponsored by the UN, create suitable grounds for de-escalation as a prelude to reaching a political settlement to the conflict and realizing comprehensive peace," Dr Hajraf said in a press release from the GCC Secretariat. "The truce declaration signals the importance attached by the international com-

munity to the efforts to resolve the crisis of Yemen," the GCC chief pointed out. He spoke highly of the peacemaking efforts of the UN Special Envoy, noting that the truce is in keeping with the initiative declared by Saudi Arabia in March 2021 to end the conflict and reach a comprehensive solution.

Dr Hajraf also appreciated the quick response of the Arab coalition to the calls for halting the military operations inside Yemen, voicing hope that this response would bear fruit and help restore peace and security across Yemen. Announcing the truce, Grundberg said the parties accepted to halt all offensive military air, ground and maritime

operations inside Yemen and across its borders. "They also agreed to meet under my auspices to open roads in Taiz and other governorates in Yemen," he noted, adding that the Truce can be renewed beyond the two-month period with the consent of the parties.

Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit welcomed the announcement of a two-month cessation of hostilities in Yemen and along the borders with Saudi Arabia. In a statement, Abul-Gheit said such cessation comes as respond to calls of many Yemenis who suffered tremendously in the past seven years. —KUNA



ترفع شركة "طلبات الكويت"
أسمى آيات التهاني والتبريكات لمقام

حضرة صاحب السمو أمير البلاد
الشيخ/ نواف الأحمد الجابر الصباح
حفظه الله ورعاه

وولي عهده الأمين سمو
الشيخ/ مشعل الأحمد الجابر الصباح
حفظه الله ورعاه

وسمو رئيس مجلس الوزراء
الشيخ/ صباح خالد الحمد الصباح
حفظه الله

ولعموم المواطنين والمقيمين على أرض الكويت الحبيبة

بمناسبة شهر رمضان الفضيل

آملين من الله عز وجل أن ينعم على الكويت وأهلها
بالخير والبركة وأن يحفظها من كل مكروه

أعاد الله عليكم الشهر الفضيل باليمن والخير والبركة

Model United Nations conference concludes

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The conclusion ceremony of the Model United Nations conference MUN 2022 organized by the Kuwait International Law Society (KILS) was held on Thursday. "The Oxford dictionary defines change as something or someone that is replaced with something or someone else, especially something of the same kind that is newer or better. While that may be true, my definition of change is better summarized in one word - you," Deputy President of the MUN committee Nora Al-Sabah said, welcoming the attendees.

"Every single one of you has shown great dedication to making this year's MUN one of the most successful and entertaining of all the conferences we have hosted. Change begins with a simple gesture, whether speaking up when you see something wrong, or standing up for something you believe in, even if others do not agree," she added. "We live in an era where we have countless resources which aid in spreading our opinions and speaking up when we see something wrong. I have great hopes for the future of the world with us as leaders. They are the voices of today; we are the voices of tomorrow," she concluded.

President of KILS Dalal Al-Ghunaim said the socie-

ty was founded in 2012, and today it has three projects: Dal Talks, Moot Court Competition and the Model United Nations and National Assembly. "Dal Talks is a discussion conference held annually, where personalities from various fields highlight their stories and experiences to inspire those who aim to change and improve. In fact, anybody who participates in any of our projects will have better thought development," added said Ghunaim.

Moot Court Competition is about a controversial international case with a legal loophole. "Participants who represent imaginary countries form teams investigating and discussing this case from all aspects. These teams will then present their defenses in legal memoranda with legal evidence through which they defend one of the parties to the dispute before the arbitrators," she explained.

Model United Nations is organized internationally at universities and educational institutes. "It allows students from all fields at universities and schools inside and outside Kuwait to participate in this conference. The student acts as a diplomatic representative at the United Nations and allows the participants to get familiar with international crises to issue decisions, resolutions, conventions or treaties after they study real international cases. KILS also added the unique Model National Assembly to this conference," Gunaim added. The ceremony concluded by the Head of the National Assembly committee of KILS Abdullah Al-Humaidi awarding Abdulaziz Al-Saif.



Kuwait's Pavilion concludes participation at Dubai Expo 2020

DUBAI: Kuwait's Pavilion concluded Thursday its participation in Dubai Expo 2020 after a six-month-long full of various events and activities that gave visitors a glimpse of Kuwaiti rich history and promising future. The Kuwaiti pavilion shed light on how the country is committed to sustainable development to deliver a secure and prosperous future for its economy, environment, cities, and people. During the past six months,

Kuwait's pavilion visitors were able to see how the past meets the present to shape a far-reaching vision for the country's future. Kuwait's pavilion was held in the Sustainability sector, which focused on changing the path humankind is on right now with a better alternative and highlighted the impact climate change is having on the planet and solutions on how to tackle it, from solar energy to water conservation. The global event officially came to an end today, after attracting more than 20 million visitors from across the world. Up to 192 countries took part in this huge event, giving visitors briefings about each country's past, present, and future, where guests have enjoyed the unique architecture, culture, and inspiring innovations. —KUNA

Local

Long queues at grocery stores as Ramadan begins

Consumers complain of high prices, price discrepancy



KUWAIT: A customer shops at a market during the first day of the holy month of Ramadan in downtown Kuwait City yesterday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Customers shop at a market during the first day of the holy month of Ramadan in downtown Kuwait City yesterday.



By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The first day of Ramadan started with long queues at grocery stores, a dearth of trolleys and empty shelves as consumers stocked up on Ramadan products. Kuwait Times investigated and compared prices of some basic commodities at co-ops and supermarkets, and discovered that prices varied from one store to another. The products include eggs, milk, frozen and fresh chicken, fresh meat, flour, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, lemons and cucumbers.

Supermarket 1

- Eggs: KD 1.140
- Milk: KD 1.210 for 2.85 litres
- Frozen chicken: KD 1.030 for 1100 gm
- Fresh chicken: KD 0.975 for 1000 gm
- Fresh meat (South Africa): KD 3.690 per kilo
- Flour: Sold out
- Tomatoes: KD 0.795 per kilo
- Lemons: KD 0.495 per kilo
- Cucumbers: KD 0.395 per kilo
- Potatoes: KD 0.195 per kilo
- Onions: KD 0.295 per kilo

Supermarket 2

- Eggs: KD 0.950
- Milk: KD 0.990 for 3 litres
- Frozen chicken: KD 0.600 for 1200 gm
- Fresh chicken: KD 1.235 for 1000 gm
- Fresh meat (New Zealand): KD 3.190 per kilo
- Flour: KD 0.160
- Tomatoes: KD 0.795 per kilo
- Lemons: KD 0.645 per kilo

- Cucumbers: KD 0.495 per kilo
- Potatoes: KD 0.395 per kilo
- Onions: KD 0.210 per kilo

Supermarket 3

- Eggs: KD 0.775
- Milk: KD 1.100 for 2.85 litres
- Frozen chicken: KD 0.750 for 1000 gm
- Fresh chicken: KD 1.400 for 1000 gm
- Fresh meat (Georgia): KD 3.990 per kilo
- Flour: KD 0.160
- Tomatoes: KD 0.795 per kilo
- Lemons: KD 0.450 per kilo
- Cucumbers: KD 0.395 per kilo
- Potatoes: 0.430 per kilo
- Onions: KD 0.295 per kilo

Yarmouk Co-op

- Eggs: KD 1.100
- Milk: KD 0.940 for 2 litres
- Frozen chicken: KD 1.030 for 1100 gm
- Fresh chicken: KD 0.975 for 1000 gm
- Fresh meat (Arabian): KD 4 per kilo
- Flour: KD 0.145
- Tomatoes: KD 0.730 per kilo
- Lemons: KD 0.575 per kilo
- Cucumbers: KD 0.880 box
- Potatoes: KD 0.440 per kilo
- Onions: KD 0.330 per kilo

Kaifan Co-op

- Eggs: KD 1.100
- Milk: KD 0.940 for 2 litres
- Frozen chicken: KD 0.945 for 1100 gm
- Fresh chicken: KD 1.550 for 1200 gm
- Fresh meat (South Africa): KD 3.500 per kilo
- Flour: KD 0.150
- Tomatoes: KD 0.695 per kilo
- Lemons: KD 0.550 per kilo
- Cucumbers: KD 0.330 per kilo
- Potatoes: KD 0.395 per kilo
- Onions: KD 0.330 per kilo

Khalidiya Co-op

- Eggs: KD 0.750
- Milk: KD 0.990 for 3 litres
- Frozen chicken: Sold out
- Fresh chicken: KD 1.550 for 1100 gm
- Fresh meat (South Africa): KD 3.500 per kilo
- Flour: KD 0.145
- Tomatoes: KD 0.739 per kilo
- Lemons: KD 0.550 per kilo
- Cucumbers: KD 0.395 per kilo
- Potatoes: KD 0.265 per kilo
- Onions: KD 0.295 per kilo



'Our basic needs are too expensive'

Consumers in Kuwait are complaining of unreasonable price rises with the beginning of Ramadan, especially as demand for food increases in the holy month. Wafaa Humoud told Kuwait Times that prices have gone up by 100 percent. "The prices of vegeta-

bles and fruits have increased insanely. Our basic needs are too expensive to be bought from our co-op," she said.

Abdulaziz Suleiman agreed with Humoud, saying prices always increase on the first day of Ramadan, as there is a noticeable spike in the prices of vegetables and fruits compared to other consumer goods. "I have noticed the increase in the price of tomatoes, where a large tomato box did not exceed 900 fils, but it has now reached KD 3," he told Kuwait Times.

Suleiman added he relies on "Ramadan baskets", boxes of basic items that cooperative societies provide to shareholders at low prices. "The Ramadan basket will only be enough for half the month, then we will be affected by high prices again," he rued. Umm Abdullah was amazed by the Ramadan offers at Khalidiya Cooperative Society. "Prices at Surra Co-op are much more higher than in Khalidiya. This is my first time grocery shopping outside my area, and I'm glad I did it, as I got the chance to get better deals," she said.

Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Al-Shuraian had assured that food prices are "stable and will not be affected by any changes," stressing the government's "full commitment" on that matter. This came at the Food Security Conference on Thursday, where Shuraian expressed confidence in the country's strategic reserve of essential food supplies and in its national institutions, making clear that food security in Kuwait is "strong". Meanwhile, Acting Director of Kuwait Port Authority Bader Al-Enezi, pointed out that port traffic is "flowing as usual" with ships docking and smoothly unloading in accordance with international standards.

Defense Minister discusses with US counterpart bolstering cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Friday a telephone call from his American counterpart Lloyd Austin, and shared views on several issues of common concern. During the call, the two sides discussed the latest developments on international and regional arenas, and means of promoting cooperation and work between the two friendly countries, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense said in a statement. Austin congratulated Sheikh Talal on the new post and the holy month of Ramadan, it added.

He also expressed gratitude to Kuwait for its humanitarian and medical aid provided to Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian military operation, the statement pointed out. Meanwhile, Sheikh Talal thanked Austin for the call that shows the deep-rooted ties between the two friendly countries. In addition, Sheikh Talal stressed Kuwait's keenness on, and interest in, translating the political leadership's directives that support all US humanitarian efforts and agencies to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees, according to the statement. —KUNA

Foul play ruled out in Mubarakiya Market blaze

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force ruled out foul play in yesterday's Mubarakiya Market blaze. The fire started from welding works in a perfumes shop at the market which quickly spread to nearby stores, KFF explained.

KFF announced late Thursday that its teams had put out the huge blaze which erupted at the landmark Al-Mubarakiya marketplace in Kuwait City. In a press statement, the KFF said that eight squads have participated in fighting the massive fire which destroyed dozens of shops at the popular market. The fire caused several injuries, most of them were minor and treated by medical teams, it noted. It pointed out that Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior retired general Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah had rushed to the site to follow up the fire-control efforts and ordered a probe into the causes of the incident.



KUWAIT: People gather to see the damage caused by a fire that broke out in Souq Mubarakiya. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Separately, firefighters put out a fire at a car scrapyard on Al-Salmi Road in Al-Jahra Governorate. In a press statement, KFF said the blaze, which caught Al-Naem scrapyard for cars early Friday, was put under control, and there were no casualties. Investigations are underway in order to reach the causes of the fire, it added. —KUNA

Body of missing person found off Kout Mall beach



KUWAIT: Fire and Sea rescue teams yesterday recovered the body of a person who went missing off the beach of Kout Mall. Shuaiba and Salmiya fire stations' teams were dispatched to search for the missing person. The body was found under water and will be sent to the forensics department, Kuwait Fire Force said.

On the occasion of the



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Marina Hotel Kuwait celebrates holy month of Ramadan

KUWAIT: During the Holy Month of Ramadan, Marina Hotel will be celebrating the traditions of the occasion by inviting guests to partake in enjoying the Iftar, and Ghabqa feasts with their families and friends in stunning venues.

Looking out over picturesque views of the Arabian Sea, the Atlantis Restaurant offers Iftar in a perfect ambiance. Guests may gather with their friends and families to feast on buffet entrees that encompass both Arabic and international cuisine while the sun sets over glittering water. The perfect place to break your fast, the Atlantis will serve Iftar till 08:30 pm.

The Ramadan celebrations at Marina Hotel continue past Iftar. Within the Qamar Al-Marina tent, outfitted warmly with Arabic decorations that reflect the tradition of Ramadan, Marina Hotel chefs have prepared a special Ghabqa buffet for groups and private events, which includes exceptional oriental desserts as well as seasonal beverages, a selection of tea flavors, and Arabic coffee. The tent is located inside the Six Palms and can accommodate groups up to 200 guests for Ghabqa and Iftar.

Enjoy Ghabqa by the Beach with a magnificent view of the city skyline lights twinkling on the horizon at night while tucking into a candle lit Kashta. Indulge in the fine selection of lavish live cooking stations. The Ghabqa is available for individual and small group reservations from 21:00 till 1:00 am.

For private functions and corporate events, the Salwa Sabah Al Ahmed Theatre and Hall is the perfect venue. This exquisite hall can accommodate up to 500 guests at a time, and the staff are highly trained to provide personalized attention to all details. A selection of different menus for Iftar and Suhoor are available at exclusive prices, and the hall is fully equipped to cater for groups and organizations.

Apart from the amazing Iftar, Ghabqa and Suhoor offerings, guests are invited to avail of a special room rate throughout the month. An offer for two, you and your partner are welcome to relax in a spacious, luxuriously-outfitted room. Choose to spend your time gazing at the sea from your balcony, swimming in its waters or in the pool, working off a rich meal at Marina's state of the art fitness center, or simply lounging on your heavenly mattress.

Nabil Hammoud, General Manager, said: "We eagerly await the beautiful month of Ramadan to break our fast with family and friends and to enjoy Ramadan-inspired dishes. Everyone at Marina Hotel will be ready to provide an exceptional experience to our guests. We would like to wish you all a Ramadan Mubarak."

Marina Hotel is located right in the heart of one of the most prominent places in Kuwait. Guests can visit Marina Mall, which is among the best shopping malls in Kuwait and is only walking distance from the hotel. They can also go to Marina Crescent which houses a variety of international restaurants and coffee shops. Make this Ramadan a truly memorable one by sharing special moments with family and friends at The Marina Hotel Kuwait.

ktech participated in TESOL's 8th annual conference

KUWAIT: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Association, in collaboration with Cambridge University Press and Assessment, held TESOL's 8th annual conference on February 17th and 18th, 2022. The conference titled 'The Hybrid Transition: Emotional, Social and Educational Impacts on Language Learning' included Kuwait Technical College (ktech) as one of the sponsors. The virtual conference hosted over 39 break-out sessions and welcomed a record-breaking 2041 registrants from all over the world.

The conference not only invited internationally recognized subject matter expert, such as Scott Thornbury, Christopher Graham, Dr Niall Curry, Grazzia Maria Chirinos, but it also invited speakers from Kuwait such as: Dr Fatimah Al Hashem, Dr Jassem Hajia, Dana Al-Khatrash to shed light on the knowledgeable members within the Kuwaiti society.

Dr Reem Al-Qenai, Assistant Professor at ktech and TESOL Conference Chair, stated "Regardless of learning how to organize a conference, to be able to connect people from all around the world and offer them a platform to exchange ideas, experiences and build bridges is considered magic."

TESOL Kuwait is a non-profit volunteers' team based in Kuwait with over 400 members of English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals. TESOL's mission is to 'Connect, support, and assist the progress of English Language Teaching professionals in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf region'. They provide a platform for teachers and ELT professionals to express their views, exchange research, and learn from each other to develop professionally.

'30 Days of Blessings': Zain launches annual Ramadan campaign

Company spreads messages of sharing, giving, and peace in Holy Month



KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of its annual campaign for the Holy Month of Ramadan under the theme "30 Days of Blessings". The company kick-started its social campaign to share the blessings of the Ramadan with the entire community, partnering with various institutions in the nation to reflect the spirit of giving during the Holy Month.

During the past two years, the pandemic limited Zain's initiatives during the Holy Month of Ramadan. With the return to normal life and the gradual reopening of activities all around Kuwait, Zain is eager to make a strong comeback to share the joys of the Holy Month with the community as it used to do before the days of the pandemic. The company's initiatives adhere to health measures as much as possible to protect the health and safety of everyone involved.

This year, Zain's Ramadan program features various contributions in a number of the most vibrant sectors within the community, including charitable and humanitarian efforts, social, religious, and entertainment programs, and sports and health activities. Through its campaign, Zain works hand in hand with its strategic partners from across Kuwait's public and private sectors.

Zain's campaign comes in line with the company's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy that closely focuses on giving back to the community. The company carefully selected the activities and programs that most presented an added value to all segments. In this report, Zain showcases the initiatives and programs it will undertake during Ramadan this year:

Ramadan supplies

Zain already kicked-off its Ramadan campaign before the beginning of the Holy Month by delivering 'Ramadan Machla' (food supplies) in collaboration with four of its non-profit strategic partners: the Kuwait Food Bank, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers, and the Patients Support Fund Society.

Zain's Machla is offered via vouchers to give each family the opportunity to choose specific supplies as per their different personal needs. The initiative aimed at catering to underprivileged families' needs before the arrival of the Holy Month.

Iftar meals

This year, Zain's Iftar initiative comes back for its 15th year after a halt of two years due to the pandemic. The

Iftar initiative is one of the main pillars of the company's Ramadan campaign as part of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy, putting Zain at the forefront of leading national companies that exert charitable and volunteer efforts.

To commit to health measures and social distancing, Zain offers the Iftar meals this year in partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank via special trucks that deliver the meals daily across the country. The company offers over 30,000 Iftar meals throughout the Holy Month.

The trucks visit the most populated areas to secure the daily Iftar meal of workers, underprivileged individuals and families, and others who are in most need during Ramadan.

Zain Quran App

As it does every year, Zain offers its free Quran App, which the company gifts to its customers during the Holy



Over 30,000 Iftar meals throughout Ramadan

Month of Ramadan. The app offers the best Quran reading experience on iOS, Apple Watch, and Android devices. The app features a user-friendly interface and many great features, including reading all pages of the Holy Quran, downloading and listening to the Holy Quran in the voices of over 20 famous reciters, read Tafseer (interpretations) to understand the meaning of verses, searching the whole text of the Holy Quran, as well as synchronizing usage between multiple devices.

The app also includes a dark mode feature for easy reading in the dark, prayer times and Athan notifications, Qibla direction, and much more. Customers can download the app for free by searching 'Zain Quran' in the App Store and Google Play Store.

Sponsoring entertainment programs

Every Ramadan, Zain is keen on diversifying the content of its campaign to include cultural and recreational

programs. This year, Zain sponsors Al "Ayal Kebret" on atv, a unique TV program hosted by two young girls, Muneera and Hessa Al Kulaib, who are one of the most famous young media personalities in the GCC. The girls interview over 30 guests from across fields, including art, music, sports, science, business, and more.

Zain also sponsors "Fourth Ring Road", an all-new podcast from Marina Media Group that continues throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan every day after midnight. The show discusses topics related to Kuwaiti youth in a comedic manner and is broadcast LIVE on all Marina platforms and channels.

Zain's sponsorship of these shows comes as part of its keenness on supporting and encouraging the creative ideas of Kuwait's youth in all areas, including art and entertainment on social and traditional media channels. Such programs receive great interactivity from audiences during the Holy Month of Ramadan, especially that these shows aim at highlighting a number of issues that are of great interest to the Kuwaiti community.

Al Shaheed Park Ramadan Challenge

During the Holy Month of every year, Zain is keen on supporting health and sports programs to encourage adopting a healthy lifestyle and exercising during the Holy Month. This year, Zain partners with suffix, a sports management and consultancy leader, to power Al Shaheed Park Ramadan Challenge, which will feature walkathons and marathons at Al Shaheed Park throughout the Holy Month.

Advanced tech tools will be used to monitor the participants throughout the challenge, where results will be recorded and uploaded to the leaderboards automatically. Zain will also offer valuable prizes to the winners and will make sure social distancing is adhered to during the challenge to protect everyone involved.

Duwaween Games Tournament

This year, Zain continues to sponsor Duwaween Games, an app for playing cards tournaments, which is set to feature a tournament where Zain will offer many valuable prizes during the Holy Month. The app was developed by Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and is considered the first of its kind in the GCC and Arab region. The app reached its climax with more than 350,000 users competing in the paper games of Kout, Balot, and Hand. The app is available on all main smartphone operating systems: iOS, Android, and Huawei.

Al-Maillem Tires raises funds for cancer patients

KUWAIT: To celebrate 50 years of partnership in Kuwait, premium German tire manufacturer Continental Tires and their distributor in Kuwait Al-Maillem Tires launched a campaign in 2021 in collaboration with Al-Sidra Association, the leading support center for cancer patients. As part of this campaign, for every Continental tire sold, small part of revenue was earmarked towards supporting Al-Sidra's humanitarian services.

In a ceremony held recently at Al-Sidra office, a cheque for the accumulated amount for the second half of

last year was handed over to Altaf Al-Essa and Manal Shadeed of Al-Sidra by the Al-Maillem Team in the gracious presence of Sheikhha Azzah Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.

Speaking on the occasion, Choji Lamba, President Al-Maillem Group said, "We deeply appreciate the work being done by Al-Sidra in providing a warm, caring and safe environment for patients and their families in coping with the cancer experience, and feel privileged to be associated with such an organization." Both Continental and Al-Maillem share similar values of commitment and service. Continental, with its strong roots in German traditions of excellence in engineering, has been at the forefront of tire technology and innovation for more than 150 years. It continues to participate in multiple CSR activities globally.

Al-Maillem's corporate vision



matches that of Continental. As the leader in Kuwait for automotive products since 1960, the company has developed a wide customer base through pioneering service and quality

together with competitive pricing. Throughout its journey, Al-Maillem has shown a strong commitment toward social and environmental responsibility.

DWC celebrates Ramadan



KUWAIT: In presence of the Honorary President Sheikhha Halah Bader Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Diplomatic Women's Committee celebrated the advent of the holy month of Ramadan for the year 2022. Among the attendees were the lady ambassadors of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Republic of Kenya, and the wives of a group of ambassadors and diplomats as well as the members of DWC board Nargis Al-Shatti, Fouzia Abdelbasit,

Nazira and Yoke Melinda.

DWC usually prepares for its members a dinner banquet with many popular Kuwaiti dishes on the occasion of the Graish that happens to be celebrated before the holy month of Ramadan every year as part of the Kuwaiti heritage. Sheikhha Halah welcomed the attendees and congratulated them for the holy month of Ramadan and gave an idea about the occasion of the Graish and its importance in Kuwaiti

society for its cultural, historical and social aspect.

The spouse of the Ambassador of Sultanate of Oman mentioned that the people of Oman celebrate the same occasion, as well as in Sudan, Turkey, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but with different names. After the dinner, DWC presented the attendees with souvenirs that serve the occasion and congratulated DWC members for the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, the month of worship and blessings.



US judge denies Maxwell request for new trial

After crisis, Spain's right-wing PP appoints Feijoo as new leader

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COLOMBO: A police official walks past a cordoned off site next to the burnt-out bus near Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's home in Colombo on April 1, 2022. Security forces were deployed across the Sri Lankan capital on April 1 after protesters tried to storm the president's home in anger at the nation's worst economic crisis since independence. — AFP

Sri Lanka deploys troops to quell protests

'Sri Lankans have a right to protest peacefully for democratic expression'

COLOMBO: Troops armed with sweeping powers were deployed in Sri Lanka Saturday with the near-bankrupt country on edge after the president declared a state of emergency to quell escalating protests against him. Gotabaya Rajapaksa invoked special powers on Friday night, a day after hundreds tried to storm his house in anger over unprecedented shortages of food, fuel and medicine.

The state of emergency was for the "protection of public order and the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community", Rajapaksa said in a proclamation. Soldiers armed with automatic assault rifles had already been deployed for crowd control at fuel stations and elsewhere when the emergency was declared. More were seen on Saturday. In normal times, Sri Lanka's military can only play a supporting role to police, but the state of emergency gives them authority to act alone, including to detain civilians.

The South Asian nation of 22 million people is battling severe shortages of essentials, sharp price rises and crippling power cuts in its most painful downturn

since independence from Britain in 1948. The coronavirus pandemic has torpedoed tourism and remittances, both vital to the economy, and authorities have imposed a broad import ban in an attempt to



Severe shortages of essentials

save foreign currency.

Many economists also say the crisis has been exacerbated by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing, and ill-advised tax cuts. The emergency laws came ahead of planned anti-government protests on Sunday, when activists on

social media have urged people to demonstrate outside their homes.

"Do not be deterred by tear gas, very soon they will run out of dollars to re-stock," said one post encouraging people to demonstrate even if police attempt to break up gatherings. US ambassador Julie Chung warned: "Sri Lankans have a right to protest peacefully-essential for democratic expression." "I am watching the situation closely, and hope the coming days bring restraint from all sides, as well as much needed economic stability and relief for those suffering," she tweeted.

'Lunatic, go home'

Travel trade specialists say the state of emergency could be a new blow to hopes of a tourism revival as insurance rates usually rise when a country declares a security emergency. A police official said authorities were considering a nationwide curfew to prevent an escalation of protests that have blocked traffic in many towns. "There are reports of sporadic attacks on the homes of government politicians," a security

official told AFP, adding that a ruling party legislator was hit with eggs at a public event in the central district of Badulla on Friday. In the nearby hill resort of Nuwara Eliya, protesters shouted anti-Rajapaksa slogans and blocked Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's wife Shiranthi from opening an annual flower exhibition. A curfew imposed for a second night Friday was relaxed at dawn Saturday.

Thursday night's unrest outside the president's private home saw hundreds of people demand he step down. Protesters chanted "lunatic, lunatic, go home", before police fired tear gas and used water cannon. The crowd turned violent, setting ablaze two military buses, a police jeep and other vehicles, and threw bricks at officers. Police arrested 53 protesters, before 21 of them were released on bail Friday night, court officials said. Others were still being detained but had yet to be charged. Rajapaksa's office said Friday that the protesters wanted to create an "Arab Spring"-a reference to anti-government protests in response to corruption and economic stagnation that gripped the Middle East more than a decade ago. — AFP

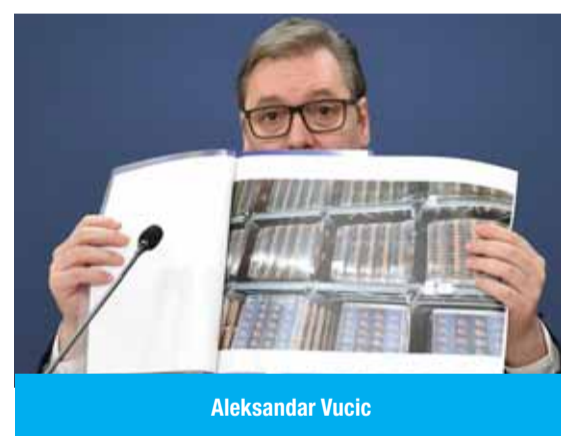
War in Europe casts shadow over Serbian polls

BELGRADE, Serbia: With war raging in Europe, Serbia's populist President Aleksandar Vucic has promised the electorate continued stability ahead of nation-wide elections this Sunday, in a contest that has largely been overshadowed by Ukraine. After a decade in power, the ruling centre-right Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) led by Vucic looks likely to extend their rule over the country, according to recent polls.

The country of some 7 million will elect the president, deputies for the 250-seat parliament along with contests in several municipalities. The Kremlin's war in Ukraine, however, has cast a long pall over the vote that observers had earlier predicted would focus on issues like environment, corruption, and rights.

Vucic has deftly used the invasion of Ukraine to his advantage-by stoking fear of potential bouts of instability while offering assurances that he alone can prevent the country from falling into any such crisis. "This is the flour. This is the salt... The warehouses are full ... These are the peas," said Vucic during a broadcast where he showcased the latest food reserves being stockpiled amid soaring prices. The incumbent has even minted a new, mid-campaign slogan: "Peace. Stability. Vucic".

While Vucic's campaign might seem "pompous" to



Aleksandar Vucic

some, the messages are "carefully threaded for the voters" said Zoran Stojiljkovic, a union leader and political science professor at Belgrade University. In a country that was once viewed as a pariah, memories of the bloody wars of the 1990s during the break-up of Yugoslavia and economic sanctions are still fresh for many.

During times of trouble, voters often seek a leader who promises stability rather than radical change, said Stojiljkovic. "Great crises, at least in the short run, always work in favour of those already in power," Stojiljkovic told AFP. "They induce uncertainty, fear and expectations that the system will guarantee at least basic security." Only a few months ago, the opposition appeared to have momentum. In January, Vucic pulled the plug on a controversial lithium mine project following mass demonstrations across the country that saw thousands take to the streets. — AFP

rivals. In January, 10 bodies were found in a sports utility vehicle abandoned in front of the governor's palace in the historic center of the northern city of Zacatecas. In June 2021, two heads and other human remains were left at polling stations in the border city of Tijuana on election day.

Across the country, more than 340,000 people have been killed in a wave of bloodshed since the government deployed the army to fight drug cartels in 2006. On Thursday, Lopez Obrador hit out at television series on platforms such as Netflix, saying they presented a rose-colored version of the lifestyles of drug traffickers. The shows feature "gangs of drug traffickers, with actors, men, beautiful women, property, the latest cars, jewelry, designer clothes, power," he told reporters. But they ignore "the destruction in particular of young people. And we are talking about thousands of deaths. In the United States, it's a serious problem," he added, referring to victims of drug overdoses. — AFP

Six mutilated bodies found in Mexico

MEXICO CITY: Six mutilated bodies were found Thursday in a vehicle in southern Mexico, authorities said, as President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador accused popular television shows of glamorizing the violent drug trade. The remains were found in plastic bags inside a car in Chilapa in the state of Guerrero, prosecutors said, without confirming reports that the severed heads were placed on the roof.

Discoveries of mutilated bodies dumped in public or hung from bridges have increased in Mexico in recent years as drug cartels seek to intimidate their

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International

Zionists kill three Palestinian militants as violence spirals

Islamic Jihad: 'We mourn the death of our three hero fighters'

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity security forces killed three Islamic Jihad militants when they came under fire Saturday during a raid in the West Bank, police said, adding that the latest deaths in a surge of violence. The bloodshed comes amid heightened tensions ahead of the start of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, that has seen violence spiral in Zionist entity and the occupied West Bank.



70 people
wounded
in clashes

Last year during Ramadan, clashes that flared between Zionist forces and Palestinians visiting Al-Aqsa mosque in annexed east Jerusalem led to 11 days of devastating conflict between Zionist entity and the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas. On Saturday, Zionist entity police said security forces killed three members of the Islamic Jihad militant group who had opened fire during an operation to arrest them near the northern West Bank city of Jenin.

Four Zionist soldiers were wounded during the operation, one of them seriously, the police said.

The Zionist forces had intercepted "a terrorist cell on its way to an attack, and stopped the car in which they were travelling between Jenin and Tulkarem", the police

said in a statement. The Islamic Jihad confirmed the three deaths. "We mourn the death of our three hero fighters," the armed wing of Islamist movement said, adding that two of them were from Jenin and one from Tulkarem.

Hamas said the Zionist approach would fail. "The enemy's policy of assassination in the West Bank and occupied Jerusalem will not provide it with so-called security," Hamas said. Zionist entity Foreign Minister Yair Lapid warned in a tweet on Saturday that the security forces would "act forcefully against any attempted attack" on citizens of the Zionist entity. Saturday's clash is the latest in a spate of bloody violence in Zionist entity and the West Bank since March 22.

IS-linked attacks

On Friday, Zionist forces shot dead a 29-year-old Palestinian during clashes in the West Bank city of Hebron, the Palestinian health ministry said. The Palestinian Wafa news agency named him as Ahmad al-Atrash, who it said was taking part in a protest against the settlements and had previously served six years in a Zionist prison.

The Zionist army said that during a "riot" in Hebron, "a suspect hurled a Molotov cocktail" at soldiers, who "responded with live fire". Hebron, the biggest city in the West Bank, is home to about 1,000 Jewish residents living under heavy Zionist military protection, among more than 200,000 Palestinians. The Palestinian Red Crescent said 70 people were wounded in Friday's clashes with the Zionist army in the Nablus area of the northern West Bank. On Thursday, Zionist security forces raided Jenin after three fatal attacks rocked the Jewish state, leading to



HEBRON: Palestinians carry the body of Ahmad al-Atrash, shot and killed during clashes with Zionist security forces, during his funeral procession in the city center of Hebron city in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

clashes in which two Palestinians were killed, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

Elsewhere in the West Bank on the same day, a Palestinian man who stabbed and seriously wounded a Zionist civilian with a screwdriver on a bus was shot dead south of the city of Bethlehem. The violence followed an attack on Tuesday night in Bnei Brak, an Orthodox Jewish city near Tel Aviv. A Palestinian with an M-16 assault rifle

killed two Zionist civilians, two Ukrainian nationals and a Zionist-Arab policeman. A total of 11 people have been killed in the attacks since March 22, including some carried out for the first time by assailants linked to or inspired by the Islamic State group. The West Bank, which has been occupied by Zionist forces since the 1967 Six-Day war, is home to nearly 500,000 Zionist settlers, living in communities regarded as illegal under international law. — AFP

US judge denies Maxwell request for new trial

NEW YORK: A request for a new trial by Ghislaine Maxwell, the former Jeffrey Epstein associate who was convicted of child sex trafficking late last year, was denied Friday by a federal judge in New York.

Maxwell's lawyers filed for a retrial in January after juror Scotty David — identified by his first and middle names — told media outlets he had persuaded fellow panelists to convict the 60-year-old by recalling his own experiences as a sex abuse victim, a fact he did not reveal during jury selection.

Maxwell, a disgraced British socialite, was convicted of recruiting and grooming young girls to be sexually abused by the late US financier Jeffrey Epstein. Her sentence, which will be decided on June 28, could see her spend the rest of her life in prison.

Two of Epstein's victims, identified as "Jane" and "Carolyn," testified in Maxwell's trial that they were as young as 14 when she began grooming them and arranging for them to give massages to Epstein that ended in sexual activity. Scotty David, referred to as Juror 50 in court filings, said in interviews that he had helped convince jurors who were doubting the accounts of "Jane" and "Carolyn" by telling them that he did not remember every single detail of the abuse he had received. — AFP



NEW YORK: File photo shows British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell and US financier Jeffrey Epstein. — AFP



LUQA, Malta: Photo shows children offering flowers to Pope Francis (L) as Malta's President, George Vella (2ndL) and his wife Miriam Vella (C) look on, after the Pope landed at Malta's international airport in Luqa, for a two-day trip to the island. — AFP

Pope arrives in Malta

VALLETTA, Malta: Pope Francis began his first trip to Malta Saturday, where he is expected to ask the heavily Catholic country to do more to help migrants who have risked their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe.

The pontiff's plane touched down around 9:50 local time (0750 GMT) at Malta's airport south of the capital, ahead of a welcome ceremony with Prime Minister Robert Abela and dignitaries at the Grandmaster's Palace, the former seat of the Knights Hospitaller who ruled for centuries over the Mediterranean archipelago.

Aboard the papal plane, Francis—who had boarded using a lift for reduced mobility passengers instead of stairs—told journalists accompanying him the visit to the tiny island nation would be "quick, but will be beautiful". The visit to Malta was scheduled two years ago but was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, and now comes as war in Ukraine has unleashed Europe's worst refugee

crisis since World War II, with more than four million fleeing the country.

Francis said on Twitter Friday that his "journey in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul" would be an "opportunity to know at first hand a Christian community with a millennia-old history". Francis, who will visit a migrant centre during his two-day trip, is likely to renew calls for an end to the war while reminding the world not to overlook those who continue to risk their lives at sea trying to reach Europe from North Africa.

"The pope comes to our island as a herald and messenger of reconciliation and mercy not only in the Mediterranean basin, but throughout the world," the Archbishop of Malta Charles Scicluna said in Italy's Christian Family magazine published Friday. Francis's visit to Malta follows those of his predecessors Benedict XVI in 2010 and two visits by John Paul II, in 1990 and 2001. The country's history is steeped in Catholicism going back to St. Paul, who is believed to have been shipwrecked on Malta en route to his execution in Rome. About 85 percent of Malta's 516,000 inhabitants say they are Catholic believers. Catholicism is part of the constitution and Malta is the only European Union country that completely bans abortion. — AFP

Sarah Palin announces bid for US Congress

WASHINGTON: Incendiary US conservative and former vice presidential hopeful Sarah Palin announced Friday she is running for Alaska's lone seat in the United States House of Representatives, eyeing a return to national politics during a period of deep political division. The 58-year-old far-right former governor is seeking to succeed Republican Don Young who died unexpectedly last month after serving in the US House for 49 years. Palin is a fierce supporter of Donald Trump, and has joined with the former president in making unfounded claims that the 2020 election was tainted by fraud.

"America is at a tipping point," she said in a statement on Facebook announcing her candidacy. "As I've watched the far left destroy the country, I knew I had to step up and join the fight." The US midterm elections, in which all 435 House seats are up for grabs, is set for November 8. While the largest US state by area, Alaska has only one representative in the House, due to its sparse population. Palin was Republican nominee John McCain's running mate during his 2008 presidential election, in which the duo lost to Barack Obama and his vice presidential pick, then senator Joe Biden. Palin served as Alaska's governor from 2006 until 2009, when she resigned and emerged as a darling of the conservative Tea Party movement. As an anti-establishment flamethrower capable of electrifying the Republican base, she is widely seen as the political precursor to Trump. — AFP



Sarah Palin

Abundant rewards in the...

Continued from Page 1

Further, Allah Almighty orders the scribe angels to record each sin as a single sin, and if the sinner repents immediately, it is forgiven of him. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "Verily, Allah has recorded good and bad deeds and made them clear. Whoever intends to perform a good deed but does not do so, then Allah will record it as a complete good deed. If he intends to do it and does so, then the Exalted, Allah will record it as ten good deeds up to seven hundred times and much more. If he intends to commit a sin and does not do so, then Allah will rather record it in his favor as a complete good deed. If he commits it then Allah will record for him as a single bad deed." (Al-Bukhari # 6, 126)

A believer always maintains an attitude of gratitude in all the situations, whether good or bad. Suhaib

bin Sinan Ar-Roumi (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said what can be translated as: "How amazing is the attitude of a believer; if granted goodness, he praises Allah and is grateful, and that is better for him. If he is afflicted with a calamity, he praises and thanks Allah & patiently perseveres, and that is good for him." (Sahih Muslim # 2, 999)

Despite being rewarded abundantly for our sincere good actions, the ultimate reward will be to meet our Creator, Allah, after being admitted into Paradise. Regardless of the kind of life experience we have experienced, our focus while seeking the best of rewards is to be granted the eternal life in Paradise.

Courtesy of the TIES Center: As one of the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue, TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity.

For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

metaverse experiences, says it was "nothing short of sexual assault". Her story and others like it have prompted soul-searching over the nature of harassment in the virtual world, and a search for an answer to the question: can an avatar suffer sexual assault?

"VR (virtual reality) relies on, essentially, tricking your brain into perceiving the virtual world around it as real," says Katherine Cross, a PhD student at the University of Washington who has worked on online harassment. "When it comes to harassment in virtual reality - for instance, a sexual assault - it can mean that in the first instant your body treats it as real before your conscious mind can catch up and affirm this is not physically occurring." — AFP

Cash-strapped Lebanon...

Continued from Page 1

"The entire elections, at home and abroad, don't cost this much," Mawlawi said, saying his total budget for the vote was capped at \$12.5 million. Mawlawi was adamant the government was working for the polls to go ahead as scheduled, despite persistent rumors they could be called off. Lebanon, grappling with an unprecedented economic crisis since 2019, and which defaulted on its debt in March 2020, has suffered from severe power shortages for nearly a year—largely because the government can't afford fuel for power stations.

Power cuts last up to 22 hours a day in most regions, forcing many to rely on expensive gener-

ator subscriptions to keep the lights on. The international community has long demanded a complete overhaul of Lebanon's loss-making electricity sector - which has cost the government more than \$40 billion since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war - as one of the basic conditions to disburse billions of dollars in desperately needed financial support. EDL had asked for its payment in cash, Mawlawi said.

Mawlawi said the government may turn to private generators to power voting centres, which will need electricity to light the room at night when the votes are counted immediately after polls close. "I can't rely on the state because despite the high cost demanded, EDL can't guarantee solid results... which may lead to a sudden blackout," the interior minister said. "The issue of electricity is the biggest problem facing Lebanon... but we will be able to solve it for the day of elections," he added. — AFP

abused and threatened," it added. United for Navid said Iran "continues to ignore" FIFA's requests to show "basic adherence" to human rights.

'Long overdue'

Human Rights Watch meanwhile urged FIFA to demand that Iran urgently overturn the "discriminatory" stadium ban on women and ensure accountability for abuses. "Given the Iranian authorities' longstanding violations, FIFA needs to follow its own global guidelines on nondiscrimination and should consider enforcing penalties for Iran's noncompliance," Tara Sepel Far, HRW's senior Iran researcher, said in a statement. The New York-based NGO said that under FIFA's statutes discrimination on the basis of gender is "strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion". — AFP

Metaverse grapples with...

Continued from Page 1

"Their voices started verbally and sexually harassing me, with sexual innuendos," said the London-based entrepreneur. "They touched and they groped my avatar without my consent. And while they were doing that, another avatar was taking selfie photos."

Patel, whose company is developing child-friendly

FIFA urged to kick Iran out...

Continued from Page 1

as long as the Football Federation of Iran continues to violate the Olympic Charter and FIFA regulations," it said in a letter to FIFA's deputy secretary general Mattias Grafstrom.

In the letter, a copy of which was obtained by AFP Friday, it said that Iran had pledged to FIFA that it would end its policy of "gender apartheid" by allowing women to attend matches. "But not only has Iran broken that promise by continuing to bar women from entering a stadium but women are beaten,

International

After crisis, Spain's right-wing PP appoints Feijoo as new leader

'I have come here to win and to govern'

SEVILLE, Spain: Spain's opposition Popular Party (PP) on Saturday appoints Alberto Nunez Feijoo as leader in the hope the calm, experienced moderate with a pragmatic outlook will return the right-wing faction to power. After 13 years governing Galicia in northwestern Spain with an impressive track record of four absolute majorities, the party is hoping the 60-year-old will be able to translate his regional success to a national level.

"I have come here to win and to govern," he told delegates on Friday at a two-day party conference in the southern city of Seville to appoint him. The Galician leader is the only candidate running to take over from Pablo Casado, who was edged out following a bitter internal dispute with one of the party's rising stars.

When he took over as PP chief in July 2018, Casado was a young hard-liner who promised to breathe new life into a party snarled in corruption and bleeding votes. But barely four years later, the 41-year-old was left fighting for his political life after a very public confrontation with Isabel Diaz Ayuso, whose success as Madrid regional leader threw his own lacklustre leadership into sharp relief.

Casado told the gathering on Friday that he was giving up his seat in parliament and quitting all "positions of

responsibility" in the PP. "It is best if I step aside," he said. Two former PP prime ministers also spoke at the two-day gathering: Jose Maria Aznar, who was premier between 1996-2004, and Rajoy, who served between 2011-2018. Both urged party members to rally around Feijoo. "I ask everyone for the greatest unity and the clearest support for this new stage of our party," said



Feijoo's job is to attract centrist voters

Aznar speaking by video link because he has COVID-19.

Feijoo v Vox and the Socialists

Feijoo is the only one of Spain's regional leaders to govern with an absolute majority in a region where the Socialists pose no threat and the far-right party Vox has made no headway despite its growing popularity across Spain. But at a national level, the scene is the opposite, and Feijoo will have to

contend with a Socialist-led government, its hard-left partner Podemos and Vox in the ascendancy.

During his long political career, Feijoo has steered clear of scandal, despite the emergence of photos from the mid-90s showing his friendship with a cigarette smuggler later jailed for drug trafficking. While admitting they were friends at the time, Feijoo said he had no idea about the illegal activities.

During a national tour to present his candidacy, Feijoo made a few slips, including a reference to the government as "autistic" for which he later apologised to those with the condition. General elections are due by the end of 2023 but Pedro Sanchez's left-wing coalition is already worn out by the pandemic, soaring inflation and social unrest over spiralling prices as well as the global uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine.

The far-right has also been a headache for the PP, which has watched how Vox has, within eight years, managed to obtain 52 of the 350 seats in Spain's parliament as its own showing has fallen from 186 to 88. Feijoo's job is now "to attract the centrist voters" that brought the PP's Aznar and Rajoy to power, said Ernesto Pascual, a political scientist at Barcelona's Autonomous University. Even if the PP does succeed



SEVILLE, Spain: Member of the Ukrainian Parliament Yelyzaveta Oleksiyivna Yasko delivers a speech during the 20th National Congress of the Popular Party (PP) at the Fibes conference and exhibition centre in Seville on April 2, 2022. — AFP

in next year's election, recent polls suggest it could need the support of Vox to govern.

Alarm bells sounded last month when the PP made a coalition deal with Vox,

letting the far-right faction into a regional government for the first time, raising fears it could be a blueprint for future power-sharing, both regionally and nationally. — AFP

Stranded Ukrainians find comfort in crisis-hit Sri Lanka

UNAWATUNA, Sri Lanka: As the sun dips below the Indian Ocean waves, Ukrainian tourist Viktoria Makarenko and her daughter light incense every evening at a temple in a Sri Lankan beach resort to pray for a return home. Russia's February invasion of the 35-year-old's homeland has left thousands of foreign travellers from the two countries stranded on the tropical island.

But Ukrainians with empty wallets, distraught over the fate of loved ones back home, say they have been overwhelmed by support from locals—despite their own travails in the face of a worsening financial crisis. "I love Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan people," Makarenko told AFP. "Everybody wants to help us."

She, her husband and their five-year-old daughter had been travelling around Sri Lanka for weeks when Russian forces invaded Ukraine. They were running low on cash and despairing of their predicament before locals in the resort town of Unawatuna rallied around them, offering free accommodation, food and even incense sticks to light on their daily trips to the shrine.

"The owner of this hotel let us stay here as long as we need. We have food, water, we don't have a headache (over) what to eat tomorrow," Makarenko said. "We stay safe here and they take care of us." Along the white sands of Sri Lanka's southern coastline, dozens of tourist-oriented businesses are advertising offers or assistance for stranded Ukrainians.

Ahesh Shanaka, the manager of the Blackgold cafe in Mirissa, said he asked one Ukrainian cus-

tom carrying a baby whether she was returning home. "She said, 'I cannot go back, my house was destroyed, where can I go?'"

A sign outside offers half-price meals upon presentation of a Ukrainian passport, and nearby guesthouses have given empty rooms to small cohorts of backpackers from the country. Shanaka believes that his fellow Sri Lankans' generosity stems from still-fresh memories of the island's own experience of conflict—a decades-long civil war that ended in 2009.

"We also faced a situation like that before... We know the suffering, we know the pain," he said. Sri Lanka's current hardships have been bad for business: Long queues for petrol and electricity blackouts are threatening to upend operators and bring a budding post-pandemic tourism revival to an abrupt end. "We are in a bad situation, you know. The crisis, our economy is going down, everything is bad," said Shanaka. "But we are also people, they are also people, that's why we try to help."

Gone to ground

Official figures show around 15,000 Russians and 5,000 Ukrainians visited Sri Lanka in the month the conflict began—making up the island's first and third-biggest tourism sources respectively. Sri Lanka has granted free visa extensions for citizens of both countries. Many Russian tourists are also stuck in the country, cut off from funds after US sanctions on international payment networks. But no offers for them are being advertised, and they are reluctant to talk. "We have to go meet friends," one young Russian man replied tersely, before he and his companions turned to contemplate the ocean view at the historic Dutch Fort in Galle. Public sentiment overwhelmingly backs Ukraine in the conflict—slogans condemning the war are daubed in the yellow and blue of the country's flag on walls up and down the coast.

"There is great compassion on their part, given that



WELIGAMA, Sri Lanka: Tourists ride a scooter along a road in Weligama. Russia's February invasion of the 35-year-old's homeland has left thousands of foreign travellers from the two countries stranded on the tropical island. —AFP

they are also in difficult circumstances," Darina Stambuliak, another Ukrainian whose stay in Unawatuna was involuntarily extended by the war, told AFP.

The 33-year-old said she was previously forced to flee Donetsk when pro-Russian separatists declared a breakaway region in 2014. She now spends much of her time anxiously keeping up with news from home. But a generous discount on her accommodation has given her one less cause for worry. "Business owners have wrapped us in love and support," she said. "We are so grateful." — AFP

reach Tigray since December and follows the declaration last week by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government of an indefinite humanitarian truce, while the TPLF agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" if aid arrived. The region has been under what the UN has described as a de facto blockade, and suffering for many months without basic services such as electricity, telecommunications, internet and banking. The war has driven hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine, displaced more than two million people and left more than nine million in need of food aid, according to the UN.

"This is one good step in the right direction," TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda said on Twitter, announcing 20 trucks had arrived in rebel-controlled territory. "The bottom line, though, isn't about how many trucks are allowed but whether there is a system in place to ensure unfettered humanitarian access for the needy!"

Friday's development comes just days after both sides accused each other of blocking an aid convoy headed for Tigray, which has not seen any humanitarian supplies arrive by road since December 15. Nearly 40 percent of Tigray's six million inhabitants face "an extreme lack of food", the UN said in January, with fuel shortages forcing aid workers to deliver medicines and other crucial supplies sometimes by foot. — AFP

First aid convoy reaches Ethiopia's Tigray: UN

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia: The first aid convoy in three months reached Ethiopia's war-stricken Tigray region on Friday, the UN said, a week after the government and Tigrayan rebels agreed to a conditional humanitarian truce. The UN's World Food Programme said on Twitter that 13 trucks had "arrived safely" in Tigray's capital Mekele, adding: "More trucks & fuel will follow in morning."

The 17-month war between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has created a humanitarian crisis in northern Ethiopia, with millions of people in need. The UN agency said its convoy that travelled from the neighbouring region of Afar to Tigray was carrying more than 500 tonnes of food "for communities on (the) edge of starvation".

"Good progress, much more needed — we need daily convoys flowing in safely to meet the needs of 5 million people," it said. It is the first such convoy to



DEBARK, Ethiopia: Men carry a sack of wheat during a food distribution by the World Food Programme (WFP) for internally displaced people (IDP) in Debark, 90 kilometres of the city of Gondar, Ethiopia. The first international aid convoy in three months entered Ethiopia's war-stricken Tigray region. —AFP

Burkina Faso sets up panels to talk to jihadists

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: Burkina Faso's junta leader has announced the setting up of local committees to seek dialogue with armed jihadist groups and help restore peace. Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who seized power on January 24, addressed the Sahel nation late Friday saying the move was intended "to create conditions for the total commitment of all around the key factor which is to recover our territorial integrity".

"I have decided to set up local committees for dialogue and the restoration of peace," he said. The committees would "make approaches to the members of groups who are no longer in contact with the nation." They would also be tasked with "building bridges for those who ... have been drawn into a spiral of extremism."

Damiba also announced a ban on civilians living or working in specific "military operational zones" and restrictions on protests likely to disturb public order or require policing by large numbers of security forces. The 41-year-old staged the coup after mutinies in several army barracks, overthrowing President Roch Marc Kaboré who was accused of ineffectiveness in the face of jihadist violence plaguing the country.

But the junta is now facing a resurgence of the violence which has seen more than 60 civilians and soldiers killed in the north towards the end of March. In his address Damiba said: "The surge of terrorist attacks recently cannot and must not be interpreted as a sign of inaction or inefficiency from what we are deploying on the ground." — AFP

Swiss Cold War bunkers back in vogue

MEYRIN, Switzerland: Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reawakened interest in Switzerland's concrete nuclear fallout shelters, built during the Cold War with enough space to shelter everyone in the country. Since the 1960s, every Swiss municipality has had to build nuclear bunkers for their residents, while such shelters have also been mandatory in all homes and residential buildings over a certain size built since then.

The shelters have become an integral part of the Swiss identity, on a par with the country's famous chocolate, banks and watches. But the underground spaces, long seen as a quirky curiosity mostly used for storage or as very well-protected wine cellars, are being viewed in a new light since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24.

Just days into the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin put the country's strategic nuclear forces on high alert, sparking global alarm. Fierce fighting near Ukraine's nuclear power plants, including Chernobyl — the sight of the world's worst nuclear accident in 1986 — have also heightened fears that even traditionally neutral Switzerland could be affected by the war.

'Ukraine is very nearby'

"People are discovering that Ukraine is very nearby," Marie Claude Noth-Ecoeur, who heads civil and military security services in the mountainous southern Wallis region, told AFP. The wealthy Alpine country has pledged that each and every resident will have a shelter space if needed.

In fact, the country of 8.6 million people counts nearly nine million spaces across 365,000 private and public shelters. But while there are more than enough spots at a national level, there are vast regional differences. Geneva is worst off, with only enough places for 75 percent of its population.

Nicola Squillaci, head of Geneva's civil protection and military affairs division, said the shelters were conceived to provide protection "especially in the case of a bombing and a nuclear attack". They would help protect the population "against the shock waves, and against radioactivity in the air", he told AFP.

Ducking into a private shelter for around 150 people, underneath a brand new residential building in the Geneva suburb of Meyrin, Squillaci pointed out how, in peace time, it was equipped with basement storage units for the apartment dwellers above. But unlike most storage facilities, this one comes with composting toilets, kits for quickly assembling beds, and a ventilation system that filters the air coming in from the outside.

'Capsule'

"It is like a capsule, with airlocks on emergency exits and main exits," Squillaci said. "If the building were to collapse, the shelter would remain intact." Switzerland's vast network of nuclear bunkers have a range of other day-to-day uses, including as military barracks or as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers.

But Swiss authorities require that they can be emptied and reverted back to nuclear shelters within five days. So far, Switzerland's population has never been ordered down into the shelters, not even in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster.

Experts say the most likely scenario for needing to use them has always been a possible accident at one of Switzerland's own nuclear power plants. But now the conflict raging in Ukraine has added a new, urgent layer to the national nuclear anxiety. With public concern growing, Swiss authorities have published overviews of the available shelter spots, and have urged households to always maintain a stock of food to last at least a week. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 2022

Boursa Kuwait concludes successful participation in AFCM conference

Company seeks to reinforce its position as a leading exchange operator in the region

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait concluded its successful participation in the Arab Federation of Capital Markets (AFCM) annual conference entitled, "AFCM Annual Conference: Bahrain 2022", which was held in the Kingdom of Bahrain, on March 28 and 29, 2022.

Regarded as the largest event for stock exchanges and capital markets in the Middle East, the AFCM annual conference is a distinguished platform that gathers leaders from across the Arab securities industry, to exchange ideas and visions on the most suitable means to provide key opportunities and the ideal environment to promote the growth of the Arabian capital market ecosystem, in addition to enhancing integration and liquidity among exchanges across the region. The conference seeks to bring the interests of the Arab capital markets to life on all levels, boosting cooperation and coordinating efforts to ultimately enhance liquidity and motivate companies to register, list and trade, in an effort to develop and enhance the region's capital markets.

investors, particularly foreign investors, to benefit the respective economies of GCC member states. The heads of the region's exchanges also discussed easing the account opening procedures for investors through the "Know Your Client" platform and introducing joint products in an effort to create a better sense of cohesion for all the region's capital markets.

Commenting on Boursa Kuwait's participation in this regional event, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi, said: "Boursa Kuwait is keen to participate in the annual conference of the Arab Federation of Capital Markets, especially since Kuwait is one of the founders of this Federation. As part of its efforts to raise the status of the company and strengthen its position in the region as well as internationally, Boursa Kuwait is constantly striving to enhance the ways and methods of cooperation among the Arab capital markets."

Al-Osaimi added, "Apart from the specific agenda set for this conference, we took the opportunity



MANAMA: A group photo during Boursa Kuwait's participation in the Arab Federation of Capital Markets (AFCM) annual conference in Bahrain.

transparent investment environment for all Arab capital markets. This event offered the ideal forum for the region's leaders to exchange ideas and expertise in the hopes of witnessing the desired results come to life."

Secretary General of Arab Federation of Capital Markets Rami El Dokany also commented on the event, saying, "We were pleased to organize this year's AFCM Conference in the Kingdom of Bahrain and bring together our colleagues and partners from across the capital markets industry. The AFCM is an opportunity to create a transparent and developed environment for the Arab capital markets, and encourage further cooperation and communication between the Federation's members."

The AFCM consists of 21 members representing 17 exchanges and four clearing companies as well as multiple affiliate members, such as financial institutions and brokerage firms, from across the Arab region. By the end of 2021, more than 1,570 corporations were listed across all Arabian stock exchanges with a

combined capital of \$3.8 trillion.

Boursa Kuwait's involvement in international and trade events falls in line with the company's efforts to reinforce its position as a leading exchange operator in the capital markets. The company also aims to gain expertise, build knowledge, and promote the Kuwaiti capital market through its various participations in conferences and events.

Since its inception, the company has strived to develop a strong financial market with high liquidity and credibility through the implementation of a range of structural and technical developments and initiatives that will enhance the position of the exchange, regionally and globally. Boursa Kuwait continues to implement many steps in accordance with international practices and standards to transform Kuwait into a regional and global investment destination, by focusing on creating an attractive issuer base and broadening its investor base, increasing the depth and breadth of its products, as well as upgrading its infrastructure and business environment to international standards.



The largest event for stock exchanges and capital markets in the Middle East

The event's agenda included 19 discussion panels and 95 speakers, shedding light on various topics related to the capital markets as well as their efforts and operations throughout the past year. Key topics included sustainability, environmental, social and governance (ESG) metrics, listed index funds, real estate codes, green financing, regulatory technology, bilateral netting, and the development of market data and their sale.

Easing procedures

During the conference, the heads of the GCC's stock exchanges discussed possible ways to ease procedures for double listed companies as well as launching joint platforms to benefit all asset classes. Conference attendees also discussed the means of exchanging knowledge and expertise and enhancing collaboration as well as the opportunities to market listed companies across the region to

to use this event as a platform to ease procedures for our investors and raise awareness of corporate days and roadshows to include other exchanges from across the Gulf. We also sought to encourage companies to get listed across multiple exchanges in the region and introduce joint GCC products and services to serve both issuers and investors, regardless of asset class."

A launchpad

Commenting on the event, Sheikh Khalifa bin Ebrahim Al-Khalifa, Chief Executive Officer of Bahrain Bourse said: "Bahrain Bourse is proud to be hosting this year's annual AFCM conference, which represents a launchpad to address key issues regarding regional stock exchanges and capital markets. We recognize the vital role the Bahrain Bourse plays in providing a stable and transparent environment, and the importance of promoting a

Iraq oil exports \$11.07bn in March, highest for 50 years

BAGHDAD: Iraq exported \$11.07 billion of oil last month, the highest level for half a century, as crude prices soared amid shortfalls following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the oil ministry said.

The second largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Iraq exported "100,563,999 barrels for revenues of \$11.07 billion, the highest revenue since 1972", the ministry said. The figures published late Friday are preliminary data but final data "generally does not vary" much, a ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In February, oil revenues reached an eight-year high of \$8.5 billion dollars, with daily exports of 3.3 million barrels of oil. Oil exports account for more than 90 percent of Iraq's income.

Crude prices spiked over fears of a major supply shortfall after Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24. Russia is the world's second biggest exporter of oil after Saudi Arabia.

On Thursday, the OPEC group of oil producing countries and its Russia-led allies agreed on another modest oil output increase, ignoring Western pressure to significantly boost production as the Ukraine conflict has rocked prices. The 13 members of the Saudi-led OPEC and 10 countries spearheaded by Russia—a group known as OPEC+ — backed an increase of 432,000 barrels per day in May, marginally higher than in previous months.

'Two-edged sword'

The United States has urged OPEC+ to boost production as high energy prices have contributed to soaring inflation across the world, which has threatened to severely derail the recovery from the COVID pandemic. While OPEC refused to budge, Washington said it would tap its strategic stockpile by a record amount in a bid to cool soaring prices. The international benchmark contract, Brent North Sea crude, flirted with a record high in early March as it soared to almost \$140 per barrel, but has retreated since then.

On Friday, oil was around \$100 a barrel. Oil revenues are critical for Iraq's government, with the country mired in a financial crisis and needing funds to rebuild infrastructure after decades of devastating war. Iraq, with a population of some 41 million people, is also grappling with a major energy crisis and suffers regular power cuts. —AFP

Street protests as Sri Lanka economic crisis escalates

COLOMBO: Street protests gripped Sri Lanka Friday as demonstrators blocked main roads across the country, a day after hundreds tried to storm the president's home in anger over an unprecedented economic crisis. The South Asian nation is facing severe shortages of essentials, sharp price rises and crippling power cuts in its most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

Police reimposed a nighttime curfew Friday in the Western Province, which includes the capital Colombo, slightly expanding the zone's circumference from the prior night.

Earlier in the evening, dozens of rights activists carried handwritten placards and oil lamps in the capital while demonstrating at a busy intersection.

"Time to quit Rajapaksas," said one placard. "No more corruption, go home Gota," said another, referring to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In the highland town of Nuwara Eliya, activists blocked the opening of a flower exhibition by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's wife, Shiranthi, police said.

The southern towns of Galle, Matara and Moratuwa also saw anti-government protests, and similar demonstrations were reported in the northern and central regions. All held up traffic on main roads.

India, Australia ink interim trade deal

NEW DELHI: India and Australia signed an interim free trade deal on Saturday that cuts tariffs on billions of dollars of commerce as the two Quad partners bolster their economic ties. Both signatories are members of the Quad alliance with the United States and Japan, which is seen as a counterweight to an increasingly assertive China.

But while they both border the Indian Ocean, Canberra says India was only Australia's seventh-largest trading partner in 2020, and accounted for just over four percent of its exports last year.

The Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement was signed simultaneously in New Delhi and Canberra by India's commerce minister Piyush Goyal and his Australian counterpart Dan Tehan in a joint ceremony. India and Australia are "natural partners, connected by shared values of democracy, rule of law and transparency", Goyal said.

'Lunatic, go home'

Thursday night's unrest outside the president's private home saw hundreds of people demand he step down. People chanted "lunatic, lunatic, go home", before police fired tear gas and used water cannon.

The crowd turned violent, setting ablaze two military buses, a police jeep, two patrol motorcycles and a three-wheeler. They also threw bricks at officers. At least two protesters were wounded in police firing but it was not clear whether officers used live ammunition or rubber bullets. Four people were injured when a security vehicle ran over them.

Police said 53 protesters were arrested, but local media organizations said five news photographers were also detained and tortured at a local police station, a charge the government said it will investigate. The police and military presence was beefed up Friday across the country as social media posts urged residents to demonstrate peacefully outside their homes.

'Terrorists'

Two government ministers said a major intelligence failure had placed the lives of the president and his wife in danger on Thursday. "Both the president and his wife were at their home when the protests were going on," Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella told reporters in Colombo, discounting earlier claims that they were away at the time.

"We had information of a demonstration, but nothing suggesting that it could turn violent. This is a major intelligence failure."

"Our relationship rests on the pillars of trust and reliability aptly reflected in our deepening geo-strategic engagement through the QUAD and the supply chain resilience initiative."

Two-way trade reached around \$27.5 billion last year according to New Delhi, with resource-rich Australia exporting coal and other commodities, along with sheep meat, and India largely supplying finished goods and services. At the same time Canberra's relations with its biggest trading partner China are at their lowest point in a generation, with many Australian goods hit with punitive sanctions and ministerial relations frozen.

Beijing has been angered at Australia's willingness to legislate against overseas influence operations, to bar Huawei from 5G contracts and to call for an independent investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. India and China have also seen a sharp deterioration in ties after a high-altitude clash in 2020 left 20 Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese soldiers dead.

The agreement "delivers a clear message that democracies are working together and ensuring the security and resilience of our supply chains", Australian



COLOMBO: Street protests escalated in Sri Lanka Friday as demonstrators blocked main roads across the country over an unprecedented economic crisis.

Transport Minister Dilum Amunugama said "terrorists" were behind the unrest.

Rajapaksa's office said Friday that the protesters wanted to create an "Arab Spring"—a reference to anti-government protests in response to corruption and economic stagnation that gripped the Middle East more than a decade ago.

A common theme of demonstrations was a demand for all members of the powerful Rajapaksa family to quit. One of the president's brothers, Mahinda, serves as prime minister while the youngest, Basil, is finance minister. His eldest brother and nephew also hold cabinet positions.

Sri Lanka's predicament has been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which torpedoed tourism and remittances. —AFP



NEW DELHI: India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal addresses a press conference after taking part in the virtual signing ceremony of the India-Australia economic cooperation and trade agreement with Australian Trade Minister Dan Tehan, in New Delhi on April 2, 2022. —AFP

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said at Saturday's signing, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi added it would "contribute to increasing supply chain resilience and to the stability of the Indo-Pacific region". —AFP

Business

US labor market nears full recovery after strong hiring

Economy added 431,000 jobs in February, jobless rate fell to 3.6%

WASHINGTON: The US labor market has almost recovered from the mass joblessness caused by the pandemic, adding hundreds of thousands of positions last month and sending the unemployment rate nearly to where it was before COVID-19 broke out nationwide.

The Labor Department reported Friday that the unemployment rate fell more than analysts had predicted in March to 3.6 percent, a hair above its February 2020 level of 3.5 percent, while the economy added 431,000 jobs in the month. Though the hiring total was slightly below analysts' forecasts, it was nonetheless a strong figure that underscored how far the economy has come since the pandemic started two years ago.

The economy has "gone from being on the mend to being on the move," President Joe Biden said Friday at the White House, as his administration grapples with low approval ratings driven in part by inflation, which has hit record levels during his presidency.

The economy has also added millions of jobs since Biden took office last year, but analysts said they doubted that the robust pace of hiring could be maintained. "Today's job report is great news as it means the economy has almost fully recovered from the blow caused by the pandemic," Mark Zandi of Moody's Analytics wrote on Twitter.

"But it is somewhat disquieting in that the job market must cool off quickly, or inflation, our number one economic problem, will soon be a much bigger one."

The data was released as the Federal Reserve undergoes a delicate process of fighting price increases by raising interest rates from the zero level they held them at when the pandemic was at its worst, while simultaneously trying not to harm the recovery. Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said the report contains signs

that wage growth—a driver of the price increases—is moderating while workforce participation is increasing, trends that could convince the Fed to be less aggressive in tightening policy.

"Rates still need to rise substantially, but the Fed won't need to go overboard this year if the labor market is normalizing," he said.

Back to normal

The latest report showed key markers of labor market health had made a full recovery after the catastrophe brought on by the pandemic, which cost more than 20 million people their jobs and sent the unemployment rate up to 14.7 percent in April 2020. Last month, the number of unemployed people fell to six million, just above its 5.7 million level before the pandemic, while the number of people whose employment ended involuntarily or who completed a temporary job came in at 1.4 million, close to where it was in February 2020.

The Labor Department also revised upwards the healthy jobs gains reported in January and February, saying they were a combined 95,000 higher than first reported.

A wide range of industries hired last month, including leisure and hospitality, the sector encompassing the bars and restaurants hit hardest by the pandemic's layoffs. That industry added 112,000 positions, while professional and business services firms gained 102,000 jobs in March, retailers added 49,000 positions and manufacturing employment rose by 38,000. The labor force participation rate, indicating the share of people employed or looking for work, ticked up slightly to 62.4 percent, a post-pandemic high but still a percentage point below February 2020.

Tightening to come

Nonetheless, there was still ground to be

Shanghai authorities have recognized that patience is running thin after three weeks of scattered lockdowns and restrictions, promising people will have fresh food packages.

State media on Thursday moved to reassure the public that fresh produce would not run out, showing photos of "vegetable planting bases" in the Shanghai suburbs running "round-the-clock" to meet the demand spike. Fresh food costs tripled in some markets due to panic buying and a lack of delivery drivers. Residents are growing weary and frustrated at the failure to control the virus outbreak, in which city authorities have warned cases are "rapidly rising".

"It's been much more difficult to buy groceries on Hema," a 42-year-old locked-down Shanghai resident, who gave her name only as Tang, told AFP.

"Some of the things I wanted were not there, and of course the delivery times are much, much longer."

Lockdowns have extended beyond their initial periods and many residents are concerned a positive test could see them swept into state quarantine. "Our compound had around 20 confirmed cases... We can't go downstairs of our building," said a finance worker locked down in Pudong. The man, who declined to give his name, said he had received a "package of vegetables, so we don't lack any now".

As the city entered a period of anxiety and confusion over the lattice of lockdown rules, AFP

Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

After a choppy session, all three major US indices finished modestly higher with the S&P 500 up 0.3 percent, lifting the index narrowly into positive territory for the week.

European equities also climbed, despite data showing eurozone inflation surged by a record 7.5 percent last month. Analysts said soaring inflation will pressure the European Central Bank, which has thus far been reluctant to follow the Federal Reserve's lead and lift interest rates.

"With euro-zone inflation rising even further above the ECB's forecast, and likely to remain very high for the rest of the year, we think it won't be long before the Bank starts raising interest rates," said Jack Allen-Reynolds at Capital Economics.

Oil prices, meanwhile, retreated, with the US benchmark WTI contract dipping under \$100 a barrel.

In a bid to ease oil prices, the 31-nation International Energy Agency agreed to tap emergency oil reserves again at an emergency ministerial meeting following a pledge to release over 60 million barrels. The IEA, whose members include the United States, European countries, Japan and other nations allied to Washington, said it would make the new amount public early next week.

The move came a day after Biden announced a record release of oil onto the market—one million

business conditions more favorable than those that consider them unfavorable, and the survey is considered to be the broadest indicator of how Japan Inc. is faring. The latest reading—the first decline in seven quarters—comes more than a month after Russia invaded Ukraine, starting a war that has pushed up raw material prices and triggered parts shortages.

"While (plus 14) is still not particularly weak by past standards, it suggests that supply shortages are still hampering some manufacturers," said Tom Leamouth, Japan economist at Capital Economics.

"Non-manufacturing sentiment held up better-than-expected during the Omicron wave and the labour market continued to tighten," he added.

"Indeed, we think output will rebound strongly in Q2." Among large non-manufacturers, confidence fell



LOS ANGELES: In this file, patrons order food at a taco stand in Los Angeles, California. The US added 431,000 jobs in March and the unemployment rate fell to 3.6 percent. —AFP

recovered. The total number of employed people was still 1.6 million short of its pre-pandemic level, the data said, while employment in leisure and hospitality is 1.5 million jobs lower than before the pandemic. The recovery was also not being felt equally, with unemployment for white workers hitting 3.2 percent in March, but coming in at 6.2 percent for Black Americans and 4.2 percent for Hispanic workers, though the rates for each group decreased from the month prior.

Economists viewed the data as reinforcing the Fed's commitment to forcefully raising interest rates, perhaps by half a percentage point at its meeting next month, which would be double the increase it announced when it began hiking in March. "The US economy has recovered the majority of the jobs lost during the pandemic and now the focus remains on how bad inflation will get, but... the Fed can go forward with aggressive tightening," Edward Moya of OANDA said. —AFP

Shanghai harvests memes from vegetable shortage

SHANGHAI: Bok choy emojis, clips of Gucci gift bags stuffed with celery and video of drones delivering broccoli-vegetable memes are the new currency in Shanghai's sardonic social media scene, with the city locked down and pining for greens. Those navigating the city's thicket of COVID-19 restrictions to go shopping this week found long queues and empty shelves as panic-buying outpaced re-supply.

The online market was a little better stocked, with fresh food apps Hema and Ele.me crashing as early risers refreshed pages the moment stores opened.

The vegetable hysteria was picked up by meme-makers who tickled image-conscious Shanghai with videos of Louis Vuitton boxes holding bok choy instead of luxury items, and clips on Douyin-China's TikTok-showing lettuce, cucumber and celery in Gucci gift bags. Another unverified but widely shared video shows a man delivering a bag of broccoli via drone to a grateful neighbor.

Stocks edge higher on solid US jobs data, oil prices retreat

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks finished modestly higher Friday as solid US jobs data boosted expectations for more Federal Reserve interest rate hikes, while oil prices retreated after US allies agreed to tap their emergency stockpiles. The government jobs report for March showed US employers adding 431,000 positions and the unemployment rate falling to 3.6 percent, a hair above where it was before the pandemic.

The data showed progress in the US economic recovery, but also raised expectations of an aggressive Federal Reserve interest rate hike to tame runaway inflation.

"Given the strength of the labor market and inflation well above target, the probability that the Fed raises rates by 50 (basis points) at its next meeting in May—which is our baseline—is rising," Daniel Vernazza of UniCredit Bank said in a note. However, the Institute for Supply Management reported the US manufacturing sector's expansion slowed last month amid a spike in energy prices following

Business confidence dips in Japan as Ukraine concern grows

TOKYO: Confidence weakened among Japan's major manufacturers for the first time in nearly two years, a key business survey showed Friday, as concern grows over the impact of the Ukraine crisis.

The Bank of Japan's Tankan business survey—a quarterly poll of about 10,000 companies—showed a reading of plus 14 for major manufacturers lower than the previous plus 17.

A positive figure means more manufacturers see



SHANGHAI: People buy vegetables in a market. Vegetable memes are the new currency in Shanghai's sardonic social media scene, with the city locked down and pining for greens. —AFP

reporters saw people surreptitiously buying vegetables through a gate sealed by police tape, and people hauling groceries up to a balcony on a string. A stream of the Miami Ultra Music Festival, hosted by Chinese platform TudiMusic, was blizzed with vegetable emojis from Shanghai viewers during replays this week. TudiMusic said hundreds of thousands of viewers from the city tuned in. —AFP



TOKYO: An electronic quotation board (front right) displays the yen's rate against the US dollar and the share price of the Tokyo Stock Exchange (bottom) at a foreign exchange brokerage in Tokyo. —AFP

barrels of US government oil every day for six months in a bid to ease prices.

Biden described the move as a "wartime" measure that will defuse Russia's leverage as an energy power. Washington has pressed the OPEC+ group of oil producing countries, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, to boost its output but the group on Thursday agreed on another modest increase instead. —AFP

to plus nine from plus ten. For medium-sized manufacturers, confidence halved to plus three, while sentiment for small companies sank to minus four from minus one.

Japan's top government spokesman said Friday that major manufacturers' business confidence was still at a high level despite the drop. "The situation reflects weakness in some areas, as the difficult situation caused by the pandemic remains," Hirokazu Matsuno said at a regular press conference.

The government is planning measures to cushion the impact of commodity inflation, he added. Japan has seen a smaller COVID-19 outbreak than many countries, although cases surged due to the Omicron variant. The country has recorded around 28,010 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns. —AFP

US manufacturing index falls to 18-month low

WASHINGTON: A key gauge of the manufacturing industry in the United States dropped to a level not seen since September 2020 in March as spiking energy prices and supply challenges hampered factories. The Institute for Supply Management said its manufacturing index fell to 57.1 percent in March, a far bigger drop than analysts had expected but still above the 50-percent threshold indicating growth.

Fueling the decline was a nearly eight-point contraction in new orders to 53.8 percent, while production fell four percentage points to 54.5 percent and prices saw a whopping 11.6 point increase to 87.1 percent. "The US manufacturing sector remains in a demand-driven, supply chain-constrained environment," the survey's chair Timothy Fiore said.

Although firms remain optimistic about future demand and managed to cut down on employee turnover last month, Fiore said they also moved quickly to pass on costs after Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused energy prices to spike. "Suppliers are not waiting to experience the full impacts of price increases before negotiating with their customers," he said.

The energy price surge was the latest supply woe facing manufacturers, who have battled shortages of labor and components, shipping delays and high inflation as the US economy has recovered from the pandemic. "Business continues to be strong, with incoming sales higher but still combating labor and material issues like availability and inflation," a furniture and related products company told the survey.

A more positive trend was seen in employment, which rose 3.4 percentage points to 56.3 percent, while supplier delivery times decreased slightly and order backlogs decreased five percentage points but remained in expansion territory.

"Even as the manufacturing sector continues to grow, bottlenecks and shortages—which could intensify in the near term—remain headwinds for the sector," Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics warned in an analysis. —AFP



TOKYO: Confidence weakened among Japan's major manufacturers for the first time in nearly two years, a key business survey showed Friday.

Business

Amazon workers in New York vote to unionize in US first

Dozens of supporters greet the result with cheers and applause

NEW YORK: Amazon workers in New York voted Friday to launch the first US union at the e-commerce giant, an underdog upset against a company that has steadfastly opposed organized labor in its massive workforce. Dozens of supporters greeted the result with cheers and applause, while union organizer Christian Smalls popped a champagne cork in front of bank of TV cameras and photographers.

"We want to thank (Amazon founder) Jeff Bezos for going to space because while he was up there we were signing people up," Smalls joked after workers at the Staten Island JFK8 warehouse backed the union 2,654 to 2,131 votes.

Analysts said the Amazon outcome-liked to a David vs Goliath upset and winning plaudits from President Joe Biden-could spur other unionization effort at America's second largest private employer.

Amazon noted "disappointment" over the results, and said it was evaluating its options, including "filing objections based on the inappropriate and undue influence" of the National Labor Relations Board, which oversaw the vote. At stake was Amazon's ability to remain union-free in its home market, a status it has guarded fiercely since the company was set up in the 1990s by Bezos, who has since started a space tourism venture.

During a contentious campaign, Amazon argued that forming a union would mar the company's direct relationship with workers and represent a jump into the unknown, with no guarantee employees will wind up with better wages or job security.

But union leaders, composed of current and former Staten Island employees, spoke constantly with employees, pitching the ability of a union to improve working conditions and ensure more employee-friendly work schedules without risk of being fired. Smalls, 33, launched the drive soon after being fired from the Amazon site in Staten Island in March 2020 after organizing a protest for personal

protective equipment amid the surge of the first major COVID-19 outbreak in New York.

"It's a truly historic day, it really is," said Eric Milner, who represented the union organizers during the process. "I think it's going to start a chain reaction-warehouse to warehouse."

Also cheering was Biden, a self-professed "union guy." "The president was glad to see workers ensure their voices are heard with respect to important workplace decisions," Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.

Chain reaction?

The union victory in New York came as a second election remained up in the air in the southern state of Alabama. The vote is a redo of a 2021 ballot thrown out by federal officials, with 993 workers casting ballots against the labor group, compared with 875 employees in favor.

But there were 416 "challenged" ballots, according to the National Labor Relations Board, meaning the number of votes still to be settled is big enough to potentially decide the final result.

The Alabama campaign had garnered support from the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, a national union, and enjoyed visits by high-profile politicians such as progressive Senator Bernie Sanders. By contrast, the New York campaign, while based in a part of the United States historically favorable to unions, was a grass roots effort with a hardscrabble budget.

Ruth Milkman, a sociologist of labor movements at City University of New York, said she was "stunned but delighted" by the outcome, which will "inspire" other campaigns. Despite recent unionization victories at Starbucks, the general picture for organized labor in the United States is mixed, with overall unionization levels falling steadily. "It seems that most of the attention has been focused



NEW YORK: Union organizer Christian Smalls (left) celebrates with Amazon workers following the April 1, 2022, vote for the unionization of the Amazon Staten Island warehouse in New York. — AFP

on Alabama and people kind of dismissed this one because it wasn't an established union," Milkman said. "And yet it turned out to be the success story."

Neil Saunders, an analyst at GlobalData Retail, agreed that the New York victory will embolden others to unionize. "It becomes much more difficult for Amazon to operate if they have to deal with a union," said Saunders. "They're not going to necessarily have to spend a lot more. It's just that they don't like the interference of unions."

In the immediate near-term, Staten Island organizers were already mobilizing for their next battle:

the LDJ5 sorting center across the street from the JFK8 warehouse, with a vote will be held there at the end of the month. Also ahead, Smalls and other labor leaders will begin to focus on establishing a contract with Amazon, an objective that is expected to be challenging.

"There is still a lot of hard work ahead," said Milkman. "Many times people win election and never get a contract." Achieving a contract "will require a continued, if not expanded, campaign," said Larry Mishel, a fellow at the Economic Policy Institute, a labor-backed think-tank. — AFP

Trade halted in 32 HK-listed firms on earnings no-show

HONG KONG: More than 30 firms, including at least two major Chinese property developers, saw trading in their shares halted in Hong Kong on Friday after they failed to report annual results. The move deepens uncertainty for China's embattled property sector, which has been struggling after a clampdown by Beijing suddenly turned off the liquidity taps.

It also comes as China's wider economy battles with sweeping lockdowns in key cities including Shanghai after a surge of coronavirus infections. Major Chinese developers Shimao Group and Sunac China were among 32 companies suspended on Friday after failing to publish their unaudited annual results by a March 31 deadline, according to an exchange spokesperson.

Another company was also suspended on Friday but HKEX did not say why. The exchange will "engage with the relevant issuers to support their full compliance with the Listing Rules" and try to keep suspensions as short as possible, the spokesperson told AFP.

This year's trading suspension figure compares with more than 50 for 2021 and at least nine for 2020, according to Bloomberg News. Shimao said it could not report annual results on time because of the latest coronavirus outbreak, which resulted in the "lockdown of the office building of the company's headquarters in Shanghai". Some staff involved in preparing annual results have also been quarantined without a clear date of when virus-control measures will be eased, Shimao added.

Because of virus-related delays, Hong Kong's stock exchange allowed firms to submit unaudited figures by March 31 and the audited version by April 30 to avoid suspension. Chinese property firms have struggled in the wake of Beijing's ongoing drive to curb excessive debt in the real estate sector as well as rampant consumer speculation. The failure to report audited results will compound worries about the transparency of debt restructurings within troubled Chinese firms and could spark further credit rating downgrades. Sunac in its Friday statement said its own delay was partly because of issues related to offshore loans "arising from the recent downgrade of the company's credit ratings by international rating agencies".

On March 24, Fitch Ratings downgraded Sunac's rating to "CC", which the agency said reflected its "narrowing margin of safety for refinancing capital-market maturities".

Property developer China Aoyuan Group, whose shares were also among those suspended on Friday, said it would delay reporting annual results as it did not accurately reflect the group's financial performance and position. "Publication of the 2021 unaudited management accounts at this stage could potentially be misleading to the shareholders and potential investors of the company," the firm said in a stock exchange notice.

Some 192 listed companies successfully filed unaudited results by the March deadline, compared with 27 in 2021 and 380 in 2020, according to the exchange spokesperson.

The Hang Seng Index was slightly lower in afternoon trade Friday and is down seven percent since the start of the year. —AFP

China's factory output at lowest in two years

BEIJING: China's factory output slumped to its lowest in two years in March, independent data showed Friday, as the country battles its worst COVID-19 outbreak since the start of the pandemic.

Authorities are struggling to stamp out coronavirus outbreaks with restrictions and lockdowns on key manufacturing and transport hubs like Shenzhen and Shanghai. The purchasing managers' index (PMI) released by Chinese media group Caixin came just a day after official PMI figures said activity had contracted at the quickest rate since October 2021.

PMIs are a key gauge of activity in the country's factories. The Caixin survey, which covers small and

medium-sized enterprises, is seen by some as a more accurate reflection of China's economic situation than the official government figures, which more closely track the condition of large state groups.

The Caixin PMI fell to 48.1 in March—well below the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction. Both domestic and export orders fell at the fastest rate since February 2020, when China was battling its first coronavirus outbreak, the survey found.

"In March, COVID-19 flared up in several regions across China, disrupting manufacturing supply chains and impacting production," Wang Zhe, a senior economist at Caixin Insight Group, said in a statement. "Market demand weakened, especially for consumer goods." The Ukraine war has also led to a severe fall in demand for exports and blocked global transport links, he said. Input costs rose to a five-month high as global supply chains were disrupted. On Wednesday, facing the prospect of the world's second-largest economy slowing sharply, China's central economic planner held a meeting where it pledged to roll out stabilizing policies. —AFP



BEIJING: China's factory output slumped to its lowest in two years in March, independent data showed Friday — AFP

Mexico, US talks fail to end energy reform frictions

MEXICO CITY: Mexico and the United States faced fresh diplomatic tensions on Friday after talks failed to end a disagreement over Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's controversial energy reforms.

Lopez Obrador rejected the idea of allowing a special US team to monitor the reform process, a day after meeting Washington's climate envoy John Kerry. "Imposing a group to watch us, to observe us, no one will allow that. Maybe in other times, with submissive governments," Lopez Obrador told reporters.

"There is a big difference between listening, informing, talking, communicating ... and imposing a group to watch us," he added. Despite the differences, Lopez Obrador described the meeting with Kerry, which lasted several hours, as "very respectful." Kerry said after the talks that the United States would create a team led by US Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar to work with the White House and his own office on the issue.

The group would "try to make sure that whatever comes out of the reform effort will reflect the best ability to try to move forward," he told reporters during his third visit to Mexico since October.

The reforms being discussed in Mexico's Congress seek to strengthen the state-owned electricity provider and roll back the effects of liberal-

ization that Lopez Obrador says favored private companies.

That has prompted warnings that Mexico is in danger of violating its commitments under a North American trade deal with the United States and Canada.

Critics say the reforms also favor polluting fossil fuels over renewable energy. "Mexico's energy policies damage the environment, US business and investor interests in multiple sectors, and hamper

joint efforts to mitigate climate change." US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said last month according to a statement from her office.

The reforms would ensure that the state-owned Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) has at least 54 percent of the electricity market—compared with 38 percent now—and the private sector no more than 46 percent. The Mexican government says the changes are needed to prevent soaring power prices and to tackle corruption. —AFP



MEXICO CITY: Mexico and the United States faced fresh diplomatic tensions on Friday after talks failed to end a disagreement over Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's controversial energy reforms. —AFP



ABK announces working hours during Ramadan

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its official working hours to serve its customers during the holy month of Ramadan, which will be from 10 am to 1:30 pm in all its branches across Kuwait. On the first day following the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, the Bank will resume its regular working hours.

ABK's customers will have full access to the Bank's online services at www.eahli.com and the Call Center will be available 24 hours a day and can be reached by calling a customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 1899899.

On this occasion, ABK would like to extend its warmest wishes during this holy month of Ramadan to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the Kuwaiti government and its people as well as all residents.

Lifestyle | Gossip

Dua Lipa will present an award at the Grammys



The 26-year-old pop star - who last year took home the coveted gong for Best Pop Vocal Album for her sophomore LP 'Future Nostalgia' - will take to the stage at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on Sunday to present an award at the annual ceremony, along with fellow musicians Megan Thee Stallion and Joni Mitchell as well as 'House of Gucci' star Jared Leto in what The Recording Academy has called a "diverse roster of artists." The Academy wrote on Instagram: "#GRAMMYS got the sweetest pie. #DuaLipa and #MeganTheeStallion will be returning to the GRAMMY stage, this time as presenters Tune in to Music's Biggest Night

this Sunday on @CBSstv." The 'Sweetest Pie' hitmakers will be joined by fellow stars Lenny Kravitz and 'Pose' actors Billy Porter and Michaela Jaë Rodriguez. Country musician Keith Urban, as well as past Grammy nominee and 'Sk8er' Boi' hitmaker Avril Lavigne will also be on hand to give out the prestigious awards, along with '8 Mile' star actor Anthony Mackie. The Grammys will be hosted by 'Daily Show' star Trevor Noah and will feature performance from the likes of Lady Gaga - who is nominated for five awards - as well as H.E.R., Chris Stapleton, Nas, , BTS, Billie Eilish, Brothers Osborne, Olivia Rodrigo and leading nominee Jon Batiste who is up for eight awards.

Viewers around the world will be able to tune into music's biggest night as the event is being streamed internationally in an "unprecedented" broadcast. The Recording Academy said: "Music fans will be given unprecedented digital access to GRAMMY Awards content with GRAMMY Live, which will stream internationally on live.GRAMMY.com and on Twitter @RecordingAcad. GRAMMY Live features exclusive red carpet interviews, fashion and thank you cams, pre-show interviews, and highlights from the 64th GRAMMY Awards Premiere Ceremony and Music's Biggest Night. GRAMMY Live will stream on Sunday, April 3, from 6:30-8 pm ET/3:30-5 pm PT"

A full list of presenters is as follows:
Kelsea Ballerini
Lenny Kravitz
Avril Lavigne
Jared Leto
Dua Lipa
Ludacris
Anthony Mackie
Megan Thee Stallion
Joni Mitchell
Billy Porter
Bonnie Raitt
Michaela Jae Rodriguez
Keith Urban
Questlove

'The Drew Barrymore Show' renewed for season three

The Drew Barrymore Show' has been renewed for a third season. The 47-year-old actress began hosting her self-titled daytime talk show back in 2020 and is "honored and grateful" that it will be returning for the 2022-23 season but aims to "take the show higher" this time round. She said in a statement: "I am honored and grateful but I also want to take this show higher and continue to innovate and be a game changer in the daytime space. Rising to the occasion of finding people in the diverse way they watch is what I want to challenge myself with. Our show wants

to be a bright spot not a blind spot and we just want to make people feel good. And I thank all the people who helped us get here." The show will now be produced and distributed by CMV in a format that will allow it to be aired either as two half-hour episodes that stations can run together back-to-back or be split apart to air separately and the first 30-minute segment will follow the local news casts on all CBS stations. In a statement, CBS president Steve LoCascio said: "Stations have always had a finite amount of shelf space, so we're evolving the syndication model to meet the needs of our partners. We could not be happier to continue our relationship with CBS Stations and our other station partners to deliver more of 'The Drew Barrymore Show' through this innovative new idea. From Drew's unique take on everyday news to headline-generating celebrity interviews to lifestyle how-tos, Drew is a force of nature who has brought a fresh optimistic viewpoint to daytime television. We love having her as part of the CBS family."



Jim Carrey is planning to retire

The 'Sonic the Hedgehog 2' star feels he has "done enough" with his career and is ready to lead a "quiet life" out of the spotlight, though he admitted being offered a "really important" project could change his mind. Asked about Dolly Parton's recent comments that she'd love Jim to play her music partner Porter Wagoner in her biopic, the 60-year-old star told 'Access Hollywood': "Well, I'm retiring. Yeah, probably. I'm being fairly serious. "It depends, if the angels bring some sort of script that's written in gold ink that says to me that it's going to be really important for people to see, I might continue down the road but I'm taking a break. "I really like my quiet life and I really like putting paint on canvas and I really love



my spiritual life and I feel like, and this is something you might never hear another celebrity say as long as time exists - I have enough. I've done enough. I am enough." But the 'Dumb and Dumber' star admitted that, should the '9 to 5' singer contact him about the project, he would "always speak to Dolly". Jim recently branded the Hollywood community "spineless" as he blasted the standing ovation Will Smith received when he won Best Actor at the Oscars, less than an hour after he'd smacked Chris Rock over a joke he made about his wife Jada Pinkett Smith. Jim said: "I was sickened. I was sickened by the standing ovation. Hollywood is just spineless en masse and it really felt like this is a really clear indication that we aren't the cool club anymore. "I'd have announced this morning that I was suing Will for \$200 million because that video is going to be there forever, it's going to be ubiquitous. That insult is gonna last a very long time. If you want to yell from the audience and show disapproval or say something on Twitter [that's fine]. But you do not have the right to walk up onstage and smack somebody in the face because they said words." However, the 'Mask' actor insisted he had "nothing against" Will.

Shawn Mendes changed by meditation

Shawn Mendes believes meditation has "truly" changed his life. The 23-year-old singer admitted his battle with anxiety used to "completely control" his actions but he credits practicing mindfulness with helping him to stay calm and overcome his struggles. He said: "I think the thing that I, that I don't touch on enough is how extreme my anxiety was at one point in my life and my anxiety was completely controlling my life. "Truly the one thing that changed my life and changed the trajectory of my life was meditation." The 'When Your Gone' singer acknowledged medication can seem "scary" or "ominous" but insisted "it's not that complex". He added in an interview on Sirius XM's 'The Morning Mash Up': "It's, it's actually really simple.... And so that's a big one for me and I'll, and I'll keep saying it forever because I, I feel like I owe meditation so much." In November, Shawn split from Camila Cabello after two years of dating and he admitted he is trying not to be "too hard on [himself] about the feelings" and has given himself "grace". The break-up meant the 'Stitches' singer had to learn to "trust" his family and friends again when he needed support. He said: "I think a big one for me was realizing that there's so many people in my life that I can rely on. "I don't just have to put all of my, you know, hardship onto one person. "Instead of like, just calling one person I had now six people I could call and like balancing out that." Last month, Shawn admitted he "hates being alone" after splitting from the 'Havana' hitmaker. Speaking in a video posted to Instagram, he said: "When you're breaking up with someone and you think it's the right thing, you don't realize all the thing that comes after. I think that's the reality that kind of hit me.



Andrew Garfield has split from his girlfriend

The 'Tick, Tick... Boom!' actor had been romancing Alyssa Miller since last autumn but the pair have called time on their romance because the 38-year-old star's work schedule meant it was difficult for him and the Sports Illustrated beauty to spend much time together. A source told The Sun newspaper: A source said: "Andrew and Alyssa were a really beautiful couple and things were going great at first. "They were together for quite some time before they went public, but work schedules mean it has been really hard to see each other. "On top of that it became clear that there were some differences between them and it was decided they are better off apart, for now at least. "It was disappointing for Andrew because he'd have loved to have shared the excitement of the awards season with someone he loved, but it just wasn't supposed to be. "He is keeping his chin up and taking some time for himself after a hectic few months." In 2018, Andrew - who has previously dated Emma Stone



and Rita Ora - insisted the ideas of the traditional "nuclear family" need to be revisited in the modern world and expressed his belief there are a lot of "seriously misguided" notions around love. He said: "I do believe in love at first sight but I also believe that you would love absolutely anybody if you knew their story. "I believe that the modern notion of romantic love is seriously misguided and it creates a lot of problems in our modern world. "I believe that we need to reevaluate this idea that we have of the nuclear family, this idea that we have of two-point-four children, this idea we have that it's Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. "I believe it's possible for all of us

to be in love all the time with ourselves and everyone around us." And the 'Hacksaw Ridge' star admitted he has an "openness" to a relationship with anyone. He said: "My stance toward life, though, is that I always try to surrender to the mystery of not being in charge. "I think most people - we're intrinsically trying to control our experience here, and manage it, and put walls around what we are and who we are. "I want to know as much of the garden as possible before I pass - I have an openness to any impulses that may arise within me at any time."

Cyrus tests positive for COVID-19, but says 'it was definitely worth it'

Miley Cyrus has insisted performing live is "worth" contracting COVID-19. The 'Midnight Sky' hitmaker told fans she has contracted the virus but knew there was always a "pretty high" chance of her doing so as she's been flying "around the world" and playing to large audiences in South America. She tweeted: "Traveling around the world, playin for a 100,000 people a night meeting hundreds of fans a day the chances of getting COVID are pretty high," she wrote. "I have COVID now but it was definitely worth it.(sic)" As a result of her diagnosis, Miley has had to pull out of her performance at Steven Tyler's Grammy Awards Viewing Party on Sunday which raises money for Janie's Fund, a non-profit organization which helps girls who are victims of trauma,



abuse, and neglect. She wrote in another tweet: "Unfortunately because of this I'm missing out on Janie's Fund, which sucks because it's a charity that's super important to me my friend Steven Tyler... Sorry Steven! We'll have to 'Walk This Way' another time." Miley reassured fans she was "feeling fine" and told them: "Don't worry about me!" Late last month, the 'Wrecking Ball' singer was caught up in a drama when her plane had to make an emergency landing after being struck by lightning while on a flight to AsunciUn, Paraguay. Alongside a video of the terrifying storm on Instagram, she wrote: "To my fans and everyone worried after hearing about my flight to AsunciUn. "Our plane was caught in a major unexpected storm and struck by lightning. "My crew, band, friends and family who were all traveling with me are safe after an emergency landing. We were unfortunately unable to fly into Paraguay."



Kanye tells Kim he is going away to get help

Kanye West has told his ex-wife Kim Kardashian that he is "going away to get help." The 44-year-old rapper - who was married to the reality star, 41, from 2014 until 2021 and has North, eight, Saint, six, Chicago, four, and Psalm, with her - caused controversy earlier this year with a stream of Instagram posts harassing Kim and her new partner Pete Davidson, 28, but will now reportedly step away from the lime-light "for the sake of their kids." A source told The New York Post's Page Six column: "Kanye told Kim that he's going away to get help. For the sake of the kids, Kanye has told Kim he's not making any public appearances or inflammatory social media statements, and he will go away somewhere to get better" However, it is reportedly "unclear" whether the

'Stronger' hitmaker will go into a treatment facility or will simply stay at home out of the spotlight. A representative for the 'DONDA' rapper - who legally changed his name to Ye towards the end of 2021 - insisted that he is currently just focusing on having a "healthy co-parenting relationship" with Kim. The rep said: "At this time, Ye is committed to a healthy co-parenting relationship with Kim and is and focused on raising their beautiful children." The news comes just a month after Kanye released a music video which appeared to show him decapitating and burying 'Saturday Night Live' star Pete and before that had implied that Kim had stopped "allowing" him to see their children after the divorce.

Willis' daughter found it 'surreal' going public with his aphasia diagnosis

Bruce Willis' daughter found it "surreal" sharing his aphasia diagnosis with the world. The 'Die Hard' actor's family revealed on Wednesday that he was retiring from acting after being diagnosed with aphasia - a degenerative condition affecting communication and comprehension - and his daughter Scout has been left "humbled" by the overwhelming response to the sad news. She wrote on Instagram: "Papa [heart emoji] Yesterday was so surreal, sharing something so personal. I didn't know how it would be received, there is always an unknown when sharing out so vulnerably into the world. "I'd hoped for some love and compassion, I truly NEVER could have anticipated the depth and breadth of the love we received as a family yesterday. "It kept hitting me yesterday how much love, energy, and prayers were now being sent to my dad and just humbling me in a way that brings tears as I write this. I am so grate-



ful for your love, I'm so grateful to hear about what my papa means to you" Scout - whose mother is Demi Moore - went on to thank people for their messages of support. She wrote: "Thank you so much to everyone who reached out to me yesterday, i love and I appreciate you with all my heart, it's gonna take me a whole to respond to your messages!" The 30-year-old star had previously admitted she was "blown away" by the volume of messages she'd received. She posted on her Instagram Story: "The exquisite outpouring of love that I am experiencing right now is just blowing me away. "Thank you all for showing up with so much tenderness and stunning love for my daddio and my whole family." Among those who have offered support to Bruce and his family is his 'Expendables' co-star Sylvester Stallone. — BangShowbiz

Lifestyle | Features



Picture taken show Polish television producer Tomasz Grzywinski, posing for a photo dressed as a dinosaur and handing out candy and coloring books to Ukrainian refugee children at Warsaw's main train station as part of the 'Make Roar! Not War' initiative. — AFP photos



'ROAR NOT WAR': DINOS CONSOLE UKRAINE CHILDREN IN POLAND

Shrieking and jumping up and down in glee, Ukrainian children of all ages crowd around three Poles in inflatable dinosaur costumes at a refugee shelter in Warsaw. "I don't bite," says the orange T-rex in Ukrainian while handing out high fives and candy bars to the giggling little ones, safe from the war ravaging their homeland. Their mothers take photos or just smile and watch as the boys and girls swarm the dinosaurs to tug on their tails and shake their two-fingered hands.

"They're very happy. It's a good time for them," Ukrainian refugee Lili Kyryliuk told AFP, giving the initiative a thumbs up. "Kids from Ukraine are now in distress, but these dinosaurs can help," said the mother-of-two from the central city of Vinnytsia. The 40-year-old, who left with her children after Russian missiles destroyed the local airport, is among hundreds of thousands who have sought shelter in Poland since Russia invaded Ukraine.

Looking for ways to help the new arrivals, Warsaw television producer Tomasz Grzywinski started the "Make Roar! Not War" dinosaur campaign. "I have children myself, so I can imagine how tough it must be for them to have to abandon their homes because of bombs flying everywhere," the 41-year-old told AFP. "I



thought it'd be good to offer them at least a moment of reprieve... A kind of trip to Disneyland or Jurassic Park," the father-of-three said.

'Army of dinosaurs'

Opting for a dinosaur costume because of the "wow factor", he first tried it out at Warsaw's main train station, which has seen a constant flow of refugees since the conflict started. "I was afraid it wouldn't go

over well... because these people are fleeing war, and there I was planning to clown around so to speak," he said. "But already three minutes in, from the kids' reactions I could tell it was all good. Also the parents were coming up and saying thank you and smiling."

He found the experience moving. "This one girl, a toddler, came up and grabbed me by the leg and wanted to just stand there hugging the dinosaur. No candy, no



nothing," he said. To his surprise, the idea took off on social media, with strangers reaching out to chip in for sweets and coloring books or donning costumes of their own to spread the merriment.

"I also got a lot of messages from psychologists who treat trauma saying the initiative was like mini therapy," he said. Grzywinski has since recruited friends to form "an army of dinosaurs" and has plans to branch out to less accessible places like

orphanages. "Everyone should help somehow," said his friend Marcin Truskawa, after removing his green T-rex costume at the refugee shelter. "Because these are people just like us and children just like ours," the 42-year-old bank employee told AFP. "It's awesome that we could brighten someone's day with such a little thing," he added, all smiles from the experience. — AFP

Artists hail revolutionary Joni Mitchell at pre-Grammy gala

Music's legends and hitmakers turned out Friday to honor Joni Mitchell—the Canadian-born folk icon behind classics including "A Case Of You"—at a charity gala ahead of the Grammys that featured moving tributes and glassy eyes. The 78-year-old Mitchell donned a sequined kimono-style robe, bejeweled black beret and bright red nails at the MusiCares show where artists including Herbie Hancock, Cyndi Lauper, Angélique Kidjo and Stephen Stills, along with this year's leading Grammy nominee Jon Batiste, paid homage to her vast oeuvre.

"It's been quite a year," the artist known for her distinct contralto and open-tuned guitar told journalists on the red carpet. In December she was among the inductees at the Kennedy Center Honors gala, one of America's most prestigious arts awards. The evening marked a rare public appearance for the trailblazing Mitchell, who in 2015 suffered a brain aneurysm that left her temporarily unable to speak, the aftermath of which has involved extensive physical therapy.

But on Friday she was glowing, telling reporters she's been having artistic "ideas" even as she continues to focus on improving her health. The influential artist who inspired everyone from Neil Diamond to Prince is perhaps best known for the intensely personal 1971 album "Blue," a deep dive into emotional heartache.



Scott Hoying, Lauren Daigle, Brandi Carlile, Joni Mitchell, Holly Laessig, Jon Batiste, Yola, and Allison Russell onstage during MusiCares Person of the Year honoring Joni Mitchell at MGM Grand Marquee Ballroom in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP photos

Last summer "Blue" charted number one on iTunes as it hit its fiftieth anniversary—outperforming even pop sensation Olivia Rodrigo's "Sour." Voicing her own astonishment over the milestone, Mitchell explained her album's enduring popularity and recent resurgence: "Maybe people want to get a little bit deeper." And asked by reporters how she was feeling health-wise, she said "pretty good," adding she'd been "making improvements."

'Touches the world'

Jazz great Hancock—who in 2007 released a tribute album to Mitchell entitled "River: The Joni Letters"—hailed his longtime friend's artistic "courage." "She bares her soul, but she does it in such a poetic way," Hancock told AFP on the red carpet, in the hours before he delivered a performance of Mitchell's song "Hejira" onstage.

He credited Mitchell, who is widely considered among the 20th century's greatest songwriters—with teaching him "how to listen to lyrics." "Some people—and I'm one of 'em—when we listen to music, we hear the harmonies and the musical textures, and the lyrics sound like gibberish," he continued. Yet Mitchell's "poetry" still strikes him, Hancock said: "Nobody writes lyrics like Joni."

band Mitchell both deeply influenced and shared a rich working relationship with. She also dated both David Crosby and Nash, and mined the latter break-up for inspiration on a number of the songs comprising the seminal "Blue," including the touching "A Case of You."

Neil Young appeared in a video message sending Mitchell "lots of love," while Stephen Stills attended the ceremony in Las Vegas and praised Mitchell as "one of the great artists of this world." "Back when we were kids we had a good time trying to figure out the tunings that she used. Crosby happened to be the most adept at it," he told AFP. Crosby produced her debut album, "Song to a Seagull."

Stills played guitar as Brandi Carlile belted out a rollicking rendition of "Woodstock" on an evening flush with performances, that left many in the room, especially Mitchell, with tears welling. "I could retire now, and just let other people do it," she joked when she accepted her award. "Everybody was splendid." "Did you enjoy it?" she asked the audience to rounds of applause, before joining the night's performers to sing "The Circle Game" and "Big Yellow Taxi." Stills summed up the mood: "God bless you Joni Mitchell, for being in our lives." —AFP



In this file photo French photographer Patrick Demarchelier attends the "Jose & Pilar" New York premiere at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. — AFP

French fashion photographer Patrick Demarchelier dies

Patrick Demarchelier, who died at the age of 78, was one of the biggest names in fashion photography, helping sculpt the public image of Princess Diana, before his name was tarnished in his final years by sexual harassment charges. The self-taught French photographer, who died on Thursday, had his first Vogue cover in 1977 and one of its most iconic, featuring Madonna, in 1989. But it was when he was appointed as Princess Diana's personal photographer later that year—the first time a non-Brit had become an official snapper to the royal family—that he became a major name.

His shot of Diana beaming into the camera while hugging her knees and wearing a white strapless dress and a tiara—or another of her smiling in a black turtleneck—became central to her image as "The People's Princess". Demarchelier had a long collaboration with Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, and shot all the biggest names during the 1990s heyday of the supermodels from Cindy Crawford to Naomi Campbell, and Kate Moss to Christy Turlington.

He also photographed movie stars and celebrities, including Angelina Jolie, Robert DeNiro, Anthony Hopkins and Oprah Winfrey. "Thanks for so many great memories and beautiful, timeless images," Crawford wrote on Instagram alongside a moody, black-and-white mountain shot of her. No cause of death was given by Demarchelier's family, who announced his passing on his official Instagram page accompanied by three photos.

By the 2000s, Demarchelier was famous enough to be name-checked in "The Devil Wears Prada" starring Meryl Streep, and for a cameo in the "Sex and the City" movie. He was honored by the French state with the Order of Arts and Letters in 2007, and had a retrospective of his work at the Petit Palais museum in Paris in 2009. —AFP



Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell speaks on stage after accepting the Person of the Year award during the 2022 MusiCares Person of the Year gala in her honor at the MGM Grand Conference Center in Las Vegas.



US singer Mickey Guyton (right) and Canadian singer-songwriter Allison Russell (left) perform "For Free" on stage.



(From left) Brandi Carlile and Jon Batiste onstage during MusiCares Person of the Year honoring Joni Mitchell.



CEO of the Recording Academy Harvey Mason Jr gives the MusiCares Person of the Year award to Canadian singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell on stage.

Lifestyle | Features



In this picture French mountaineer Marc Batard shows a picture displaying the new route to climb Mount Everest during an interview with AFP in Kathmandu.— AFP photos



French mountaineer Marc Batard prepares his equipment before an interview with AFP in Kathmandu.

Veteran French climber seeks new Everest route and record

A 70-year-old French climber is aiming to become the oldest person to climb Mount Everest without supplemental oxygen and at the same time find a new, safer route. Marc Batard wants to explore a new way around the lethal Khumbu icefall that all climbers must cross to reach the world's highest peak from the Nepal side. The treacherous, ever-shifting expanse of glacial ice that requires climbers to navigate crevasses over rickety ladders has claimed more than 40 lives.

In 2014, a huge block of ice broke off a hanging glacier and barreled down into the icefall, killing 16 Nepali guides in one of the worst tragedies at Everest. "Too many people have died there," Batard told AFP in Kathmandu before setting off. "This project is not only for me. I am very happy to climb Everest again. But I want to use my reputation to do some good things... This new route is not easy but it is safer," he said.

Batard was 18 when he discovered mountaineering, climbing the Pyrenees that straddle the border of France and Spain,

and began working as a mountain guide. He first entered the record books in 1988 when he became the only person to reach the summit of the world's highest mountain without bottled oxygen in under 24 hours. His solo 22.5-hour climb earned him the nickname "Sprinter". Batard also made headlines in the 1980s for speed climbing several 8,000-metre mountains.

Recently back from retirement, Batard now hopes to reach the 8,848.86-metre (29,031 feet) summit of Everest for a third time. He will camp in Gorakshpeth at 5,150 meters, away from hundreds of Everest climbers in the usual tent city at base camp.

The new route crosses the foothills of adjoining Nuptse to an unnamed peak, and Batard along with his team will have to climb down if they want to join the regular route at the Western Cwm. "We've already set a part of the route... Batard is a strong and experienced climber, so we hope we can be successful," said teammate Pasang Nuru Sherpa, 47, who has summited Everest 14 times. Batard and Sherpa, 47,

will both be joined by their sons-aged 26 and 42 — on the expedition. If successful, Batard will break the record set by Italian climber Abele Blanc, who reached the Everest summit in 2010 aged 55 without oxygen support.

The oldest person to climb Everest with oxygen support was Japanese climber Yuichiro Miura. He was 80 when he scaled the peak in 2013. With the coronavirus pandemic winding down, expedition operators in Nepal are hopeful of a better climbing season this year. Kathmandu only reopened Everest last year after the virus shut down the mountaineering industry in 2020. The Tibetan part of Everest continues to be closed to foreigners, possibly adding more climbers to the Nepal side. Nepal has so far this season issued 135 climbing permits for various Himalayan mountains, including seven for Everest.— AFP



Swedish cow calling gets Hollywood moment and second wind

Jennie Tideman-Osterberg lets loose a high-pitched call into the Swedish forest, her voice rising and falling in a haunting, eerie melody. The echo reverberates through the woods and moments later, three cream and black cows emerge from the trees. The bells around their necks jingle as they make their way towards her to return to their shed. This is kulning—a form of Scandinavian cattle-calling dating back to the Middle Ages.

Once these calls rang out from summer farms across central Sweden as farmers brought their animals back from the woods after a day of grazing. Many of the farms vanished as Sweden industrialized in the mid-19th century, but kulning has grown in popularity in recent decades. Prestigious music schools now offer courses and the hypnotic and entrancing art was even featured in the 2019 Disney movie "Frozen II". Sweden recently decided to nominate the summer farms known as fabods, where kulning developed, to UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list to better preserve their unique culture.

'The real life'

Tideman-Osterberg's lifelong passion for music started with a childhood obsession with opera, before going through a punk drummer stage. She is currently doing a PhD in musicology. Hearing kulning changed her life, she said, as she fell in love with both the art form and its cultural origins. "The first time I used kulning, it felt almost as if my feet were growing roots," she said. "I decided that it was my life's mission to spread knowledge" about kulning and other fabod traditions, said the tattooed musician dressed in a pinafore, cotton dress and head-covering harking back to the 19th century. Traditionally fabod women would take cows and goats to graze in the woods to ensure they did not eat the crops grown on arable land.

When AFP caught up with Tideman-Osterberg in July, she was visiting the Arvselen fabod in the central region of Dalarna, practised calling the farm's cows back from the forests. Owner Tapp Lars Arnesson returned to his family farm after a career as an actor, attracted by a simple life in the countryside. "For me there's nothing

better," he said, standing outside one of the farm buildings, a trilby pulled down over his eyes. "This is the real life."

He has maintained the group of little red traditional buildings without electricity and still lives off the land, growing vegetables and milking his three cows. His fabod is one of only around 200 left in Sweden, down from tens of thousands in the mid-19th century. And only a handful keep kulning alive. Tideman-Osterberg is planning to tour Sweden this summer with fabod farmers to give lectures and kulning demonstrations to raise awareness. Its rising popularity means the high-pitched, wordless call is now also practiced as an art, with concerts given around the country.

'It's very releasing'

At Stockholm's Royal College of Music, a small group of students are spread out into the corners of a dimly lit auditorium, responding to their tutor's call with melodious ones of their own. They learn to project their voices as farmers in the forest would have done to reach animals kilometers away.

"People want to learn kulning because there is something intriguing about using your voice in this powerful way," said Susanne Rosenberg, a folk singer and professor who started the course. Rosenberg's students come from a variety of backgrounds. "They could be an opera singer... (or) someone who just wants to call the kids home for dinner," she said. Enthusiasts also offer courses outdoors, with or without cows. On a farm near Gnesta south of Stockholm, tutor Karin Lindstrom troops across verdant hillsides followed by a dozen students.

Standing in a field as mosquitoes and gnats buzz around, her dozen students start with short sounds, building up until they are ready to attempt their own cattle calls. Few will ever use their new skills to round up cattle, but Lindstrom said the centuries-old tradition had other benefits. "The personality is very closely (linked) to the voice and many people have not been able to express themselves," she said. "It's very releasing." — AFP

Will Smith resigns from Oscars Academy over Rock slap

Will Smith resigned from the body that awards the Oscars on Friday, five days after he assaulted comedian Chris Rock during a live global broadcast. The actor said his actions, which overshadowed Hollywood's glitziest night of the year, were "shocking, painful and inexcusable." "The list of those I have hurt is long and includes Chris, his family, many of my dear friends and loved ones, all those in attendance, and global audiences at home," Smith said.

"I betrayed the trust of the Academy. I deprived other nominees and winners of their opportunity to celebrate and be celebrated for their extraordinary work. I am heartbroken." Attendees at the Dolby Theatre watched open-mouthed as Smith mounted the stage and slapped Rock across the face after the comic made a joke about his wife's closely cropped head. Jada Pinkett Smith has alopecia, a condition that causes hair to fall out.

He returned to his seat and shouted obscenities at Rock, who has been widely praised for keeping a cool head and getting things back on track. Half an hour after the astonishing attack, Smith was awarded the best actor Oscar for his role in sports biopic "King Richard." There have been conflicting reports in recent days over whether Smith was asked to leave the ceremony, with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences saying he refused to go. The group said this week it was starting disciplinary action against Smith-only the fifth Black man to win the movie world's highest individual award for a man—and warned he could face a rare expulsion.

But on Friday, Smith pre-empted that punishment. "I am resigning from membership in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and will accept any further

consequences the Board deems appropriate. "I want to put the focus back on those who deserve attention for their achievements and allow the Academy to get back to the incredible work it does to support creativity and artistry in film."

Praise

Rock, who told a comedy audience in Boston this week he was "still kind of processing" events, has drawn praise for the way he handled events. Oscars producer, Will Packer, told ABC that it was the comic's professionalism that allowed the show to go on.



In this file photo US actor Will Smith accepts the award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for 'King Richard' onstage during the 94th Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California.— AFP

"Because Chris continued the way that he did, he completed the category. He handed the trophy to [best documentary winner] Questlove... it gave us license in a way to continue the show, which is what we were trying to do," he said. Packer said he had counseled against ejecting Smith from the theater after speaking to Rock as he walked off stage.

"I said: 'Did he really hit you?' And he looked at me and he goes: 'Yes. I just took a punch from Muhammad Ali,'" Packer said. Smith played the legendary boxer in the 2001 film "Ali." Packer said he had not been part of the conversation about removing Smith, but he had spoken against it.

"I immediately went to the Academy leadership that was on site and I said: 'Chris Rock doesn't want that,' I said: 'Rock has made it clear that he does not want to make a bad situation worse.'" — AFP

FIVE THINGS TO WATCH FOR AT THE GRAMMYS

Las Vegas will host the Grammys for the first time ever Sunday, one year after the coronavirus pandemic forced organizers to shake up the broadcast with a cabaret-style show heavy on performances. Music's most prestigious awards ceremony comes with the entertainment world on edge, just a week after a shocking twist at the Oscars that saw Will Smith slap Chris Rock onstage over a bad joke.

The incident is sure to prompt stiffer stage security and script vetting in Sin City, but there's always a little room at the Grammys for things to get... weird. Here's a guide to the event, which comedian Trevor Noah will host:

Olivia Rodrigo sweep?

Two years after Billie Eilish cleaned up the "big four" prizes—Album of the Year, Song of the Year, Record of the Year and Best New Artist—viral pop sensation Olivia Rodrigo has the chance to do it again. The former Disney channel actress—who posted record-breaking streaming numbers last year during her explosive ascent to pop's upper echelons—has a total of seven nominations, including in all four of the most prestigious categories.

Rodrigo, 19, is among a coterie of pop stars including Justin Bieber and Doja Cat leading this year's nomination pack. The "drivers license" singer is also slated to perform, as are a variety of acts including BTS, Billie Eilish, Lil Nas X, H.E.R. and nominations frontrunner Jon Batiste.

Kanye antics

Kanye West, whose legal name is now Ye, released an album both this year and last, but it's his questionable behavior that has made him music's chaos agent at large. He scored five nominations this year, most for his album "Donda"—and will face off with longtime nemesis Taylor Swift in the best album category, where she has her sole 2022 chance at Grammys gold for "evermore." Neither are necessarily favorites to win the coveted prize.

But ever since West's infamous "I'mma let you finish" stunt at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2009 — when he walked onstage and interrupted the then 19-year-old, who was accepting the award for Best Female Video—all the world's Ye's stage. For weeks, the mercurial West has been airing personal attacks on comedian Pete Davidson, who is dating West's ex-wife Kim Kardashian.

The Recording Academy had reportedly removed West from the performance lineup over his sometimes troubling behavior, but some sources said he could still join the lineup at the last minute. And in any event, he's still invited to the ceremony. Even with seven-second broadcast delays and bleeps, if the Oscars taught us anything, it's that anything can happen.



In this file photo Former US President Barack Obama speaks during a session at the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow.— AFP photos

Will the Carters show?

When the Grammy hopefuls were announced in November, rap mogul Jay Z became the most nominated artist in the show's history, with 83. He was previously tied with legendary producer Quincy Jones, who had 80. At last year's ceremony, Jay Z's wife Beyoncé became the show's most decorated singer in history, with 28 career wins. So far the rap billionaire from Brooklyn has 23 gramophones to his name.

But he's never won in a major category, a similar issue to Beyoncé's, who despite holding a Grammy record for most wins has only triumphed once in the "big four" categories. The Recording Academy faces perennial criticism that it's too white and too male, and that it relegates Black artists to rap and R&B categories while refusing to reward them with the top prizes.

In 2018, Jay Z was the frontrunner with eight nominations, but didn't win a single award. Needless to say, the couple skipped the 2019 ceremony—and took home a single award, for Best Urban Contemporary Album. Whether Jay and Bey will deign to show up Sunday in Vegas remains an open question.

Tony and Gaga

The perhaps improbable duo of Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga are riding the success of their second duet album "Love For Sale," which earned six nominations. It was the 61st and final studio album of Bennett's career. In 2014, the now 95-year-old became the oldest person ever to reach number one on the US album sales chart through a different collection of duets with Gaga, who became his friend and touring companion.

The iconic crooner recently revealed he's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, a condition he kept under wraps for years. Bennett has stopped touring, but it's not impossible that he will appear Sunday



US singer-songwriter Billie Eilish poses in the press room with her awards during the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.



In this file photo Kanye West attends the 2020 Vanity Fair Oscar Party following the 92nd Annual Oscars at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills.

at Gaga's side. The 36-year-old pop titan closed last week's Oscars ceremony alongside Liza Minnelli, another 20th century great Gaga has apparently befriended.

Presidential hat trick?

In the ever-eclectic Best Spoken Word Album category, which includes poetry, audio books, and storytelling, Barack Obama once again has the leading chance to win what would be his third Grammy. The former president is up for his autobiography "A Promised Land," two years after his wife Michelle bested her competition to take home the prize for the audiobook of her memoir "Becoming."

Obama—who won the award both in 2006 and 2008 — faces competition from Dave Chappelle, Don Cheadle, poet J. Ivy and LeVar Burton, who is set to host the pre-broadcast ceremony. — AFP

Sports

Woods stirs Masters talk but several in hunt for green jacket

AUGUSTA, Georgia: Injured Tiger Woods thrilled golf fans with a mere practice round at Augusta National, but other elite golfers who have competed since Nov 2020 definitely will try to win the 86th Masters. The first men's major tournament of the year tees off Thursday at Augusta National with a host of in-form contenders, but attention was riveted upon 46-year-old Woods after he played 18 holes at the iconic Georgia course on Tuesday.

The 15-time major champion, ranked 944th in the world, suffered severe right leg injuries in a February 2021 car crash. He has not played an official event since the 2020 Masters, played in November due to COVID-19. Woods tested his fitness to walk the hilly course in a practice round with son Charlie and pal Justin Thomas, the 2017 PGA Championship winner. He was listed among the field on the tournament website, but had not confirmed as of Friday whether he would play in next week's Masters, which will mark the 25th anniversary of his first triumph there.

Hospitalized for weeks and unable to walk for months, Woods has been rehabilitating with plans to return to elite golf on a part-time basis, although he has given no timetable when that might happen. "To

have Tiger there would be phenomenal," four-time major winner Rory McIlroy said. "It just adds to the event. Anything Tiger Woods does in the game of golf is heightened whenever he's there. I mean, it would be awesome for him to be there."

Woods said in December, and again in February, that he was "a long way away" from playing at a high level, noting he felt fortunate to have survived the crash and with both legs. However, the prospect of a Woods comeback overshadowed the certainty of players seeking a green jacket who have been competing for months. McIlroy, who won his 20th career PGA title last October in Las Vegas, will once again attempt to complete a career Grand Slam by winning the Masters.

He has six top-10 finishes at Augusta National, where he missed the cut last year but tuned up Tuesday himself. "There are some changes on 11 and 15," McIlroy warned. "Three new greens — 3, 13 and 17 — are all brand new greens. I just wanted to go there and just see that for myself, do a little bit of a scouting trip that I haven't really done the last couple years. "It was good to be there, good to see the place. I feel like I've already done most of my work, which is a nice feeling. For the most part, my

game feels good."

American Scottie Scheffler will be playing his first event since becoming world number one by winning the WGC World Match Play Championship. He won at Phoenix and Bay Hill also, his first three PGA titles coming in the past two months. And those breakthrough titles, Scheffler says, better prepare him to win a major championship after three top-10 efforts in 2021. "Once you actually accomplish that goal, it's a little bit different," Scheffler said. "I definitely felt a little different on the course at Bay Hill in that final round. I used that experience from Phoenix where I did make a lot of mistakes on Sunday and I was still able to get the job done."

'No secret recipe'

American Collin Morikawa, the 2021 British Open and 2020 PGA Championship winner, says there's no formula to lifting a major trophy. "There's no secret recipe for winning them. You just have to be ready to go win a major," Morikawa said. "You have to embrace that you're going to be playing against the best in the world. "You just can't make as many mistakes. When you do make mistakes, they're just that blown up when you're out on a major course,

especially on a Sunday and you feel that pressure. You know what's at stake."

Third-ranked Morikawa, a top-five finisher in four of eight starts this season, is happy with the Masters looming. "I feel like my golf game is there," he said. "I just need to be mentally making sure I go through every process when I'm out there." Several players have been winning and contending ahead of the Masters.

Defending champion Hideki Matsuyama of Japan won last October in Japan and January's Sony Open in Hawaii, although he faces fitness questions as his title defense arrives after pulling out of the Texas Open with a neck injury. World number six Cameron Smith of Australia, a 2020 Masters runner-up, won March's Players Championship and January's Tournament of Champions.

American Sam Burns, ranked 11th ahead of his first Masters, won his third title in 10 months at the Valparaiso Championship in March. World number eight Dustin Johnson, whose last US title came at the 2020 Masters, likes where his game is at. "I'm swinging it well, hitting my putts on line," he said. "So feeling really good heading into the Masters." — AFP

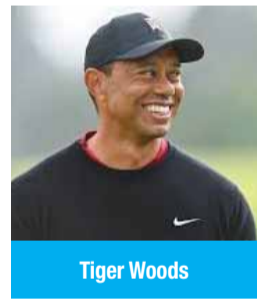
Tiger sanctuary: Woods has special bond with Augusta

AUGUSTA: From his greatest triumphs to his darkest hours, Tiger Woods has been able to count on Augusta National as a sanctuary where he can focus on golf before supportive spectators. So it's no wonder the 46-year-old US superstar, a 15-time major winner and five-time Masters champion, could be looking to make a stunning comeback under the Georgia pines next week from severe leg injuries suffered in a February 2021 car crash.

"You never give up. That's a given. You always fight," Woods said after his 2019 Masters victory. "Just giving up's never in the equation." An 18-hole practice round by Woods on Tuesday at Augusta National to test his fitness to walk the hilly layout captured the attention and imagination of the world. Woods had given no timetable for when he might play competitively again after saying he was lucky to have survived the California auto accident in February 2021 that hospitalized him for weeks and left him unable to walk for months.

"I'm not going to play a full schedule ever again," Woods said last December. "I'm going to have to pick-and-choose what events, and even then my body might not cooperate with that. "It's going to take a lot of work to get to where I feel like I can compete at these guys and be at a high level."

But his walk around Augusta National hinted that if Woods wasn't confident in the level of his game, he wouldn't test himself only days before the Masters. "There's no other tournament in the world like this, and to come back to a place that I've had so many great memories at and so many great times in my life, it's always special," Woods



Tiger Woods

says of Augusta National.

Woods won his first major title at Augusta National in 1997, becoming the Black major champion and at 21 the youngest to don a green jacket. He did it with a then-course record of 18-under 270 to win by 12 strokes. "Some of my best shots I've ever pulled off have been here," Woods said. "It's just a very special place and I get excited about it."

When his life was shattered by the late 2009 revelation of an adultery scandal that led to a divorce from wife Elin, Woods made his return to golf at the 2010 Masters and drew cheers from the crowd, easing his comeback to competition. "I didn't know what to expect with regards to the reception," Woods said in 2010. "The galleries couldn't be nicer. It was just incredible. The encouragement that I got, it blew me away to be honest with you, it really did. "The people here over the years, I know they are extremely respectful, but today was just something that really touched my heart pretty good."

'Special' relationship

After multiple back surgeries and fear that he might never have a pain-free life, Woods underwent a spinal fusion that enabled a 2018 comeback. "It has been a tough road," Woods said. "The pain of just sitting there and the amount of times I've fallen because my leg didn't work or I just had to lay on the ground for extended periods of times - those are some really dark, dark times. "It's a miracle. I went from a person who really had a hard time getting up, walking around, sitting down, anything, to swinging a club."

Woods cemented his miracle return with his first major victory in 11 years at the 2019 Masters, tearfully hugging his children off the same 18th hole where he had embraced his parents after his first major triumph 25 years earlier. "Just unreal," Woods said. "The whole tournament has meant so much to me over the years. Coming here in '95 for the first time, and being able to play as an amateur, winning in '97, and then come full circle, 22 years later, to be able to do it again."

It's more than simply playing the course so often and learning where to place the shots. It's seeing the same fans in the same places year after year and hearing the roars echo across the famed layout. "My relationship with this event and the patrons has been just special," Woods said. "The tournament does an incredible job of creating a special atmosphere." Nothing is as special as the Masters Champions Dinner, which Woods will attend even if he doesn't play. "To see Gene Sarazen and Sam Snead drinking milkshakes, that was awesome," Woods said. "Just to hear the stories of all the guys over the years. They are awesome stories." — AFP

Matsuyama nervous at joining Masters champions club

AUGUSTA: Defending Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama says he will start feeling nervous long before he tees off at Augusta National next week, notably at Tuesday's Masters Champions Dinner. The first Japanese man to win a major and the first Asian-born golfer to win the green jacket feels the expectations after his history-making triumph last April. "Looking forward to returning to Augusta National," Matsuyama said. "I really hope I play well. There's some expectations from myself, whether it's pressure or not."

"The same with the Champions Dinner. I don't speak English very well and so it's kind of a two-sided coin. I'm looking forward to it, of course, to be with all those great past Masters champions, but at the same time, too, very nervous about the speech I will be giving," Matsuyama hasn't revealed his contribution to the menu for the legends' gathering.

His preparations for his title defense have been disrupted by back issues that forced him to withdraw from the Players Championship followed by a sore neck that saw him pull out of the Texas Open. "I've been receiving a lot of treatment, getting prepared," he said after the Players. "I'm going to do my very best to be as prepared as I can to defend my title. "I haven't been able to practice as much as I'd like, but what I have been doing, I feel like I'm on the right track. Hopefully I can find that same form I started the year out with."

World number 12 Matsuyama won last October's Zozo Championship and January's Sony Open in

Hawaii. Matsuyama downplayed his role as a pioneer despite his historic feat, paying tribute to the generations of Japanese players who came before him. "Being the first Japanese to win a major, and especially the Masters, has made me really happy," Matsuyama said.

"To be the first to do it was a source of great pride, I guess, but I'm really not the pioneer. There have been so many others that have come before me that have laid the foundation for me to achieve this goal. It's not just me, but it's all of those that have gone before me that have tried and struggled and put the work in and were great examples to me."

Matsuyama has enjoyed the fame that his Masters victory has brought, but doesn't feel that he has changed much as a result. "It has been a fantastic year," he said. "It has been a great blessing to become the Masters champion and to have so many people send me their best wishes and encouragement. "I know I'm a happier person. I've also noticed people have received me differently. It has been a wonderful experience."

'We finally did it'

Matsuyama noted the gesture of his caddie, Shota Hayafuji, to bow to the Augusta National course after replacing the flagstick once the victory was secured. "I thought it was something very special," Matsuyama said. "I'm glad that Shota did it. It's a sign of respect, not only to the Masters tournament but Augusta National." Matsuyama was in tears as he walked to the clubhouse at seeing his support team crying. "Those tears, it wasn't because I won," Matsuyama said. "Walking up after the 18th green, I saw all my team, and they were all crying, and I think that's probably what started me crying, too. "The feeling of 'we finally did it' - that was the reason why those tears were falling down all of our cheeks."

Ali Al-Kharafi wins Kuwait Equestrian League title

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Sports Club jockey Ali Jassem Al-Kharafi claimed the first ever Kuwait Equestrian League title Friday by winning the eighth and final round of the championship. Masayel Club's Abdullah Al-Awadhi was second, while Equestrian Club rider Abdelrahman Al-Fuzaei stood third in the final standings.

In the final round, Kharafi won first place after a differentiation round with 46.11 points free of faults followed by Rakan Al-Hasawi, Awadhi, Enaz Al-Enaz and Fuzaei. Kharafi raised his point total to 159 points, Awadhi to 151, Fuzaei to 113 and Hasawi to 88. Kharafi said he is happy with the league title, adding that "the win was with the help of Allah and support of my father, uncles and Kuwait Equestrian Club administration for providing us with training camps abroad and participation in local and international tournaments".

Kharafi thanked the Kuwait association for organizing a successful local tournament at the



KUWAIT: Kuwait Sports Club jockey Ali Jassem Al-Kharafi receives the Kuwait Equestrian League trophy.

highest technical and organizational levels, which was held in three different clubs in the presence of international track designers from Germany, Austria, Poland, Portugal and UAE. Secretary of Kuwait Equestrian Association Nabila Al-Ali congratulated

all jockeys for their participation and wished those who did not win better luck in the future, adding that next year's league tournament will be of eight rounds, with plans to organize three international tournaments.

Qurain women basketball team win narrowly



KUWAIT: Qurain women basketball team defeated their Gulf University counterparts 79-74 in the third round of the women basketball league in a game that was played at the Kuwait Basketball Association's hall at the Sheikh Saad Complex. Meanwhile, Fatat club handed Fatayat Al-Oyoun a heavy loss with a score of 95-21.



The first game was exciting and competitive. Qurain players were up 42-33 and remained ahead in the third quarter and the point difference reached 17, but Gulf University players came back strongly and scored 25 points. But that was not enough as Qurain scored 13 points that secured the win for them.

Sports

Depleted Grizzlies stun Suns, Lakers fall despite return of James, Davis

LOS ANGELES: The short-handed Memphis Grizzlies shocked the Phoenix Suns 122-114 on Friday to push their winning streak to seven games in a clash of the top two teams in the NBA. Dillon Brooks scored 30 points to lead a Grizzlies team playing without injured top scorer Ja Morant, Desmond Bane, Steven Adams, Jaren Jackson and Tyus Jones. Despite the absences, the Grizzlies took a one-point lead into the final quarter and pushed their lead to 14 midway through the final period.

The Suns cut the deficit to five on Devin Booker's three-pointer with 56 seconds remaining, but Brooks drove to the basket for a layup, was fouled and made the free throw as the Grizzlies - who had seven players score in double figures - sealed a statement win in what could be a preview of the Western Conference finals. Booker finished with 41 points and Mikal Bridges added 18 for the Suns, who are locked into the top seed in the Western Conference ahead of Memphis. But the Grizzlies' hustle was clear with a 30-2 advantage in second-chance points and a 24-7 edge in points off turnovers. "What an unbelievable victory," said Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins. "Guys out of the lineup, guys stepping up, guys getting opportunities and making the most of them." Ziaire Williams scored 19 points for Memphis and De'Anthony Melton added 17 - making six straight free throws in the last 19.1 seconds.

Los Angeles stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis returned from injury but the Lakers' post-season hopes took another hit with a 114-111 loss to the New Orleans Pelicans. The defeat leaves the Lakers in 11th place in the West, a game behind the San Antonio Spurs for the final spot in the play-in tournament for the seventh- through 10th-placed teams for the final two berths in the playoffs proper.

James, who missed two games with a sprained ankle, scored 21 of his 38 points in the third quarter as the Lakers took an 87-86 lead. But he added just two points in the fourth period as the Pelicans-led by 32 points from CJ McCollum and 29 from Brandon Ingram - eked out the victory, with James missing a potential game-tying three-pointer as time expired.

Davis, sidelined since Feb 16 with a foot injury, scored 23 points and pulled down 12 rebounds, but his return wasn't enough for a disjointed Lakers side. "They just made more plays than us," Lakers coach



MEMPHIS: Deandre Ayton #22 of the Phoenix Suns shoots the ball during the game against the Memphis Grizzlies on April 1, 2022 at FedExForum. — AFP

Frank Vogel said of his team's inability to close out a game they led by five points with 5:07 left to play. The Pelicans tightened their grip on ninth place in the West, two games ahead of the Spurs who beat Portland 130-111.

All-Star point guard Dejounte Murray missed the game with a non-Covid respiratory illness, but Devin Vassell scored 22 points and Keldon Johnson added 21 to lead eight Spurs players to score in double figures in the crucial win. The Spurs led by as many as 28 in the first half, and by 31 in the third quarter.

Celtics edge Pacers

Elsewhere, Robert Covington scored a career-high 43 points to lead the Los Angeles Clippers to a 153-119 rout of the NBA champion Bucks in Milwaukee. Covington made 11 three-pointers and Amir Coffey also had a career-high with 32 points for the Clippers

on a night in which both teams rested their stars. Milwaukee gave two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo, Khris Middleton and Jrue Holiday the night off while the Clippers were without Paul George, Reggie Jackson and Marcus Morris.

The Boston Celtics, with 32 points from Jaylen Brown and 31 from Jayson Tatum, beat the Indiana Pacers 128-123 to move a half-game ahead of the Philadelphia 76ers for third place in the Eastern Conference. In Denver, Karl-Anthony Towns scored 32 points to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 136-130 victory over the Nuggets. D'Angelo Russell scored 24 points and Anthony Edwards scored 18 for the Timberwolves, who are seventh in the West and appear headed for the play-in tournament. Minnesota withstood a 38-point, 19-rebound performance from Nikola Jokic, who also handed out eight assists for Denver, who are sixth in the West. — AFP

Iran look to sanction England, US

DOHA: Having fought to win the respect of Iran's football public, Dragan Skocic now has a World Cup showdown with England and a politically charged clash with the United States to cement his international standing. England manager Gareth Southgate admitted he knew little about the Iranian team his side will face on the opening day of the World Cup after they were put together in Group B at Friday's draw in Doha. England have been too busy with their own matches, he said. "We know that they finished ahead of South Korea and if they have done that we know they have some pretty good players." FIFA has been urged to punish Iran for refusing to let women into a stadium for their last World Cup qualifier against Lebanon this week. But it is unlikely to impact a sixth appearance at the finals.

"We will try to advance. I always said we have a very good team and maybe we can advance for the first time," Skocic, a former Croatian international player, told Iranian state news agency IRNA on Saturday. "I think our draw could have been worse, for example, being in the Spain-Germany group. But our work will still be difficult and one cannot expect a simple group in the World Cup," he added. "England is the toughest team in my opinion," adding "but our team is good enough to be able to compete with others." England's research will show that Skocic lifted a demoralized side after taking over from Belgian Marc Wilmots in Feb 2020 when successive defeats left them in danger of failing to reach Qatar. "We were in a difficult situation," Skocic, who moved from the Iranian league to take charge of the national side, acknowledged.

But the 52-year-old has since led Iran to 15 wins, against one loss, and made them the top-ranked Asian side in the FIFA rankings. Following Wilmots and the Portuguese Carlos Queiroz, who took Iran to two World Cup finals in eight years, was not easy. Skocic com-



Dragan Skocic

plained to Iranian media after Iran sealed its place in January that "many underestimated me and didn't respect me but I'm very happy because I've proved myself." And now he is talking about the potential for upsets and Iran going past the opening groups for the first time. "Football is interesting for people because it is unpredictable," he said. "We know that England are better than other teams at the moment but they have to show that in the game."

Forget politics

Skocic also does not want to stir up the politics swirling around Iran's clash with the United States on Nov 29. Iran and the United States have been at daggers drawn since the Islamic revolution in 1979. And Iran scored a famous 2-1 win over the US team at the 1998 World Cup. "I don't care about this," said Skocic. "Of course there is some story between the two but we will think only about football." In 1998, the Iranian and US players exchanged roses before the game. Neither Skocic nor his American counterpart Gregg Berhalter expect the same gesture this time. "I want to see a good game and I don't want to think about flowers and that story. I think the ball must speak," he said. Skocic said his side must forget the "emotion" of the politics. He will be relying on players who went through previous World Cup campaigns, and the likes of Mehdi Taremi at Porto in Portugal, Sardar Azmoun at Germany's Bayer Leverkusen and Alireza Jahanbakhsh at Feyenoord in the Netherlands who have played European football.—AFP

Postecoglou impact has Celtic smiling again

GLASGOW: Twelve months on from seeing their grip on Scottish football released by Rangers, Celtic are back on top ahead of a season-defining month for both sides of the Glasgow divide. Transformed by the impact of Australian manager Ange Postecoglou, the Hoops have a three-point lead atop the Scottish Premiership ahead of Sunday's trip to Ibrox. That is the first of three Old Firm clashes in the coming weeks with a Scottish Cup semi-final and a final league meeting of the season to come at Celtic Park.

Few saw a tightly fought title race coming when Postecoglou inherited a club in crisis in June. Rangers had not only stopped Celtic's quest for a historic 10th consecutive league title, but were a juggernaut under Steven Gerrard as they went unbeaten throughout an entire league season to win it by 25 points. As well as needing a new manager, Celtic also lost their long-serving captain Scott Brown and chief executive Peter Lawwell.

Postecoglou was not even the club's first choice as a prolonged and ultimately unsuccessful courting of now Newcastle boss Eddie Howe delayed the naming of a new manager. The 56-year-old is revered in his homeland and well-respected in Japan from his three years in charge of Yokohama Marinos. But he was met with a wave of skepticism over his credentials to oversee the overhaul Celtic needed. Those doubts were not eased by three defeats in his first six league games, alongside an early exit from the Champions League qualifiers. Recruitment has been key to Celtic's revival. A total of 17 players have arrived during Postecoglou's first two transfer windows with precious few failures. "I wanted to make sure the players fitted the ideology of the team I wanted us to be," said Postecoglou.—AFP

Ruud powers past Cerundolo to set clash with Alcaraz

MIAMI: Carlos Alcaraz is one win away from creating Miami Open history after defeating defending champion Hubert Hurkacz in straight sets to book a final date on Sunday with Norway's Casper Ruud. The 18-year-old Spanish sensation brought the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium to their feet for the second night in succession following his dramatic quarter-final win over Miomir Kecmanovic on Thursday night as he saw off 10th-ranked Hurkacz of Poland 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/2) to reach his first ATP Masters final.

If he triumphs this weekend, Alcaraz, who made the last four in Indian Wells earlier this month, will become the youngest champion in the tournament's 37-year history. Only two men have won titles at this level at a younger age - Michael Chang (1990, Toronto) and Rafael Nadal (2005, Monte Carlo) were both 18 on their first triumphs. Alcaraz turns 19 next month.

Hurkacz, who has the doubles final on Saturday to help soften the blow of this painful defeat, fought until the end, but the quality of Alcaraz's groundstrokes and movement was ultimately the difference. Hurkacz served superbly to force a second set tie-break as the slow conditions suited both players but especially Alcaraz, who learned his trade on Spanish clay courts like his world famous compatriot and boyhood idol, Nadal.

On this evidence, Ruud will have his work cut out to stop the dynamic world number 16 in his tracks. "He has played well here and was the defending champion but I played a really good game from my side," said a delighted Alcaraz during a court-side interview after completing the win in just over two hours. "This will be my first big final on a hard court but I have confidence and I am going to enjoy it."



MIAMI GARDENS, Florida: Casper Ruud of Norway returns a shot to Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina during the semifinals of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on April 1, 2022. — AFP

Norwegian first

World number eight Ruud, meanwhile, is the first Norwegian to reach an ATP Masters 1000 final and surely one of the only top men's tennis players to have an Instagram account devoted solely to his golfing skills. Ruud's clash with the 2021 ATP Next Gen champion will be the biggest match of his career. Dealing with pressure situations, though, is par for the course, especially when you have played 18 holes with 21-time Grand Slam champion Nadal - a keen golfer.

"I enjoy watching both sports and I try to watch a lot of golf especially here in the States," Ruud told AFP. "I've played Rafa a couple of times over the last two years. He's a very good golfer. He beat me and is a very tough competitor. "Honestly, it was a bit tough when we played because he doesn't say much because he's so focused. Normally you're laughing a little bit and joking around, but with him it's no joke."—AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Rawda	22517733
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Adaliya	22517144
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Khaldiya	24848075
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Kaifan	24849807
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shamiya	24848913
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shuwaikh	24814507
Adan Hospital	23940620	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Nuzha	22526804
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Qadsiya	22515088
Clinics		Dasmah	22532265
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DOHA: A picture shows a general view of the stage during the draw for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center on April 1, 2022. —AFP

Germany, Spain in World Cup clash

Iran, USA vow to put politics aside after being drawn in same group

DOHA: Former winners Germany and Spain will clash early in the World Cup finals in Qatar after being placed in the same group while the coaches of bitter geopolitical rivals United States and Iran vowed to put animosity aside when their sides meet. The glitzy draw in Doha on Friday also set reigning champions France on a potential collision course with England in the quarterfinals, if they win their relatively kind groups.

But the world's top-ranked team Brazil face a tougher task in the first stage. Four-time winners Germany were in the second category of teams, making them the obvious country to avoid for the top seeds. The match with Spain will revive unhappy memories for the Germans who were thrashed 6-0 in a Nations League match in 2020, but Germany have improved fast since Hansi Flick replaced Joachim Loew as coach. "We have negative memories, but something like that doesn't happen to us twice," Germany captain Manuel Neuer said.

The European heavyweights were joined by Japan in Group E, which will be completed by the winner of an intercontinental play-off between Costa Rica and New Zealand. Iran and the United States - who severed formal diplomatic relations in 1980 - last met at the 1998 World Cup when the Iranians won a politically-charged game 2-1.

"Football transcends a lot of the political stuff

and we are able to remain friends on the pitch," insisted USA coach Gregg Berhalter. Iran's Croatian coach Dragan Skocic took a similar view of the hostilities that continue with US efforts to constrain Iran's nuclear program. "I don't care about this. Of course there is a story, but we are focused on the playing," he said.

England are also in Group B and Gareth Southgate's side might come up against neighbors Wales or Scotland, although Ukraine could also take the last spot in the European play-offs, to be decided in June, after they were delayed by Russia's invasion. England's chances will face the sternest possible test though if they come up against France's talented squad in the last eight.

The French, seeking to become the first nation to win back-to-back World Cups since Brazil in 1962, will meet familiar foes Denmark and Tunisia in a Group D completed by the winners of an intercontinental play-off - Australia, Peru or the United Arab Emirates. In a break with recent tradition, hosts Qatar will not feature in the tournament's opening match on Nov 21, with that honor going to Senegal's Group A game with the Netherlands at 1:00 pm (1000 GMT).

The Qataris, making their debut at a World Cup finals, will face Ecuador in the group's other game that evening. Louis van Gaal, the veteran Dutch coach who has described the decision to hold the

finals in Qatar as "ridiculous", had predicted his side would be drawn in the same group as the host nation. "It was a gamble, but of course it's nice when a gamble becomes true," he said. Brazil, the record five-time winners, will have to be on form from the go when they face Serbia and Switzerland as well as Cameroon in a tough-looking Group G.

Last chance?

Two-time champions Argentina drew Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Robert Lewandowski's Poland in Group C. It might be Lionel Messi's last chance to win a World Cup as he turns 35 in June. The same goes for Cristiano Ronaldo, who will be approaching 38 when Portugal come up against Ghana, Uruguay and South Korea in Group H. Croatia, runners-up in 2018, were drawn with Belgium and Morocco in Group F, which is completed by Canada, returning to the World Cup after 36 years.

The first World Cup in the Middle East will also be the first played in November and December because of Qatar's extreme summer heat. Europe's leading leagues will wrap up on the weekend of Nov 12-13 before players head to Qatar, leaving little time for national squads to prepare. "Players will be fresher than they normally would be at a World Cup, but the lack of time is a handicap, albeit it is the same for everyone," said Spain coach Luis Enrique.



La'eeb, the official mascot for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Southgate is also concerned about preparation time as England play Iran just eight days after the final Premier League games before the pause. "We're in on day one so it's quite clear now what our program looks like for the end of the Premier League season and getting out here as quickly as possible," he said. Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said in a speech at the draw he was "proud and happy that the world will see Qatar as we promised", vowing an "exceptional World Cup in our Arab world". —AFP

Qatar 2022 World Cup draw: Group guide

DOHA: AFP Sport examines each group following Friday's draw in Doha for the 2022 Qatar World Cup:

Group A: Qatar, Ecuador, Senegal, Netherlands

Qatar, ranked 51st in the world, are appearing at their first World Cup but were among the top seeds thanks to their privileged status as hosts. With a squad of home-based players under Spanish coach Felix Sanchez, they are a little-known quantity to most. The Netherlands, whose coach Louis van Gaal recently criticized the decision to make Qatar hosts, will hope to make a big impact as they return after missing 2018. Sadio Mane's Senegal will also be keen to impress off the back of winning their first Africa Cup of Nations, while Ecuador are back for their fourth finals appearance.

Group B: England, Iran, USA, European playoff winner

England will be delighted with this draw in a group dominated by the clash between geopolitical rivals Iran and the USA. Iran topped their qualifying group under Croatian coach Dragan Skocic and have been regulars at recent tournaments. They may benefit from playing so close to home too, but the returning USA will be eager to impress with Chelsea's Christian Pulisic their star. England could also have a local derby to look forward to should Wales or Scotland come through the final European play-off in June, but Ukraine remain in contention.

Group C: Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Poland

Attention is immediately drawn to the clash

between Lionel Messi's Argentina and Robert Lewandowski's Poland. Off the back of their Copa America victory last year, Argentina will be among the contenders and this is surely Messi's last chance to win the World Cup, or even score a goal in the knockout phase. Poland last appeared in the World Cup knockouts in 1986 and they face a challenge making the last 16 given the presence of Mexico, who have made the first knockout round at the last seven tournaments only to lose each time. They are coached by an Argentine in Gerardo Martino, while Frenchman Herve Renard leads rank outsiders Saudi Arabia.

Group D: France, Playoff winner, Denmark, Tunisia

France were in the same group as Denmark on their way to winning the World Cup in 1998 and 2018 but also in 2002 when Les Bleus went out in the group stage. While France defend their trophy, the 11th-ranked Danes are dangerous outsiders after reaching the Euro 2020 semifinals. No team has retained the Euro Cup since Brazil in 1962. France were also in a group with Peru and Australia in 2018 and both are still in contention in the intercontinental play-off, as are the United Arab Emirates. Tunisia's squad features several French-born players.

Group E: Spain, Playoff winner, Germany, Japan

Spain against Germany on Nov 27 is the tie of the opening round and the assumption is it will be crucial in deciding who tops the group out of the two former World Cup winners, although that could set them on a path to play Brazil in the quarterfinals. Hajime Moriyasu's Japan will hope to have their say in a country where they won the Asian Cup in 2011. The remaining place will be taken by the winner of a play-off between Costa Rica and New Zealand and the prospect of either going far seems remote.

Groups for the World Cup 2022			
A	B	C	D
1 Qatar	1 England	1 Argentina	1 France
2 Ecuador	2 Iran	2 Saudi Arabia	2 Int. playoff 1*
3 Senegal	3 United States	3 Mexico	3 Denmark
4 Netherlands	4 UEFA playoff**	4 Poland	4 Tunisia
E	F	G	H
1 Spain	1 Belgium	1 Brazil	1 Portugal
2 Int. playoff 2**	2 Canada	2 Serbia	2 Ghana
3 Germany	3 Morocco	3 Switzerland	3 Uruguay
4 Japan	4 Croatia	4 Cameroon	4 South Korea

Group F: Belgium, Canada, Morocco, Croatia

Belgium were until recently the top-ranked national team in the world and came third in 2018. With the likes of Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Thibaut Courtois, they have plenty of world-class players but Eden Hazard's decline has been steep. They should top the group, with Croatia unlikely to come close to their run to the 2018 final now that Luka Modric turns 37 this year. Morocco's squad is full of European-based talent such as Paris Saint-Germain's Achraf Hakimi. Canada, under English coach John Herdman, are at their first World Cup since 1986. They topped CONCACAF qualifying and have the excellent Lille striker Jonathan David.

Group G: Brazil, Serbia, Switzerland, Cameroon

Brazil were in the same group as Serbia and Switzerland just four years ago. Tite's side cruised through qualifying and are now targeting their sixth

World Cup. However, it remains to be seen how Neymar, now 30, handles the pressure and if he stays fit. Switzerland, who reached the Euro 2020 quarterfinals, are favorites to go through with Brazil. Cameroon are back after missing 2018 and dramatically defeating Algeria in the African play-offs, but they will struggle to go far.

Group H: Portugal, Ghana, Uruguay, South Korea

At almost 38, it will surely be Cristiano Ronaldo's last chance to win the World Cup. Yet Portugal have so much talent in their squad that some think they could even be better off without him. They will hope to avenge a defeat to Uruguay in the last 16 in 2018 - Uruguay have an ageing star striker of their own in 35-year-old Luis Suarez. South Korea, with a Portuguese coach in Paulo Bento, will again struggle to go beyond the group phase while 60th-ranked Ghana are not the team of 2010 and were not expected to qualify. —AFP