

4 Kuwait inventor wins GCC award on water project



5 France's Marine Le Pen vows headscarf fines to Muslims



16 Tuchel fumes; Real Madrid push Chelsea to the brink



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	04:09
Shurooq	05:30
Dhuhr	11:50
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:10
Isha	19:29

VOLVO

Ukraine warns of 'last chance' to flee as Russia targets east

Carnage, devastation shocks the world

Op-Ed

Reject 'expatphobia'

Kuwait Times would like to extend its support and solidarity with Al-Jarida newspaper's stance against racism.

"Expats, expats...kick them out, deport them to their countries, dump them in the desert, let them go to hell, they are the cause of all catastrophes and crimes, they are thieves and murderers, they deprive citizens from job opportunities, keep them away from hospitals and services, deny them even the air they breathe."

This is the way racist attitudes continue, and are still injecting poison inside people's brains, until most of us became convinced that expats are adversaries and enemies of Kuwaitis; rather an evil that must be kicked out of our body, otherwise our life will become hell. Many expats left Kuwait for good after suffering a painful heartbreak.

Most competent expats who used to serve our country have gone, be they in health, education and contracting, also cleaners and even tailors, and we can no longer find someone who can stitch dishdashas for Eid. The skilled expats left in search of an environment free of racism and hatred; an environment that considers them as contributors to nation building, away from bullying, demagoguery and non-stop cursing; an environment that values them and gives them remuneration for their efforts.

Kuwait was once the destination people sought to go to, and in it there were many competencies of enlightened artists, writers, teachers, craftsmen and laborers, who contributed sincerely in building the country and strengthening its pillars. With the efforts of its people and these expat workers, Kuwait became the Pearl of the Gulf. The hearts then were pure and attitudes sublime, until the crows of bullying and racism entered our skies and things changed, and now we are paying the price.

All are now paying the price - the racists are paying the price of their racism that leaked into their blood like poison, as they called for expelling innocents whose only guilt is seeking their livelihood in our country; and the non-racists too, because they did not confront or resist or reject "expatphobia" - rather some of them followed the calls of the racists and their voices were loud in demanding expelling the slaves of Allah from the land of Allah.

Then what happened? Did conditions improve? Were those who left replaced by those who are more experienced, knowledgeable and sincere? Rather it's the contrary, as labor wages increased, and finding a carpenter, blacksmith, plumber or skilled worker has become more difficult than getting hold of red mercury.

All skilled workers left and were replaced by less competent people at a higher price. If any teacher, doctor or judge finds an opportunity in a neighboring country that respects their feelings, appreciates their job and does not stab them everyday with the dagger of harm, they will not hesitate to leave Kuwait.

We're not supposed to complain, because this is the result of our doings. When we were bringing in skilled people, we lived in luxury. When we started mistreating them and found it too much for them to live amongst us as valued brothers, when we walked under the banner of bullies and racists, did not defend the truth, and did not know where the interests of our country lie, things became as they are.

Is it not strange that Kuwait - the country of humanity whose charitable hands extend from one end of the earth to the other, which helps, consoles and heals the wounds of those who do not personally know - is the same country where there are calls to harm people who came to it to contribute to its development, who are happy with what makes Kuwait happy and are saddened by what saddens Kuwait? "What is the matter with you? How ill do you judge! (Quran 68:36). Such heinous bullying and hateful calls for exclusion are bereft of any sense, logic, argument or even interests. — Al-Jarida



BUCHA: UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths (5th right) reacts at the site of a mass grave that Ukrainians had dug near a church on April 7, 2022 during his three-hour visit in Bucha, a day after he visited Moscow, where he met with officials to discuss the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. — AFP

SEVERODONETSK: Ukraine urged its residents in the east of the country Thursday to take their "last chance" to flee mounting Russian attacks, after devastation around the capital Kyiv shocked the world. Six weeks after they invaded, Russian troops have withdrawn from Kyiv and Ukraine's north and are focusing on the country's southeast, where desperate attempts are under way to evacuate civilians.

The retreat from Kyiv revealed scenes of carnage, including in the town of Bucha, that Ukraine said were evidence of Russian war crimes, and which triggered a fresh wave of Western sanctions against Moscow. On Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Russia—which denies responsibility for the killings of civilians—was undeterred and continued "to accumulate fighting force to realize their ill ambitions in (eastern) Donbas".

"They are preparing to resume an active offensive," he said, while officials in Donbas' Lugansk and Donetsk regions begged civilians to leave. "These few days may be the last chance to leave," Lugansk regional governor Sergiy Gaiday wrote on Facebook, saying that all cities in the region were under fire and one person had died in the town of Kreminna. "Do not wait to evacuate," he said, adding: "The enemy is trying to cut off all possible ways of getting people out."

Continued on Page 6

Yemen leader cedes powers to council

RIYADH: Yemen's president said Thursday he is handing his powers to a new leadership council, in a major shake-up in the coalition battling Houthi rebels as a fragile cease-fire takes hold. But Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam dismissed the move as "a desperate attempt to rearrange the ranks of the mercenaries" fighting in Yemen, and said peace would only come once foreign forces leave.

President Abedrabbo Mansour

Hadi made the announcement in a televised statement on the final day of Yemen talks held in the Saudi capital Riyadh. "I irrevocably delegate to this presidential leadership council my full powers," he said. Saudi Arabia said it welcomed Hadi's announcement and pledged \$3 billion in aid and support for its war-torn neighbor, some of it to be paid by the United Arab Emirates.

Hadi's internationally recognized government has been locked in conflict with the Iran-backed Houthis, who control the capital Sanaa and most of the north despite a Saudi-led military intervention launched in 2015. Hadi has been based in Saudi Arabia since fleeing to the kingdom that year as rebel forces

Continued on Page 6



RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (left) shakes hands with Sultan Al-Arabi, a member of Yemen's new leadership council. — AFP

Facebook battles cyber campaigns targeting Ukraine

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook's parent company Meta on Thursday said Russian state actors and others are relentlessly trying to use the social network against the Ukraine with deception, hacking and coordinated bullying campaigns. Social media networks have become one of the fronts in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, home to sometimes misleading information but also real-time monitoring

of one of the biggest geopolitical crises in decades.

"Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, our teams have been on high alert to detect and disrupt threats and platform abuse, including attempts to come back by networks we removed before," Meta said in its latest threat report. A spike in activity aimed at Ukraine shortly before it was invaded by Russia in February has become an entrenched battle, according to Meta influence operations threat intelligence team leader Ben Nimmo.

Tactics have included using bogus accounts to spread false stories such as Ukrainian troops surrendering or call for a street protest in Warsaw against the Polish government. Meta said it disrupted a network of about 200 Facebook accounts in Russia that were working together to falsely

Continued on Page 6



An internet user reads on his mobile phone 'unable to connect' as he tries to log into Facebook Messenger. — AFP

US Secret Service suspends officers

WASHINGTON: The US Secret Service, which protects President Joe Biden, said Thursday it had suspended several agents over their involvement with two men who were arrested for posing as federal officers. According to an affidavit filed in Washington court, the two men arrested on Wednesday, Arian Taherzadeh, 40, and Haider Ali, 36, had offered gifts to a member of the security detail for First Lady Jill Biden as well as other Secret Service agents.

Living in a Washington apartment building where numerous federal security-related employees live, Taherzadeh also provided several Secret Service and Homeland Security employees with rent-free units costing as much as \$4,000 a month, according to the affidavit. Taherzadeh and Ali convinced some of those agents that they themselves were special investigating officers of the Department of Homeland Security, and displayed uniforms and documents which supported those claims.

The two men's motive was unclear, but at one point they recruited another person to work for them and assigned him "to conduct research on an individual that provided support to the Department of Defense and intelligence community."

Taherzadeh also offered a \$2,000 assault rifle to the Secret Service agent who worked on Jill Biden's team. According to the court filing, four Secret Service agents were suspended over the case. "All personnel involved in this matter are on administrative leave and are restricted from accessing Secret Service facilities, equipment, and systems," the Secret Service said in a statement.

What lay behind the case remained a mystery - were the two simply law enforcement wannabes or were they part of a foreign plot to infiltrate the White House? The court affidavit said Taherzadeh and Ali appeared to control several units in the Washington apartment building, and that it was heavily populated by employees of several law enforcement agencies. — AFP

Local

Alghanim Industries organizes grand Ramadan donation drive with KRCS

1,000 boxes of provisions donated for families in need



KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately owned companies in the region, participated in a major annual donation drive in collaboration with its strategic partner, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS). The company donated and packaged 1,000 boxes of provisions for families in need.

Dozens of employees volunteered in this event, packaging an array of food staples and necessities in provision boxes. The company extended this volunteering opportunity to employees' families, many of whom joined the activity with their young children, instilling the values of giving and charity. The donated boxes will be distributed by KRCS throughout the holy month of Ramadan.

In a statement about the company's participation in the campaign, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries Kutayba Y Alghanim said: "Our continuous commitment to support and strengthen our community stems not only from our company's values, but from our Kuwaiti heritage. Partnering, once more, with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and taking part in their many donation campaigns carries forward



Kutayba Y Alghanim



Dr Hilal Al-Sayer

traditions that are inherent in our culture - traditions that emphasize giving

KRCS, who continue to play a vital role they play in championing the underprivileged, both inside and outside of Kuwait."

The company will also be donating hundreds of electronics and house appliances to the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, as part of its annual donations.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Dr Hilal Al-Sayer noted: "I would like to extend my gratitude on behalf of Kuwait Red Crescent to Alghanim Industries and its Executive Chairman Kutayba Y Alghanim, their generous



donations and continuous support is more than often a pillar in any project we take on. Over the many years of our long-standing, enduring relationship, we supported many charity campaigns together, and we hope to continue executing more successful drives and serving more great causes for our commu-

nities in the future." Throughout its operations around the world, Alghanim Industries is committed to its belief in giving back to the community, especially by empowering underprivileged people, supporting education and encouraging entrepreneurship.



Continuous commitment to support our community

and supporting one another. We are proud of our strategic partners at



Kuwait's RIHS carries out Ramadan food projects in Jordan

AMMAN: Kuwait's Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) has implemented the "Iftar for the Fasting" and "Ramadan Food Basket" projects for 2022 for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanian families in different regions in northern Jordan. Director General of the Jordanian Charitable Society, the implementing agency of the two projects, Khaled Nawasra said Thursday that the two projects, which came with a generous donation from the Kuwaiti RIHS, targeted Syrian refugees

living in the cities and towns of Ramtha, Al-Naima and Sahel Horan in Irbid governorate.

The "Iftar for the Fasting" project benefited over 500 widows and orphans living in residential complexes, as well as hundreds of Syrian refugee families, which included the distribution of hot ready-made meals, with a total of 5,000 meals being distributed throughout the holy month of Ramadan, Nawasra added. The "Food Basket" project was also implemented, targeting

Jordanian families of widows, orphans and the poor in those areas, he stated, pointing out that 144 food baskets have been distributed so far, containing basic foodstuffs that suffice the small and medium size families for nearly a full month. Nawasra underlined the keenness of the Arab committee of the Kuwaiti RIHS to alleviate the suffering of hundreds of deprived families amid the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and its negative effects on societies. The charitable RIHS projects in Jordan, over the course of 10 years, targeted the sectors of health, education, rehabilitation and decent living, as it benefited deprived Jordanian and Syrian families, he explained. — KUNA



Local

Kuwait welcomes formation of Yemen Presidential Leadership Council

Yemeni President moves powers to newly formed council

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait welcomed on Thursday the decision to form the Presidential Leadership Council in Yemen, a step in line with the Yemeni constitution and the GCC peace initiative. A statement by the Foreign Ministry expressed the State of Kuwait's full support to the council's efforts to achieve stability, peace, and security for Yemen and its people.

Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi launched a new Presidential Leadership Council and transferred all his powers to it on Thursday. In a statement read by the Information Minister Moammer Al-Eryani on national TV, the president said the council has all his powers, as well as the power of his Vice President, who was removed from position. The eight-member council will be headed by his Advisor Rashad Al-Alimi and has the authority to manage the state politically, militarily and on the security front. Yemenis are currently holding talks in Riyadh in an attempt to resolve the seven-year war in the country. The Houthi militias, who seized the capital from the government in 2014, have refused to attend

the talks, which have been arranged by the GCC.

Saudi Arabia welcomed on Thursday the decision by the Yemeni President to form the Presidential Leadership Council in Yemen as part of the efforts to end the conflict in his country. In a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), Saudi Arabia welcomed the gesture, which came in line with the GCC peace initiative and the Saudi efforts to push for stability and peace in Yemen. The Kingdom expressed full support to the newly established Presidential Leadership Council, affirming that Saudi Arabia would provide assistance to enable the council to achieve its goals ending the conflict in Yemen.

In this regard, Saudi Arabia announced it would provide the Yemeni economy with \$3 billion, adding that this would be followed by \$2 billion shared with the UAE to support the central bank of Yemen. Saudi's support to the Yemeni central bank would include \$600 million to help Yemen in purchasing oil derivatives and another \$400 million to push for development projects. Saudi Arabia also announced it would provide \$300 million for humanitarian response in Yemen spear-



SANAA: Yemeni children wait in line to receive a free fast-breaking 'iftar' meal in the capital Sanaa during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, on April 4, 2022. — AFP



Saudi Arabia welcomes Yemeni President's decision

headed by the UN this year to lessen the suffering of the Yemeni people. The Kingdom urged the Presidential Leadership Council to start negotiating

with the Houthis under UN supervision to reach a final and sustainable peace deal ensuring the security and development in Yemen. — KUNA



KUWAIT: US Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission James Holtsnider visited the diwaniya of the Amir of Al-Awazem Tribe Falah Bin Jameh. Holtsnider thanked Bin Jameh for inviting him and his delegation to the Ramadan gathering.

ABK pledged support to KNPC's Clean Fuels Project

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), pledged its support to Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC)'s new green initiative - 'Clean Fuels Project'. The project aims to reduce carbon emissions and pollution by using products and services that meet strict environmental standards.

As part of its commitment to KNPC's 'Clean Fuels Project' ABK lit up the facade of its Head Office in hues of green to raise awareness about the initiative reaffirming itself as an advocate of environmental sustainability taking steps to drive a culture of consciousness within the Bank and communities where it operates.

Commenting on the initiative, Loai Muqames, CEO of ABK - Kuwait said: "As a socially responsible group, ABK is proud to support the 'Clean Fuels Project' launched by Kuwait National Petroleum Company. There is a need for acute awareness on the subject and to adopt favorable habits to protect our planet and create a better quality of life for future generations. This ambitious project from KNPC will further enhance Kuwait's position in the global oil refining industry. To help raise awareness about this new initiative, we are lighting our headquarters building green and promoting the campaign through our social media channels."

The milestone initiative, which targets producing high-quality oil derivatives, aims to reduce emissions and environmental pollutants in compliance with international environmental requirements. Through this project, KNPC will undertake measures that include cutting Nitrogen Oxide, Sulphur



Loai Muqames

Oxide, and other pollutants, while simultaneously increasing the capacity of KNPC's two refineries producing eco-friendly oil by-products to 800,000 barrels per day.

The Kuwait Vision 2035 is intrinsically linked to global goals and factors by adapting them to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) 2030 agenda. Kuwait has made extensive concerted efforts towards building environmental sustainability awareness and achieving the goals of its national development plan. The 'Clean Fuel Project' is a significant step forward in this direction.

Muqames added: "We are committed to fostering social, economic and environmental sustainability. We will continue implementing several programs to reduce our carbon footprint, reflecting our steadfast commitment to inculcating a culture of awareness. These initiatives are essential in the broader context of climate change. Our recently launched Sustainability Report is aligned with global ESG standards, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Kuwait - Vision 2035, and is available on our website. We will continue to operate with a culture of transparency and effectiveness to ensure long-term sustainability and value for our customers and shareholders. We hope our efforts will educate and influence our employees, partners, peers and others to take necessary actions towards protecting the environment."

Suspected drug dealer arrested in Shaab

KUWAIT: Police arrested a man in possession of 22 bags suspected to contain drugs, the interior ministry announced. Maidan Hawally patrolmen headed to a building in Shaab in response to an emergency call reporting an intruder. The caller said that the suspect was taking pictures of homes in the area. Police arrested the suspect following a brief chase. He confessed to taking the pictures, adding he was placing envelopes containing drugs in various areas with the intention to sell. Police found 22 medium size bags containing a substance suspected of being drugs, the ministry explained, adding that the suspect was sent to concerned authorities for further action.



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Ramadan Kareem

Muhammad a unique role model in treating women well

By Sharafun-Nisaa Mohammed Farook

Women and girls: Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) emphasized on several occasions the good treatment of females and he described them as delicate and as fragile as a glass. He told his companions that whoever raises his girls properly and fears God in caring for them and guiding them to faith will enter Paradise.

The woman as a mother: A man asked Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Who deserves my closest support and company?" The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) replied, "Your mother." Then man asked, "Who else after her?" The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) replied, "Your mother." The man asked the same question again, and again and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) replied for the third time, "Your mother." Then out of curiosity, the man asked the same question for the fourth time (realizing that Allah's Messenger wanted to emphasize the best treatment for mothers). Finally, Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said to him, "Your father" (i.e. your father deserves your closest support and accompany after your mother).

The woman as a wife: Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated that if a man disliked one of his wife's characteristics or mannerisms, he will be pleased with another. The believers who show the most perfect faith are those who have the best character, and the best of the believers are those who are the best to their wives. This promotes love, harmony and understanding. On the other hand, Allah's Messenger (pbuh) disliked divorce; he said, "Among all the permitted acts, divorce is the most hateful to Almighty, Allah." Should divorce become unavoidable, separation should be on good terms and with kindness.

Prophet Muhammad's extra-ordinary love for his first wife: Approximately two years after his first wife, Khadijah, had passed away, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) married Aisha, the daughter of his closest friend Abu Bakr. Despite his loyalty to his late wife, he loved Aisha and was honest to her. He was asked once by Amr bin Al-Aas (one of his companions): "Who is the most beloved person to you?" He replied unhesitatingly, "Aisha."

Confirm your love to your wife: Aisha (ra) narrated that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) described his love for her like a knot firmly tied on a rope. Aisha used to ask Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) from time to time: "How is the knot?" and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to confirm his love for her saying, "The knot is still tied as firmly as it used to be."

Be a loyal husband: Allah's Messenger (pbuh) used to ask Aisha to send a serving of food to the friends of his late wife, Khadijah, every time Aisha cooked a sheep or an ewe. Allah's Messenger (pbuh) mentioned to Aisha that no one was better than Khadijah at her time. She believed him when he first received God's revelation when many people including some of his uncles and relatives did not believe in his message. She consoled him, and supported him in various ways without hesitation.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) demonstrated unique loyalty to his deceased first wife, Khadijah, even after she died. The Messenger of Allah's loyalty to Khadijah (May Allah please with her) was unparalleled. Aisha (ra), "I did not feel jealousy towards any of the Prophet's wives as I did towards Khadijah. I never saw her, but the Prophet (pbuh) would often mention her name, and sometimes, he would slaughter a sheep, then cut it into pieces and send the portions to the friends of Khadijah. Then I say to him: 'It is as if there is no one in the world besides Khadijah.' Upon which, he would reply, 'She was such -and -such, and he would enumerate her virtues.'" (Al-Bukhari # 3, 818)

- 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.

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz winners receive their prizes



KUWAIT: Zara Yasir, the first day winner receives her award from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



Mohsin Mavli, the second day winner receives his award from Kuwait Times Managing Editor Mustafa Qamhiya.



Rukaiya Abbas, the third day winner receives her award from Mr Kanjo.



Armaan Ali, the fourth day winner receives his award from Mr Kanjo.

KUWAIT: Winners of the first four questions of the Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz - Zara Yasir, Mohsin Mavli, Rukaiya Abbas, and Armaan Ali respectively - received their awards at Kuwait Times head office this week. The winners received KD 50 in cash each and a one-year

newspaper subscription. Participation in the Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz is open for everyone living in Kuwait until the end of the holy month. To participate, follow Kuwait Times on Instagram (@kuwaittimes), answer the daily question posted on the account and mention

three people. The winner is announced the following day in the stories on Kuwait Times' Instagram account, with the winner's name tagged. The winner will be contacted via direct message and can collect the prize at Kuwait Times head office.

Kuwaiti inventor wins 1st place in GCC award on water distillation project

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti engineer Adel Al-Wasis won the first place in the GCC Patent Office award for the best water distillation project, held recently at the GCC pavilion in Dubai Expo 2020. In a press statement on Thursday, Wasis said he was one of five inventors who qualified to the finals for his invention on "watering with cold steam". He added that his project focuses on purifying salty water by using an air-free tank to reduce water boiling temperature, and using solar power to increase water heat. The engineer noted that he had worked on many water-related projects in over ten years, aiming to resolve the lack of drinkable water in the Gulf region. Wasis had won several international gold medals for his invention "the safety bell" in 2013 in Kuwait, 2017 in Malaysia and 2021 in Qatar. — KUNA

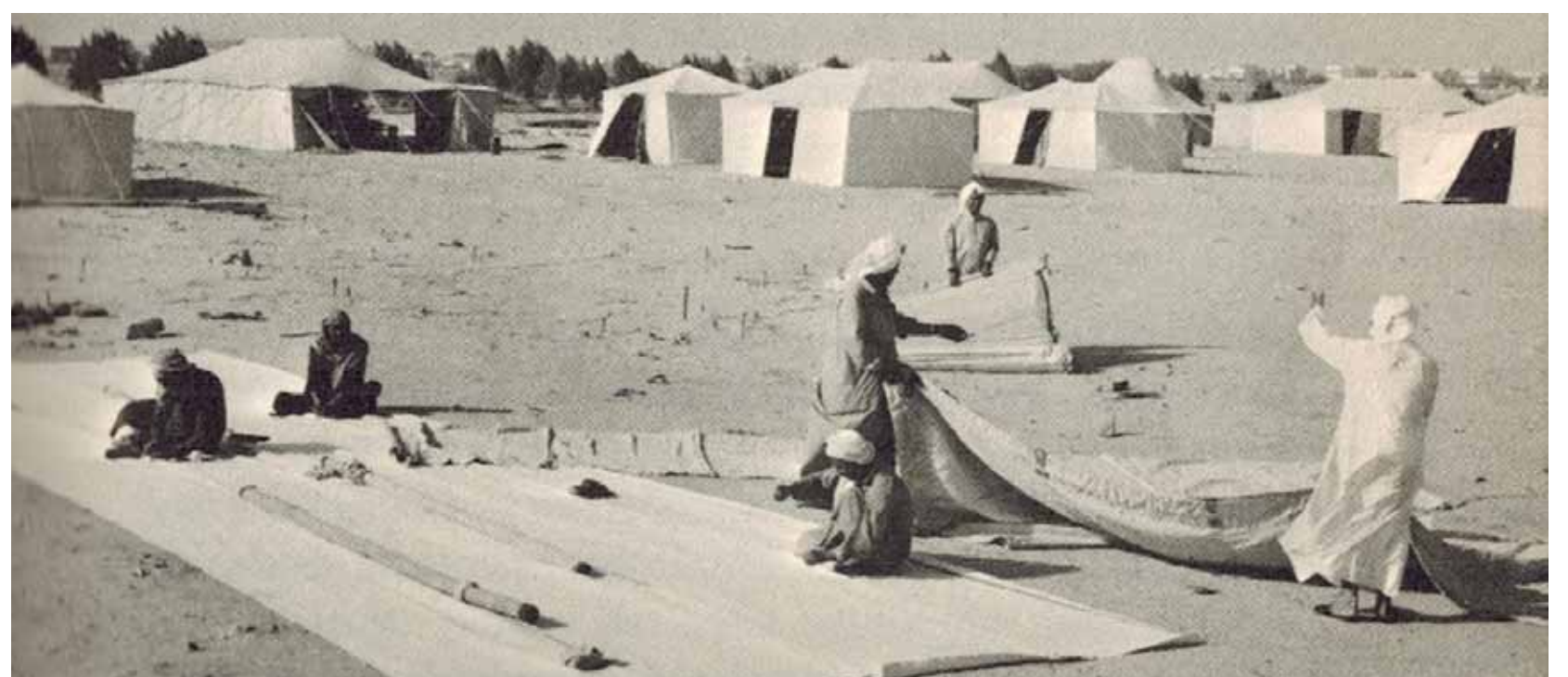


KUWAIT: Kuwaiti engineer Adel Al-Wasis. — KUNA photos



Adel Al-Wasis poses with his award.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: Tent makers in old Kuwait. Workers can be seen working tirelessly to complete making one of these tents, which are made specifically for sale to people who intend to go for hajj. (Source: 'Kuwait Miracle on the Desert' by David Cooke, New York, 1970. Prepared by: Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, researcher in heritage, Ministry of Information)



Sri Lanka president asks expert panel to plan debt restructure

Ecuador's deadly prison riots show no signs of slowing



BRUSSELS: Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba (L) and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speak to the press as they arrive for a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at NATO headquarters, in Brussels, on April 7, 2022. —AFP

Ukraine calls for 'weapons' at NATO talks

Moscow refocuses its offensive on the east of the country

BRUSSELS: Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Thursday called on NATO members to provide Kyiv with all the heavy weaponry it needs to fight Russia's invading forces. "My agenda is very simple. It has only three items on it. Its weapons, weapons, and weapons," Kuleba told journalists at a meeting with NATO foreign ministers in Brussels.

"I call on all allies to put aside their hesitations, their reluctance, to provide Ukraine with everything it needs," he said. Ukraine is pushing the West to increase its arms supplies with heavier weaponry, including air defence systems, artillery, armoured vehicles and jets, as Moscow refocuses its offensive on the east of the country.

Kuleba said economic powerhouse Germany "can do more" as he criticised allies who remain reluctant to send so-called "offensive" arms. "This distinction between defensive and offensive doesn't make any sense when it comes to the situation in my country," Kuleba said.

"Those countries who are saying we will provide Ukraine with defensive weapons, but we are not in a position to provide them with offensive weapons—they are hypocritical, this is simply unfair, unjustified approach."

NATO has refused to send troops to intervene in the fighting in non-member Ukraine, but has been sending crucial weaponry including anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. "I think the deal that Ukraine is offering is fair. You give us weapons, we sacrifice our lives, and the war is contained in Ukraine," Kuleba said.

'Defensive war'
NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said he was certain that allies would "address the need for more air defence systems, anti-tank weapons, lighter, but also heavier weapons and many different types of support to Ukraine".

"Ukraine is fighting the defensive war. So this distinction between offensive and defensive weapons doesn't actually have any real meaning," Stoltenberg said. The



You give us weapons, we sacrifice our lives

NATO chief said earlier that allies need to take advantage of a window of several weeks to supply weaponry now as Moscow repositions and rearms its forces for another major offensive in eastern Ukraine.

Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock told reporters Berlin was "looking closely with our partners how we can support Ukraine in the future, more inten-

sively and more coordinated because they have a right of self-defence."

NATO allies do appear to be heeding the call to step up the weapons being sent to Ukraine. According to Czech media reports, Prague has sent Soviet-made T72 tanks and armoured vehicles to Ukraine, the first country to do so.

Czech officials have refused to confirm the move. Alongside arms deliveries to Ukraine, the West has imposed a barrage of sanctions on Moscow aimed at battering Russia's economy. Kuleba welcomed a fresh wave of sanctions announced by the US, Britain and EU in the wake of revelations of killings in the town of Bucha, but insisted Europe especially must go further.

"We will continue to insist on full oil and gas embargo for Russia," Kuleba said. "I hope we will never face a situation again, when to step up the sanctions pressure we need atrocities like Bucha to be revealed."

The EU is currently finalising its fifth round of sanctions, including a proposed ban on imports of Russian coal. The bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he thought measures against Russian oil would be discussed by EU foreign ministers at a meeting on Monday.

"Sooner or later, I hope sooner, it will happen," he said. Foreign ministers from the G7 group of most industrialised nations also met at NATO headquarters to coordinate the Western sanctions. "We want to make sure that there are no loopholes, that within the West we are coordinated," Canada's foreign minister Melanie Joly said. —AFP



BOULOGNE-BILLANCOURT: French far-right Rassemblement National (RN) party Member of Parliament and presidential candidate Marine Le Pen (C) speaks as she takes part in the show "10 Minutes pour Convaincre" (10 Minutes to Convince) on French TV channel TF1. —AFP

Le Pen vows headscarf fines in election battle

PARIS: French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen vowed Thursday to issue fines to Muslims who wear headscarves in public, as candidates made a final push for votes three days ahead of an election seen as increasingly close. President Emmanuel Macron built what seemed an unassailable lead ahead of the first round of polls Sunday but Le Pen has eroded the margin and feels she has a real chance of winning the run-off on April 24.

With France's traditional right- and left-wing parties facing electoral disaster, far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melancon is on course to come third and he still believes he can sneak into a run-off. Speaking to RTL radio, Le Pen explained how her pledge to ban the headscarf in all public spaces would be implemented, saying it would be enforced by police in the same way as seatbelt-wearing in cars.

"People will be given a fine in the same way that it is illegal to not wear your seat belt. It seems to me that the police are very much able to enforce this measure," she said. Le Pen has said she will use referendums to try to avoid constitutional challenges to many of her proposed laws on the basis that they are discriminatory and an infringement on personal freedoms.

Previous legislation in France banning obvious religious symbols in schools or full-face coverings in public was allowed on the basis that it applied to all citizens and in specific settings. Le Pen, 53, has toned down her anti-immigration rhetoric during campaigning this year and has focused instead on household spending, putting her closer than ever to power, polls indicate.

The latest surveys suggest she is within striking distance of centrist Macron if the two of them come top in the first round of voting on Sunday. A second round run-off is scheduled for April 24, with an average of polls indicating Macron has a slight lead of 54 percent versus 46 percent for Le Pen. —AFP

HK activists fade from view, national security case drags

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's most prominent democracy activists have disappeared from view as their prosecution under a security law drags into its second year, with lawyers and family members warning the defendants are losing faith in the courts. The 47 activists make up a swathe of the city's depleted democracy movement, from veteran former lawmakers to young firebrands and community organisers as well as academics and unionists.

Charged with subversion, the majority have been held in custody for more than a year and the few granted bail must adhere to strict speech curbs. Most of what has occurred during pre-trial hearings is blanketed by reporting restrictions, even though the defendants want them lifted. And their trial is not expected to begin until at least 2023.

"The prosecution and the court are making the defendants invisible in plain sight," legal scholar Eric Lai of Georgetown University told AFP. Using the national security law Beijing imposed in 2020 following huge democracy protests, authorities targeted the activists for organising an unofficial poll to choose opposition candidates.

Some observers have voiced alarm about how lengthy pre-trial proceedings under the law have generated precedent-setting decisions without public scrutiny. The hearings, Lai said, have produced "very substantial evaluations that are rarely seen in ordinary criminal

cases" including detailed discussions over the security law's stricter bail terms, the admissibility of evidence as well as shifting prosecution charges. "(Court) procedures should be more open and transparent so the public can see how the court handled the cases and what it did to protect the integrity of trial."

Changing legal landscape

Hong Kong faces scrutiny over whether its internationally respected common law legal system can be maintained as China cracks down on dissent with the security law, which has ensnared some 170 people. Last month, two of Britain's most senior judges pulled out of sitting on Hong Kong's top court citing the law's impact on freedoms, though nine other foreign judges confirmed they would stay.

The prosecution of the 47 activists is seen as a legal litmus test. While Hong Kong allows the public to attend pre-trial hearings, reporting is largely limited to names, hearing dates and what a judge rules—unless that judge lifts restrictions.

The rules are in place to protect a defendant from potential prejudice, especially if a jury may be involved in their trial. But so far, all national security cases to reach trial stage have been heard by handpicked judges, not juries.

The 47 activists want the reporting restrictions lifted but their requests have been opposed by the prosecution and denied by the courts. Independent legal scholar Wong Kai-yeung said it was unusual for judges both in Hong Kong and under the English common law to deny such requests.

"Here it was they, the defendants to be put on trial, who actively sought publicity of the proceedings," he told AFP. "It is their trial. They have the autonomy to make the informed decision to not accept arrangements



HONG KONG: File photo shows protesters marching with a mock jail with photos of 47 pro-democracy figures already in prison in Hong Kong. —AFP

brought in the name of their protection."

'Frustrated and defeated'

Those facing trial are in custody or barred from speaking to the press as part of their bail conditions. But four barristers with knowledge of the proceedings told AFP that defendants were growing exasperated, believing prosecutors have filed vague charges and are dragging their feet, knowing their actions will not face public scrutiny or backlash.

All requested anonymity to speak freely. "Some defendants feel they are being played by the court, the prosecution and the whole procedure," said one barrister. "They think it's a sham." "There has been general distrust of the impartiality of the proceedings," another said. "It's fair to say some defendants do not believe they will get

a fair trial in this case."

The barristers themselves also described a sense of frustration with proceedings—two accused prosecutors of "moving the goalposts" by failing to disclose key evidence and frequently changing the charges. Hong Kong's Department of Justice said it took "strong exception" to such criticisms.

"Any allegation that the prosecution is 'taking advantage' of the reporting restrictions is based on a misconception of the rationale underlying such restrictions, if not based on malice," it said. The judiciary said it would not comment on individual cases.

Chan Po-ying, an activist and the wife of former lawmaker Leung Kwok-hung, said the media blackout had "dialled up the pressure" on defendants. "When public attention starts to wane, it could make them feel frustrated and defeated." —AFP

International

Ecuador's deadly prison riots show no signs of slowing

Fifth such mass murder in a prison riot since February 2021

QUITO: After another bloody year in Ecuador's interminable cycle of prison violence, authorities appear no closer to taking control. The latest sordid massacre saw 20 inmates killed—some mutilated—last Sunday in the El Turi penitentiary in the southern city of Cuenca.



Humiliated by the mafias

It was the fifth such mass murder in a prison riot since February 2021. The government blames these horrors on drug gangs taking over prisons, but some experts claim authorities simply do not care about those caught up in the violence. Vianca Gavilanes, a lawyer for the inmates' rights NGO Dignity Foundation, blames "generalized apathy" towards the lives of prisoners and a government that has forgotten "its duties as guarantor".

She noted that even in instances when intelligence networks or family members have warned of imminent bloodshed, authorities have been slow to take action. "It seems as if the police are hoping they will die inside, that they will kill each other, and they only pick up the bodies," Gavilanes told AFP.

Lack of control

The modus operandi is always the same in these

riots: A night-time brawl involving guns and machetes leaves a trail of dismembered bodies. Criticized for not sufficiently addressing the issue, right-wing President Guillermo Lasso—in power for less than a year—has released additional funding for prisons and said extra guards would be hired.

He also created a commission to study the issue in December and its first report was damning. Despicable conditions had turned prisons into "human warehouses and centers of torture," the committee said.

Mayra Flores, a researcher at the Kaleidos Center, which has also analysed the penitentiary system, says "prison has always had a dynamic that is beyond State control." Previously, she argues, there were rules that favored coexistence amongst inmates which allowed for more authorized freedoms, such as more flexible family visits. But in 2014, new criminal penalties were introduced that broadened the number of crimes carrying prison sentences, which necessitated the construction of harder to control mega-prisons.

Police creating tensions

Despite the increased funding and increased number of inmates, prisons still have a lack of guards. "The State itself is not giving it (the prison system) the priority that it should have and it (the State) has a very closed vision, very centered on the war against drugs," Flores told AFP.

Lasso insists the problem inside the facilities mirrors that outside where drug gangs are vying for control of drug trafficking routes. Situated between Colombia and Peru—the two largest producers of cocaine in the world—Ecuador seized a record 210 tons of drugs in 2021.



CUENCA, Ecuador: Police guard the CRS Turi prison a day after a riot in Cuenca, Ecuador, on April 5, 2022. At least 20 people died in a prison riot early Sunday in southern Ecuador, the president's office said. — AFP

Interior Minister Patricio Carrillo recognizes, though, that "there is corruption within the penitentiary system" and that "the Ecuadorian State has been humiliated by the mafias" who have managed to bring in and traffick weapons within prisons.

Flores argues that the police, through its intelligence arm, is "creating tensions in jail" by giving privileges to those that offer up information about gang activities within prison. The benefits provoke arguments between inmates that "transform into violence."

Punishing the poor

In its report, the commission created by Lasso said prisons "have become youth holding centers." Three-quarters of inmates are aged 18 to 35, it said. Flores points out that the anti-drug campaign mostly punishes young people from poor neighborhoods, where work and study opportunities are lacking. "What are they punishing? They're punishing poverty because in the end those are the people cramming the prisons," said Flores. — AFP

Nigeria train attackers release hostage video

KANO: Gunmen who attacked a train in northwest Nigeria and killed eight people have released a video of a bank executive who was among an unspecified number of passengers taken hostage during the assault. The attack on the train between the capital Abuja and Kaduna city last week was a major escalation in violence blamed on armed criminal gangs, known locally as bandits. Northwest and central Nigeria have long been terrorised by the gangs, who raid villages, killing residents and kidnapping for ransom. But their attacks and abductions have intensified.

The video posted online shows Alwan Ali-Hassan, CEO of Nigeria's Bank of Agriculture, flanked by four masked men in military uniform facing the camera, calling on authorities to meet his captors' demands for the release of other hostages who "are in a dire situation." AFP could not independently verify the authenticity of the video, shot in a

undisclosed forest with an armoured vehicle in the background. But family members confirmed Ali-Hassan was released by the gunmen on Wednesday and that it was him in the video.

The men do not claim affiliation to any group, but the recording closely resembles propaganda videos by jihadist groups waging a more than 12-year insurrection in Nigeria's northeast. The opening prayer in Arabic by one of the men is the same as in all previous propaganda videos by jihadist groups. The positioning of the gunmen with the hostage is also similar. Bandit gangs, who have no ideological or religious motives, have affiliated with jihadists in the past for pragmatic and financial reasons.

Kaduna has seen the presence of al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansaru jihadists, and elements of Boko Haram also operate in parts of the northwest. In the video, the speaker said they decided to release the hostage out of compassion as a "Ramadan gesture," referring to the Muslim holy month of fasting and to his "advanced age".

Although the speaker claimed no ransom was paid for Ali-Hassan's release, family sources said they had to pay money to the captors. — AFP

Residents evacuate as floods threaten Sydney suburbs

SYDNEY: Heavy rain triggered evacuation orders in Sydney on Thursday, as swollen rivers threatened homes and flooded roads in the latest wild weather to lash Australia's east. Residents in several suburbs of Sydney's south and southwest were told to leave for safety as fast-flowing rivers rose.

"We have seen exceptionally sharp, short bursts of rain that have created significant flash flooding events around parts of the Illawarra," New South Wales State Emergency Service Deputy Commissioner Daniel Austin said. "We ask the community to continue to be vigilant. This is a highly dynamic situation. These events are moving exceptionally quickly."

Images from around Sydney showed submerged roads, cars struggling through floodwaters and debris flowing rapidly down rivers. Woronora resident Belinda told national broadcaster ABC that the river was flowing faster than she had ever seen.

"A little nervous, our property's up quite high so it's not much danger of us being



SYDNEY, Australia: Houses are seen on the bank of overflowing Woronora river on April 7, 2022, as inclement weather triggered evacuation orders in several suburbs of Sydney's south and southwest. — AFP

flooded but for those properties that are a bit lower, it's a real worry," she said. Major flood warnings were issued for several suburbs in the south of Sydney, while the entire city of five million was warned of potential flash flooding into the weekend. NSW emergency services said they had responded to more than 680 calls for help from people affected by the weather so far. The deluge is the latest to hit the region and comes less than a week after huge waves pummelled the coastline,

with surf swallowing entire beaches including the famous sands of Bondi.

Large parts of Australia's east coast have been inundated by heavy rain for months. Residents in the hardest-hit areas are still recovering from floods that swept through in March. The extreme weather, driven by the La Nina weather system and worsened by climate change, has raised further questions about Australia's disaster preparedness. — AFP

Ukraine warns of 'last chance'...

Continued from Page 1

Gaiday said previously that more than 1,200 people had been evacuated from Lugansk on Wednesday, but that efforts were being hampered by artillery fire, with some areas already inaccessible. For those unable to leave, he said, tons of food, medicine and hygiene products were being delivered as part of a massive humanitarian effort. The head of the Donetsk Regional Military Administration said strikes had targeted aid points.

"The enemy aimed directly there with a goal to destroy the civilians," Pavlo Kyrylenko wrote on Facebook. He added that people were heeding calls to flee and he would be coordinating evacuation to make it "faster and more effective". Large areas of Lugansk and the neighboring Donetsk region have been controlled since 2014 by pro-Russian separatists.

Shells and rockets were also slamming into the industrial city of Severodonetsk, the easternmost city held by Ukrainian forces. "We have nowhere to go, it's been like this for days," 38-year-old Volodymyr told AFP, standing opposite a burning building in Severodonetsk. More than 11 million people have been displaced since Russia invaded on February 24, with the stated aim to "demilitarize" Ukraine and support Moscow-backed separatists. It is currently believed to be trying to create a land link between occupied Crimea and the statelets in Donbas.

'Weapons, weapons'

Ukrainian forces are also regrouping for the offensive, including on a two-lane highway through the rolling eastern plains connecting Kharkiv and Donetsk. Trench positions were being dug, and the road was littered with anti-tank obstacles. "We're waiting for them!" said a lieutenant tasked with reinforcing the positions, giving a thumbs up.

Western allies have already sent funds and weapons to help Ukraine, but Kyiv's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Thursday made a fresh appeal to NATO for heavy weaponry, including air defense systems, artillery, armored vehicles and jets. "My agenda is very simple. It has only three items on it. It's weapons, weapons, and weapons," he told journalists ahead of a meeting with NATO ministers in Brussels.

The evacuation calls are being fuelled by fears of fresh atrocities, after chilling discoveries in areas from which Moscow's troops have withdrawn. US President Joe Biden said "major war crimes" were being committed in Ukraine, where images have emerged in recent days of bodies with their hands bound or in shallow graves. "Civilians executed in cold blood, bodies dumped into mass graves, the sense of brutality and inhumanity left for all the world to see, unapologetically," Biden said.

In one of the worst affected towns, Bucha, some residents were still trying to learn the fate of loved ones, while others were hoping to forget. Tetiana Ustyomenko's son and his two friends were gunned down in the street, and she buried them in the garden of the family home. "How can I live now?" she said. The Kremlin denies responsibility for any civilian deaths and President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday accused Ukrainian authorities of "crude and cynical provocations" in Bucha.

But the German government pointed to satellite pictures taken while the town was still under Moscow's control, which appear to show bodies in the streets. Russia's denials "are in our view not tenable", said German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit. Ukrainian officials have warned other areas may have suffered worse than Bucha, including nearby Borodianka.

"Locals talk about how planes came in during the first days of the war and fired rockets at them from low altitudes at these buildings," Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky told local media. Officials have alleged that Russian troops are now trying to cover up atrocities elsewhere to prevent further international outcry, including in the besieged city of Mariupol. Ukrainian human rights official Lyudmila Denisova said Wednesday, citing witness testimony, that Russian forces have brought mobile crematoria to burn bodies and other heavy equipment to clear debris in the city.

Sanctions 'not enough'

Western powers have already pummeled Russia with debilitating economic sanctions and on Wednesday the United States unveiled further measures targeting Russia's top banks and two of Putin's daughters. Britain sanctioned two banks and vowed to eliminate all Russian oil and gas imports by the end of the year, while the European Union is poised to cut off Russian coal imports. — AFP

Yemen leader cedes powers...

Continued from Page 1

closed in on his last redoubt, the southern port city of Aden.

A United Nations-brokered truce that took effect last Saturday - the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan - has offered a glimmer of hope in the conflict which has triggered what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The truce came as discussions on Yemen were unfolding in Riyadh without the participation of the Houthis, who refused to attend talks on "enemy" territory. "The path to peace is by stopping the aggression, lifting the siege, and taking the foreign forces out of the country," said Abdulsalam, the Houthi spokesman.

'Something big'

Some analysts had cast doubt on what the negotiations could achieve in the absence of the Houthis, but Thursday's news may help the sometimes fractious coalition battling the rebels to speak with one voice in any future peace negotiations. "The status quo was going nowhere," Elisabeth Kendall, a

researcher at Oxford University said.

"Something big needed to change to get the warring parties on track to a political process. This transfer of presidential powers could be it." Peter Salisbury, senior Yemen analyst for the International Crisis Group, said on Twitter that the formation of the council represents "the most consequential shift in the inner workings of the anti-Houthi bloc since the war began". But he cautioned that implementing the arrangement would be "complicated to say the least".

Hadi also announced he had sacked Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar. The new council will consist of eight members and be led by Rashad Al-Alimi, a former interior minister and adviser to Hadi. Hadi said it would be tasked with "negotiating with the Houthis for a permanent ceasefire". He said it should also sit down for talks "to reach a final and comprehensive political solution, that includes a transitional phase that will move Yemen from a state of war to a state of peace".

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, met the council and said he hoped for a "new page" to turn in Yemen, footage aired by state media showed. The secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council Nayef Al-Hajraf also welcomed Hadi's announcement, pledging the bloc's support for the new council "in its tasks to achieve safety and security" in Yemen. — AFP

Facebook battles cyber...

Continued from Page 1

accuse people of violating the social network's policies to get posts about Ukraine removed.

Those involved tried to disguise their collaboration as a cooking-themed group, according to the social network. "The majority of these fictitious reports focused on people in Ukraine and Russia," Meta said in the report. "The people behind this activity relied on fake, authentic, and duplicate accounts to submit hundreds - in some cases, thousands - of complaints against their targets." Such coordinated bullying campaigns are referred to as "mobbing."

Meanwhile, government-linked "actors" from

Russia and its ally Belarus have engaged in cyber espionage and covert influence operations online, according to Meta. That malicious activity took aim at the Ukrainian telecom and defense sectors along with tech platforms, journalists and activists, the report indicated. Meta executives said they have seen a "further spike" in attacks by a Russia-linked hacker-group known as Ghostwriter. Ghostwriter's typical tactic is to target victims with "phishing" emails that trick them into clicking on deceptive links in an effort to steal log-in credentials.

The goal appeared to be to spread links to misinformation. "Since our last public update, this group has attempted to hack into the Facebook accounts of dozens of Ukrainian military personnel," Meta said in the report. "In a handful of cases, they posted videos calling on the Army to surrender as if these posts were coming from the legitimate account owners." Meta blocked those videos from being shared, according to head of security policy Nathaniel Gleicher. — AFP

International

Sri Lanka president asks expert panel to plan debt restructure

Sri Lanka slaps travel ban on former central bank chief

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's beleaguered president has appointed an expert panel to organise a debt restructure to claw the country out of a crippling economic crisis that has sparked huge protests demanding his resignation.

Scarce supplies of food and fuel, along with record inflation and regular blackouts, have inflicted widespread misery in the country's most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

Rating agencies have warned of a potential default on Sri Lanka's \$51 billion foreign debt, and authorities have been unable to raise more commercial loans because of credit downgrades. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office said late Wednesday that the three-member advisory panel had been tasked with guiding Sri Lanka through a "sustainable and inclusive recovery".

His government is preparing for bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, and finance ministry officials told AFP the trio will prepare a programme for sovereign bond holders and other creditors to take a haircut.

"What Sri Lanka is keen to do is avoid a hard default," a source from the ministry, who requested anonymity, told AFP. "It will be a negotiated restructuring of the debt with the help of the IMF."

Parliamentary Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana warned Wednesday that the economic crisis could lead to starvation unless addressed within the week. Meetings with the IMF are set to begin by next week but Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa-the president's brother-resigned on Sunday night along with nearly the entire cabinet.

The country is still without a replacement, with his successor quitting after just one day in office. Public anger is at fever pitch, with crowds attempting to storm the homes of several govern-

ment figures and demanding President Rajapaksa's resignation.

Security forces have dispersed protests with tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets, and dozens have been arrested-many saying they were tortured in police custody.

Opposition parties have rejected the president's overture to form a unity administration and joined calls for him to step down. But chief government whip Johnston Fernando reiterated Thursday that Rajapaksa would stay in office to lead the country out of the crisis.

The government has lost its majority in parliament but there has so far been no clear signal that opposition legislators will attempt a no-confidence motion to topple the administration. A critical foreign currency shortage has left Sri Lanka struggling to import essential goods, with the pandemic torpedoing vital revenue from tourism and remittances.

Rating agencies have warned of a potential default on Sri Lanka's \$51 billion foreign debt, and authorities are unable to raise more commercial loans because of credit downgrades.

Economists say the crisis has been exacerbated by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing and ill-advised tax cuts.

Meanwhile, a Sri Lankan court on Thursday placed a travel ban on the country's recently resigned central bank chief following allegations he is responsible for the island's crippling economic crisis.

The magistrate in Colombo ordered Ajith Cabraal, who quit on Monday, to appear in court on April 18 to answer a complaint against him. The court asked immigration authorities not to allow him to leave the island after a rights



COLOMBO: Police stand guard as demonstrators take part in a protest against the surge in prices and shortage of fuel and other essential commodities near the parliament building in Colombo on April 7, 2022. —AFP

Meetings with IMF set to begin by next week



Australia, Myanmar junta meeting 'unacceptable': HRW

SYDNEY: Human Rights Watch on Thursday slammed a meeting between Australia's ambassador to Myanmar and the military junta chief, saying it was "lending credibility" to a regime accused of war crimes.

Since a military-led coup ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's administration last year, Myanmar has been increasingly isolated internationally-with foreign governments urging an end to deadly crackdowns on mass democracy protests.

Australia's outgoing ambassador Andrea Faulkner met with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw on Wednesday, with state-owned media outlet Global New Light of Myanmar reporting the pair discussed "enhancement of cooperation in various sectors".

The ambassador was accompanied by Australia's defence attache to Myanmar, Colonel Tony Egan, the report said. Katrina Cooper from Australia's foreign affairs department said the ambassador had used the meeting to reiterate calls for Myanmar to cease violence and release detainees. "The Australian government does not consider that the outgoing meeting legitimises the current regime," Cooper told a Senate committee in Canberra.

But HRW said the meeting and subsequent coverage in state media did just that. "This is meeting is not only deeply unacceptable, but it undercuts efforts by other governments to isolate the military commander implicated in serious abuses," HRW's Myanmar researcher Manny Maung said.

"By taking photo ops and accepting gifts, Australia only serves to lend credibility to a military junta that is accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity against its own population," Maung urged Australia to "align with its traditional allies" by avoiding further high-level meetings with the junta and immediately imposing sanctions.

Australian officials outlined seven other meetings and phone calls with the junta since the coup,



NAYPYIDAW, Myanmar: Handout photo taken on April 6, 2022 and released on April 7 by the Myanmar Military Information Team shows Australian ambassador Andrea Faulkner (L) meeting with Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw. —AFP

but denied any sectors were engaging with the regime. Canberra has repeatedly called for the release of Australian economist Sean Turnell, who was working as an adviser to Suu Kyi when he was detained shortly after the coup.

He has been charged with violating Myanmar's official secrets law and faces a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison if found guilty. Myanmar has been in chaos since a putsch in February 2021, with more than 1,700 people killed in crackdowns on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

Meanwhile, the deputy governor of Myanmar's central bank was shot and wounded in her home in the commercial capital Yangon on Thursday, a junta spokesman told AFP, in the latest high-profile attack on military-linked officials.

Myanmar's military has led a bloody crackdown on dissent after taking power in last year's coup, sparking social unrest and a worsening economic crisis. Self-declared civilian "people's defence forces" have sprung up to fight the junta, with dissidents also targeting officials perceived to be working with the military.

Deputy governor Than Than Swe, appointed by based on the current government system," Ahn Cheol-soo, the head of the committee, told reporters.

The committee will announce its new gender equality minister, along with other members of its cabinet, Ahn said, adding they will still be looking at whether they will restructure. The newly appointed gender equality minister will "be tasked with setting up a plan to identify problems and whether there are better reorganisation measures available," he said. Experts had previously said abolishing the ministry outright-as Yoon once promised-would be difficult, as it would require revising legislation in parliament, currently controlled by the country's liberals.

After the election, Yoon had promised to go through with his pledge, saying that if he did not, he would have "lied" to his supporters. "The pledge is still valid," Choo Kyung-ho, an official on his transition team, told reporters Thursday.

But there were still "different opinions" about how best to reorganise, which was why the plan had been delayed, he said. Yoon's battle cry against the ministry in particular appears to have galvanised female voters-with more than 10,000

activist filed a petition against him.

Cabraal, who was handpicked to lead the bank by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was responsible for Sri Lanka's acute foreign exchange shortage and other financial woes, activist Keerthi Tennakoon argued.

Tennakoon told the court the former bank chief was also responsible for insider trading when he led the institution between 2006 and 2015. He was appointed to a new term in September last year.

Cabraal quit on Monday a day after the cabinet resigned en masse except Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president's brother. A

replacement has yet to be appointed.

Senior government figures have accused the banker of misleading President Rajapaksa and preventing Colombo from seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund at an earlier date.

Last month the government said it will finally go to the IMF for help but talks are yet to begin. Cabraal previously insisted he had a homegrown solution to boost foreign reserves, but the government has now run out of dollars to pay even for essential supplies. The former bank chief was not immediately available for comment on Thursday. —AFP

Humanitarian situation in Ukraine

The Brazilian Government received, with great consternation, the news and images of violence against civilians and the high number of deaths, many of them with signs of torture and ill-treatment, in the town of Bucha, Ukraine. In solidarity with the families of the victims and the entire Ukrainian people, Brazil reiterates its call for the protection of civilians and full respect for International Humanitarian Law. The Brazilian Government advocated at the United Nations Human Rights Council for a complete and independent investigation into any alleged violations, so that responsibilities can be ascertained. As a member of the United Nations Security Council, Brazil remains fully engaged in discussions with a view to the immediate cessation of hostilities and the promotion of dialogue leading to a peaceful and lasting solution, in line with the Brazilian diplomatic tradition, the United Nations Charter and international law.

—Embassy of Brazil

China warns against possible Pelosi visit to Taiwan

TAIPEI: China warned of "strong measures" on Thursday if US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi visits Taiwan following media reports of an upcoming trip. Japanese and Taiwanese media on Thursday reported that Pelosi will visit Taiwan next week, after leading a delegation to Japan this weekend.

Neither Taiwan nor Pelosi's office have confirmed the reports but Beijing-which opposes countries having relations with Taipei-spoke out against the potential visit. "The US should abide by the One-China policy and...and immediately cancel Nancy Pelosi's plan to visit Taiwan," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters. "China will take strong measures in response to defend its national security and integrity," Zhao added. A visit by Pelosi would be diplomatically significant for Taipei but not unprecedented. Newt Gingrich visited Taiwan in 1997 when he was speaker of the House of Representatives.

China's Communist Party has never controlled self-ruled Taiwan but it nonetheless views the island as part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if needed. Beijing's sabre-rattling has increased significantly under President Xi Jinping, spurring diplomatic support for Taipei and visits from western nations shaken by China's more muscular tone.

Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine has also heightened fears that China might one day follow through on threats to annex its smaller neighbour. Like most nations, the US diplomatically recognises Beijing but also maintains de facto diplomatic ties with Taipei and is bound by an Act of Congress to ensure Taiwan can maintain its defence. —AFP

S Korean president backtracks on scrapping gender ministry

SEOUL: South Korean president-elect Yoon Suk-yeol's team backed away Thursday from the avowed anti-feminist campaign pledge to abolish the country's Ministry of Gender Equality. Yoon won the March election by an extremely narrow margin after appealing to disgruntled young, male voters with a promise to scrap the ministry, which has become a lightning rod in the country's bitter debates over gender.

On the campaign trail, he repeatedly claimed that South Korean women do not suffer from "systemic gender discrimination"-despite much evidence to the contrary around the gender wage gap, female workforce participation and political and corporate top-end representation.

But on Thursday, his transition team said they would keep the ministry for now and appoint their own minister for gender equality. "It has been decided that the composition of the cabinet will be



Yoon Suk-yeol

young women joining the left-leaning Democratic Party after the election. But Yoon "can still incite his base and push back against the women's equality agenda through speeches, statements, and his rhetoric," Linda Hasunuma, a political scientist at Temple University, told AFP. Even if the ministry remains for now, the attacks on it can still be used to "stoke these divisions, fears, and misinformation about women's equality." —AFP

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 8, 2022

Pakistan rupee nosedives against dollar

Political crisis rocks confidence; political crisis continues



KARACHI: A foreign currency dealer counts US dollars at a shop in Karachi on April 7, 2022. The Pakistan rupee dropped to a historic low of 191 rupees to the dollar as an ongoing political crisis rocked confidence in the currency. —AFP



KARACHI: People exchange foreign currency at a shop in Karachi on April 7, 2022. —AFP

KARACHI: The Pakistan rupee dropped to a historic low of 191 rupees to the dollar Thursday as an ongoing political crisis rocked confidence in the currency. The rupee has been declining for months, but the fall became precipitous in March when opposition parties tabled a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan that led to the dissolution of the national assembly last week.

The rupee has lost over six percent in a month, and on the open market Thursday was at 191 — and 189 at the interbank rate. “The political mess has ensued from uncertainty and this badly reflects on the rupee,” said Mohammad Sohail, chief of Topline Securities, a Karachi based brokerage and economic research house. Pakistan’s supreme court was sitting Thursday to rule on the legality of political manoeuvres that led Khan to dissolve the national assembly. Pakistan’s foreign exchange reserves, which rely on remittances from the diaspora, have failed to stop a growing trade deficit.

Reserves have fallen to \$12 billion from \$16 billion since March as the deficit hit 70 percent for the nine months of the fiscal year spanning 2021-22. Since July 2021, the rupee has lost 18 percent of its value against the dollar. Relations with the United States and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are also critical factors. The IMF has approved a \$6 billion bailout package for Pakistan to support its balance of payment issue in 2019. Half was disbursed, but the rest is being renegotiated.

Political crisis continues

Pakistan President Arif Alvi told the country’s election commission Wednesday to fix a date for a new national ballot, as the supreme court adjourned a hearing into the legality of political manoeuvres that led to parliament being dissolved. The court — which will sit for a fourth day Thursday — must rule if the deputy speaker of the national assembly violated the constitution by refusing to allow a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Imran Khan at the weekend.

Had the vote taken place Khan was certain to have been booted from office, but the move allowed him to get the loyalist president to dissolve parliament and order an election. The opposition have cried foul and are refusing to cooperate with forming an interim government to oversee any ballot, but on Wednesday Alvi upped the ante. A statement from his office said the election commission had been told to propose a date “in order to carry out the mandate of the Constitution”.

On the campaign trail

While the opposition applied its resources to the court, Khan effectively hit the campaign trail — telling party workers in Lahore late Tuesday that he would be more careful in picking candidates to stand for his Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Khan’s woes started

weeks ago when a group of rebel PTI lawmakers threatened to vote against him, but his fragile ruling coalition was beginning to unravel anyway. There had been high hopes for Khan when he was elected in 2018 on a promise of sweeping away decades of entrenched corruption and cronyism, but he struggled to maintain support with soaring inflation, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Nuclear-armed Pakistan has been wracked by political crises for much of its 75-year existence, and no prime minister has ever seen out a full term. Whether the election commission has the capacity to organise a ballot within 90 days remains to be seen, with a watchdog group warning this week of “grave concerns” for potential violence. “The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) has identified multiple constitutional, legal and operational challenges to the conduct of an early election,” said the group.

“Public confusion and political divisions that have already arisen as a result can potentially translate into violent expression.” Khan has already blown anti-US sentiment into the political atmosphere by saying the opposition had colluded with Washington for “regime change”. The cricketer-turned-politician says Western powers want him removed because he will not stand with them against Russia and China, and the issue is sure to ignite any forthcoming election.

Court precedent

It is unclear when or how the court will rule on the issue — or if Khan would even accept its decision — but there is precedent. In 1988, Muhammad Khan Junejo appealed to the court after the assembly was dissolved by then president General Zia-ul-Haq, who had taken power in a military coup years earlier.

It agreed his government had been dissolved unconstitutionally, but ruled that since elections had been announced anyway it was best to move on. In 1993, the court ruled president Ghulam Ishaq Khan had also illegally dissolved the assembly — then with Nawaz Sharif as prime minister. The Supreme Court is ostensibly independent, but rights activists say previous benches have been used by civilian and military administrations to do their bidding throughout Pakistan’s history.

Publicly the military appears to be keeping out of the current fray, but there have been four coups since independence in 1947 and the country has spent more than three decades under army rule. “I don’t think the court is going to deliver any noticeable decision, it will be a sort of doctrine of necessities,” said Ayesha Siddiqui, an independent analyst. “On one side judges will declare the ruling of the deputy speaker as unconstitutional, but at the same time will justify the fresh elections... as every political party wants to go for a fresh election.” —AFP

Energy giant Shell hikes Russian exit hit to \$5 billion

LONDON: Shell on Thursday warned that its exit from Russia over the Ukraine war would cost the British energy giant up to \$5 billion, but it would fulfil pre-conflict contracts to buy fuel from Moscow. Despite the massive financial hit, energy majors are generally enjoying soaring revenues as oil and gas prices remain high on tight supply worries caused by the war and as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns.

Shell, which is gradually withdrawing from Russia owing to the war, said impairment from assets-or loss in their value-and extra charges relating to activities in the country would be between \$4 billion and \$5 billion (3.7 billion and 4.6 billion euros) in the first quarter just ended. The London-listed company in late February announced that it would sell its stakes in all joint ventures with Russian state energy giant Gazprom after the Kremlin launched its assault on Ukraine. At the end of last year, Shell valued these Russian ventures at \$3 billion.

‘Legally obliged’

Shell is withdrawing from Russian gas and oil in line with UK government policy. However, the company on Thursday revealed it is “legally obliged to take delivery of crude bought under contracts that were signed before the invasion”. Shell previously apologized for buying a cargo of Russian oil at a vast discount following the invasion.

Britain, which is far less dependent than the rest of Europe on Russian energy, plans to wean itself off oil imports by the end of the year and eventually stop importing its gas. A UK government energy strategy update Thursday called for more renewable power from nuclear, offshore wind and solar. Nations around the globe and their companies have axed business ties with Russia since President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on February 24. Shell’s rival BP is pulling its near 20-percent stake in state energy giant Rosneft.

Oil prices jump

The Ukraine crisis has sent shockwaves across the global oil and gas markets because Russia is a major producer of fossil fuels. Oil prices, which rocketed close to \$140 per barrel in early March, have since fallen back to around \$100 on peace talk hopes. Shell, which on Thursday cautioned that the crude market remains “volatile”, saw its share price slide 1.4 percent in morning deals on London’s benchmark FTSE 100 index, which was steady. —AFP

Sri Lanka slaps travel ban on former central bank chief

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan court on Thursday placed a travel ban on the country’s recently resigned central bank chief following allegations he is responsible for the island’s crippling economic crisis. The magistrate in Colombo ordered Ajith Cabraal, who quit on Monday, to appear in court on April 18 to answer a complaint against him. The court asked immigration authorities not to allow him to leave the island after a rights activist filed a petition against him.

Cabraal, who was handpicked to lead the bank by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was responsible for Sri Lanka’s acute foreign exchange shortage and other financial woes, activist Keerthi Tennakoon argued. Tennakoon told the court the former bank chief was also responsible for insider trading when he led the institution between 2006 and 2015. He was appointed to a new term in September last year.

Cabraal quit on Monday a day after the cabinet resigned en masse except Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president’s brother. A replacement has yet to be appointed. Senior government figures have accused the banker of misleading President Rajapaksa and preventing Colombo from seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund at an earlier date.

Last month the government said it will finally go to the IMF for help but talks are yet to begin. Cabraal previously insisted he had a homegrown solution to boost foreign reserves, but the government has now run out of dollars to pay even for essential supplies. The former bank chief was not immediately available for comment on Thursday.

Debt restructure

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka’s beleaguered president has appointed an expert panel to organize a debt restructure to claw the country out of a crippling economic crisis that has sparked huge protests demanding his resignation. Scarce supplies of food and fuel, along with record inflation and regular blackouts, have inflicted widespread misery in the country’s most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948. Rating agencies have warned of a potential default on Sri Lanka’s \$51 billion foreign debt, and authorities have been unable to raise more commercial loans because of credit downgrades.



COLOMBO: Police and Special Task Force (STF) prepare to patrol the streets to contain a protest against the surge in prices and shortage of fuel and other essential commodities near the parliament building in Colombo. —AFP

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s office said late Wednesday that the three-member advisory panel had been tasked with guiding Sri Lanka through a “sustainable and inclusive recovery”. His government is preparing for bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, and finance ministry officials told AFP the trio will prepare a programme for sovereign bond holders and other creditors to take a haircut.

“What Sri Lanka is keen to do is avoid a hard default,” a source from the ministry, who requested anonymity, told AFP. “It will be a negotiated restructuring of the debt with the help of the IMF.” Parliamentary Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana warned Wednesday that the economic crisis could lead to starvation unless addressed within the week. Meetings with the IMF are set to begin by next week but Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa—the president’s brother—resigned on Sunday night along with nearly the entire cabinet.

The country is still without a replacement, with his successor quitting after just one day in office. Public anger is at fever pitch, with crowds attempting to storm the homes of several government figures and

demanding President Rajapaksa’s resignation. Security forces have dispersed protests with tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets, and dozens have been arrested—many saying they were tortured in police custody.

Opposition parties have rejected the president’s overture to form a unity administration and joined calls for him to step down. But chief government whip Johnston Fernando reiterated Thursday that Rajapaksa would stay in office to lead the country out of the crisis. The government has lost its majority in parliament but there has so far been no clear signal that opposition legislators will attempt a no-confidence motion to topple the administration.

A critical foreign currency shortage has left Sri Lanka struggling to import essential goods, with the pandemic torpedoing vital revenue from tourism and remittances. Rating agencies have warned of a potential default on Sri Lanka’s \$51 billion foreign debt, and authorities are unable to raise more commercial loans because of credit downgrades. Economists say the crisis has been exacerbated by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing and ill-advised tax cuts. —AFP

Business

Shares soar in China drugmaker after positive COVID drug trials

Shares close up over 100 percent in Hong Kong

BEIJING: Shares in the Chinese pharmaceutical group Kintor rocketed on Wednesday after it reported that trials had shown its COVID-19 drug to be highly effective, making it potentially China's first homegrown antiviral treatment. Shares closed up more than 100 percent in Hong Kong after the group said its new pill dramatically reduced the risk of hospitalization or death from COVID-19, particularly among the middle-aged or elderly.

The drug, proxalutamide, cut the risk of hospitalization or deaths by 50 percent to 100 percent depending on the length of treatment, Kintor said in a statement. Tong Youzhi, the group's founder and chairman, said the drug had shown a reduced viral load against both the Delta and Omicron variants. The group will now apply for emergency use authorization for the treatment in China, the US and other countries, he added.

"The top-line data of this pivotal study demonstrates the clinical efficacy of proxalutamide... with a significant reduction of hospitalization and death rate in patients," he said. At its peak Kintor shares soared some 229 percent, according to Bloomberg. Chinese media hailed the results as a "breakthrough". Proxalutamide was originally used to reduce the production of male hormones, particularly for use in the treatment of prostate cancer.

But its reputation has been marred by a health scandal in Brazil, where a team had conducted trials, separate from those by Kintor, to assess its effectiveness against

COVID. The Brazilian researchers initially announced positive results, but a large part of the scientific community expressed skepticism about their credibility. Brazilian authorities also denounced the researchers' methods, saying they could have contributed to the deaths of 200 people as the country grappled with a deadly wave of the virus.

Tens of millions are locked down across China as Beijing sticks to a policy of pursuing zero cases and battles its most serious outbreak since the earliest days of the pandemic. Beijing recorded 20,472 infections Wednesday—the highest daily infection number ever reported in the country, even during the peak of China's initial outbreak in the city of Wuhan. The vast majority of cases are asymptomatic. Beijing has also been ramping up efforts to vaccinate its huge population, particularly among the elderly where levels remain low. Regulators have not yet approved any foreign-made coronavirus vaccines, but several Chinese vaccine makers have recently been given the go-ahead for clinical trials for a domestically-made mRNA COVID jab. Beijing gave "conditional" approval in February for Pfizer's COVID-19 drug Paxlovid to treat adults with mild to moderate illness and a high risk of developing severe disease. Lab tests have shown Omicron patients jabbed with the Chinese-produced Sinovac vaccine experience larger drops in antibody levels than those given the Pfizer version.—AFP



HONG KONG: A man rides a bicycle next to Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong on April 7, 2022. — AFP

Canada approves controversial Bay du Nord offshore oil project

OTTAWA: Canada's environment minister approved Wednesday a controversial offshore oil project expected to see 300 million barrels of oil extracted over 30 years and to set back efforts to curb climate change. In a statement, Steven Guilbeault said Norwegian firm Equinor's proposed development of oil discoveries in the Flemish Pass Basin, some 500 kilometers east of St Johns, Newfoundland, passed an environmental assessment. That four-year review, the minister said, determined that the Bay du Nord project "is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects when mitigation measures are taken into account." "The project is therefore allowed to proceed

with strict measures to protect the environment," he said. Canada is the world's fourth largest oil producer. The Bay du Nord project, which split Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals and was widely seen as a test of the government's resolve in tackling climate change and curtailing oil output, is expected to generate an estimated Can\$3.5 billion in government revenue.

For Newfoundland province, which has the highest unemployment rate in the country, it also represents a much needed economic boost. Ottawa set 137 binding conditions on the project, including incorporating reduced greenhouse gas emissions in its design, protecting fish habitat and air quality—which Guilbeault said represent "some of the strongest environmental conditions ever" applied in Canada.

But environmental groups immediately panned the decision, citing UN warnings to stop tapping new oil sources or risk irreversible and catastrophic climate impacts. "Approving Bay du Nord is another leap towards an unlivable future," Environmental Defence's Julia Levin said in a statement. "The decision is tantamount to denying that climate change is real and threatens our very existence."—AFP

EU Parliament passes symbolic vote to ban Russia energy imports

STRASBOURG: The European Parliament on Thursday passed a symbolic vote demanding a total ban on all Russian energy imports into the EU, as member states closed in on narrower sanctions against Russian coal. MEPs voted 513 in favor, with 22 against and 19 abstentions, of an "immediate" ban on Russian coal, gas and oil, as well as nuclear fuel. Although the motion was nonbinding, the parliament's speaker, Roberta Metsola, called it a "very important moment" that sent the "strongest messages" to Ukraine on the degree of EU support. The vote was separate from discussions going on Thursday between ambassadors of the 27 EU countries on adopting a European Commission proposal to sanction Russian coal, among

other trade measures. Several EU states wanted to go further by also banning Russian oil, but others whose economies are highly dependent on Russia energy supplies—Germany among them—resisted.

In 2021, Russia supplied 45 percent of the EU's coal imports, 25 percent of its oil imports and around 45 percent of its gas imports. Hydrocarbons are Russia's most important exports, and the EU is its biggest customer for them. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Wednesday told the European Parliament that EU purchases of Russian fossil fuels have filled Moscow's coffers by 35 billion euros (\$38 billion) since the February 24 invasion of Ukraine.

That amount eclipsed the one billion euros the EU has set aside for arms deliveries to Ukraine, he said. The European Parliament's resolution also demanded stepped-up weapons deliveries to Ukraine, something Kyiv has been repeatedly calling for from Europe. Metsola late last week became the first head of an EU institution to visit Ukraine since the war started. Borrell and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen were to follow up with their own visit to Kyiv on Friday.—AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 07 APRIL 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,099	1,055	1,099	1,051	48	33,271,079	-44	-4.00%	5.82%	1,055	1,080	22.8	2.21	2.8%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	319	341	344	319	25	34,704,024	20	6.23%	22.22%	332	344	27.4	1.59	2.0%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	254	252	260	251	9	15,693,061	0	0.00%	15.60%	248	254	NM	1.10	1.6%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	294	300	301	291	10	9,305,895	9	3.09%	19.52%	291	301	22.7	1.36	1.7%	1.03
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	976	1,007	1,039	976	63	58,903,079	34	4.39%	21.03%	1,007	1,025	39.5	4.41	1.2%	1.39
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	895	916	930	872	58	4,224,545	22	2.44%	15.95%	915	927	67.6	5.28	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	449	423	453	419	34	25,103,870	-21	-4.73%	93.15%	419	440	13.4	1.79	10.6%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	201	196	202	195	7	23,551,650	-5	-2.49%	38.03%	195	200	44.6	2.42	2.4%	0.60
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	135	133	135	131	4	19,083,393	-2	-1.48%	12.71%	132	137	NM	0.81	6.4%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	160	166	166	158	8	34,065,044	6	3.75%	-7.26%	160	166	25.6	1.20	1.7%	0.96
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	854	879	885	850	35	1,137,645	12	1.42%	10.84%	850	880	19.4	2.00	1.6%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	282	278	282	264	18	21,125,224	-3	-1.07%	-1.77%	272	284	5.5	1.00	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,457	1,372	1,460	1,351	109	1,677,157	-85	-5.83%	57.52%	1,350	1,390	48.4	1.39	4.4%	0.95
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	1,000	983	1,005	970	35	2,155,444	-17	-1.70%	15.38%	970	995	27.9	2.31	5.4%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	385	382	385	379	6	2,436,722	-2	-0.52%	10.09%	382	388	NM	1.04	4.0%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,108	1,178	1,180	1,085	95	20,697,713	73	6.61%	24.66%	1,145	1,180	2.7	1.28	1.6%	1.47
605	Zain	Telecommunications	627	614	628	601	27	12,845,821	-14	-2.23%	3.19%	613	617	14.1	2.24	3.7%	1.33
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,229	3,290	3,319	3,161	158	1,702,530	61	1.89%	2.05%	3,286	3,315	7.2	3.59	12.1%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	218	219	219	217	2	2,632,977	2	0.92%	0.46%	217	222	NM	0.70	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,680	1,737	1,745	1,680	65	1,873,181	48	2.84%	34.65%	1,700	1,770	NM	16.56	1.8%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	333	356	370	330	40	117,624,245	24	7.23%	28.06%	356	370	24.4	2.75	3.4%	1.16
821	Warba Bank	Banking	281	278	282	277	5	6,571,407	-4	-1.42%	1.46%	278	280	21.2	2.75	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	583	579	583	577	6	2,755,631	-2	-0.34%	-1.70%	579	585	18.0	1.63	2.7%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	397	407	410	392	18	7,056,841	9	2.26%	2.30%	400	408	NM	1.70	2.5%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	223	224	225	222	3	3,612,980	1	0.45%	-1.75%	222	224	19.0	3.97	4.0%	0.58
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,719	2,660	2,719	2,610	109	499,101	-50	-1.85%	31.68%	2,600	2,700	34.1	9.46	2.4%	0.68

* As of end of week closing

Business

The lots of low- and no-cost ways to halt global warming

Humanity has less than 3 years to halt rise of carbon emissions

PARIS: Not only do we have the tools to slash emissions and curb global warming by 2030, but half of available carbon-cutting options are cost-free or very cheap, UN climate experts say. There is no silver bullet, but a mosaic of actions—from ramping up solar and wind technology, to economy-wide energy efficiencies—were identified by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as low hanging fruit.

The IPCC said humanity has less than three years to halt the rise of planet-warming carbon emissions, and less than a decade to slash them by 43 percent from 2019 levels to give us a shot at capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius. But current policies support continued fossil fuel use and are taking the world in the wrong direction, the IPCC said, in a flagship report on how to avoid catastrophic warming, published on Monday.

Despite the tight timeline, the IPCC said the existing carbon-cutting potential across sectors "is sufficient to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to half of the current level or less". While this requires taking action across a wide range of options, the report said that measures that are low-cost "make up more than half of this potential and are available for all sectors". "The market benefits of some options exceed their costs," it added.

Wind and solar

In 2019, total emissions were 59 billion tons, or gigatons, of CO₂ or its equivalent in other greenhouse gases. The range of options identified would enable a reduction in emissions of 31 to 44 gigatons by 2030. There are four key areas where the total potential for carbon reduction is highest between now and the end of the decade—solar and wind energy, reductions in deforestation, and restoration of forests and other ecosystems.

Of those, solar and wind are also among the cheapest options available thanks to the steep drop in the unit costs of these technologies—down 85 and 55 percent respectively between 2010 and 2019, according to the report. This "demonstrates that with the right policy incentives and economic frameworks, climate change mitigation can be financed at scale and relatively quickly," said Michael Wilkins, head of the Centre For Climate Finance And Investment at Imperial College Business School.

More investment in solar could see an emissions reduction of between two and seven gigatons of CO₂ equivalent by 2030. Wind energy could save between 2.1 and 5.6 gigatons. Most of that potential, according to the report, would have essentially negative lifetime costs because they are cheaper than

fossil fuel alternatives. The reduction of methane emissions in the production of fossil energies is also mostly low cost. Other energy generation options have a lower overall potential, with a higher cost, such as nuclear power and hydroelectricity.

Food and forests

Protecting and restoring natural habitats is the second most significant area for reducing CO₂ emissions. Forests are crucial for absorbing CO₂ generated by human activities, and the IPCC found that limiting deforestation and the destruction of grasslands could reduce net emissions between three and almost eight gigatons, largely at a low cost. Restoring these types of ecosystems would save one to five gigatons. But action in this category would be at the more expensive end of the range considered by the IPCC. Shifting to "sustainable" diets and reducing waste food could save more than two gigatons, the IPCC said, but it did not give a cost estimate because of wide global variability and a lack of data.

'Fair balance'

The transport sector is notable for the fact that no single option has a particularly large potential to reduce emissions. But almost all of the potential measures—switching to public transport and bicy-

cles, fuel efficiency in road vehicles, shipping and aviation—are associated with negative costs. In the construction sector, reduction in energy demand and efficiencies in things like lighting are seen as the lowest cost options, albeit with limited potential.

The construction of new highly energy efficient buildings have the greatest potential (between less than one and more than two gigatons), although costs are towards the higher end. In industry, meanwhile, most of the options—beyond improving energy efficiency and cutting other greenhouse gas emissions—are associated with higher costs. But the sector still has significant potential for reducing emissions, in particular the switch to less carbon-intensive energy sources.

"The costs of climate protection are economically absolutely feasible when examined on a global scale and over generations," said Elmar Kriegler, of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, who was one of the IPCC authors. But, he said, costs vary significantly from region to region, with developing countries facing a relatively higher price tag to move away from fossil fuels. "That is why a fair balance is crucial, not only within individual countries but also internationally. Because one thing is clear: The benefits of climate protection clearly exceed its costs," he added. — AFP

Samsung forecasts Q1 operating profit

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics expects operating profits for the first quarter to rise 50.3 percent, the South Korean tech giant said in a statement Thursday, despite global supply chain woes. The world's biggest smartphone maker forecast 2022 first-quarter operating profits of about 14.1 trillion won (\$11.6 billion), up from 9.4 trillion won in the same quarter last year. Samsung did not provide details on the performance of its various divisions. The company is expected to release its full results on April 28.

Analysts said the forecast was likely driven by strong smartphone sales, but warned of an expected drop in profits in the memory chip division. "Price decline in memory chips will be contained on the back of stronger than expected demand," Kim Un-ho, an analyst at IBK Investment & Securities, said in a report. Profits in Samsung's mobile business are expected to soar by 55.8 percent compared with Q4 to over 4.1 trillion won, offsetting an anticipated six percent decline in profits from its memory chips division, the report said.

With memory chips now used in a wide-ranging array of devices and cloud servers—essential for remote working in the pandemic era—the sector has become less dependent on seasonally-driven demand for gadgets such as smartphones and laptops. Last year saw a surge in chip prices amid strong demand for those used in personal devices and data centres, helping Samsung hit record annual sales. Going forward, Kim forecast the conglomerate would make 60.5 trillion won in operating profits for 2022 overall, a 17 percent increase on-year.

Smartphone app

But Samsung's smartphones division was in hot water in its native South Korea recently over a pre-installed app called Game Optimizations Service on the latest Galaxy S phone lineup. Designed to fine-tune system performances, consumers claim it actually throttled the speed of thousands of non-gaming apps.

The issue forced Samsung's vice chairman, Han Jong-hee, to apologize at a shareholders' meeting last month, and prompted a class action by nearly 2,000 consumers seeking 300,000 won in compensation each. But sales of its latest Galaxy S22 series are likely to exceed one million units in South Korea on Friday in the first six weeks of release, selling at a 20 percent faster pace than the previous S21 edition. "It is a significant feat considering global supply chain woes," Samsung said in a press release Wednesday.

While the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on the world economy, it has helped many tech companies boom. The shift to working from home during the pandemic has boosted demand for devices powered by Samsung's chips as well as home appliances such as televisions and washing machines. The world's biggest memory chip maker, Samsung Electronics has aggressively stepped up investment in its semiconductor business as the world battles chip shortages that have hit everything from cars and home appliances to smartphones and gaming consoles.

In November, it announced a new microchip factory in Texas, a \$17 billion investment. The plant is expected to be operational by the end of 2024. The firm is also investing in the development of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics and 5G/6G communications. Samsung Electronics is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group, by far the largest of the family-controlled empires known as chaebols that dominate business in South Korea. The conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to about one-fifth of South Korea's gross domestic product. — AFP

Gulf Bank raises awareness over cryptocurrency and forex risks

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment toward social sustainability, and its keenness to enhance financial literacy and education, Gulf Bank is keen to direct its customers to proper channels of saving and investment and educate the general public about the risks of unsafe investments. The initiative has been an ongoing priority that the Bank has been promoting through its various channels, including social media, its website, and more.

Earlier this year, Gulf Bank affirmed that it will continue to spearhead various efforts in support of the Diraya campaign in its second year. Initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association, the Diraya campaign is an awareness campaign that aims to spread financial literacy in society, raise awareness of the role of the banking sector, and promote the various services that banks offer to their customers.

Deputy Director General of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank, Tareq Al-Saleh, stated that Kuwaiti banks provide various products and services that assist customers in managing their investments and increasing their returns. These products include investment deposits, investment funds and various



Tareq Al-Saleh

savings accounts, which are subject to the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association, and are tailored toward clients' various requirements, according to the acceptable risk level determined by each client. He pointed out that banks offer both short and long-term investment plans that enhance customer's abilities to prepare for future plans, including children's education, personal projects, retirement, and more. Investment plans assist clients in saving money in a bank account by promoting regular savings and investments in order to achieve accumulated returns, with a pre-specified investment period.

He warned against high-risk investments, which are not subject to a supervisory body regulating their work, and which do not fall under the jurisdiction of a legal code that can protect investors. These high-risk investments include cryptocurrencies, as digital currencies are not subject to the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait, nor are they under the control of any global or national institution.

He noted that multiple people have lost their money after investing in cryptocurrencies in the hope of achieving quick financial profits from a sudden increase in cryptocurrencies' value. Advertisements that promise huge profits from investing in cryptocurrency have also added to the allure of this type of

'Cyber Rodeo' bash fetes new Tesla plant in Texas

SAN FRANCISCO: Electric car lovers are flocking to Austin for an enormous party Thursday celebrating a new Tesla "gigafactory" in Texas the size of 100 professional soccer fields. Online buzz has swelled ever since Tesla's colorful but controversial founder and chief executive Elon Musk tweeted word of the event, with reports of perhaps as many as 15,000 guests taking part in the official plant opening. Tesla owners posted plans for cross country road trips, while others urged the uninvited to just show up and find a way inside.

The company has remained mum about details of the extravaganza, but rumors abound, including reports of an open bar and concert at Tesla's 74-acre home in Texas. Tesla fans have posted drone footage and other video showing sightings of what could be new vehicle models on display at the event. "I got a golden ticket!" Luke Metger, president of a Texas environmental organization, tweeted on the eve of the party, attaching a screen-shot of his invite to the

HUAWEI MatePad: The ultimate tablet

KUWAIT: Being portable and more versatile than a laptop makes a tablet the ideal choice for many use cases. Tablets are especially handy for students to attend online classes, take notes, sketch diagrams, and make artworks. Even professionals prefer tablets when they want a device that they can carry with them easily. The all-new HUAWEI MatePad is a new-generation mid-range tablet powered by HarmonyOS.

It comes with a great 10.4-inch 2K FullView Display and immersive sound thanks to four speakers that are finely tuned by Harman Kardon. The tablet is also compatible with the HUAWEI M-Pencil Package (2nd generation) and offers multiple smart ways to get tasks done with cool futuristic Super Device features in addition to a wide range of notetaking apps.

Stunning display and cinematic audio

The display quality of the HUAWEI MatePad allows it to be an all-rounded tablet suitable for productivity, entertainment, and learning. The HUAWEI MatePad has a 10.4-inch 2K HUAWEI FullView Display with an 84% screen-to-body ratio. Instead of being all about looks, the design of this tablet also has



AUSTIN: Workers set up for the grand opening party at the new Tesla Giga Texas manufacturing facility on April 6, 2022 in Austin, Texas. — AFP

Cyber Rodeo - Giga Texas gala. But will Texas be Musk's land of promise?

The move to a US state known for conservative Republican politics is seen by some as Musk stepping away from the liberal Silicon Valley culture in which he made his fortune. The South African serial entrepreneur

is now ranked the world's richest man. He founded Tesla in Silicon Valley in 2003, but shifted its headquarters to Texas late last year. Musk has clashed with California regulators, particularly when health precautions mandated at the height of the pandemic closed Tesla's Fremont plant. — AFP

practical benefits. The micro-curved frame not only makes the gadget appear slimmer but also makes it easier to hold. Besides, the tablet only weighs 450grams.

It also has both TUV Rheinland Low Blue Light and Flicker-Free certifications, meaning that the screen has less impact on the eyes. Even in a small form factor, the HUAWEI MatePad comes with a quad-channel, quad-speaker sound system, as well as professional tuning by Harman Kardon, giving you the ultimate immersive sound experience

Tablet to unleash your creativity

In the digital age, the best way to draw and sketch ideas is with a stylus on a tablet. It also makes it easy for you to take notes and annotate documents. You can do all that and more with the HUAWEI MatePad as it supports the second-gen HUAWEI M-Pencil. This tablet brings you a realistic writing experience to improve your work efficiency and make it more enjoyable. The stylus brings system-level capabilities, including HUAWEI FreeScript, Annotate and Take snippet, making handwriting input more efficient and convenient.

However, that is not all. You can also use the HUAWEI Smart Keyboard with the tablet whenever you want to type with your both hands or use it as a laptop. The HUAWEI Smart Keyboard supports



Bluetooth connectivity and features a 1.3mm key for comfortable typing, even when typing with both hands for an extended period. Now you can preview the content of an app by hovering the mouse cursor over it and performing convenient control through clicking.

There is also some comprehensive improvements in the multitasking capability of the tablet: The Multi-Window simplifies operations by allowing you to open up to four windows of various apps at once, while the App Multiplier allows full utilisation of the apps in landscape orientation. With the App Multiplier, you can open multiple windows of the same app, allowing you to make the most out of the tablet's display.



Istanbul, other Turkish cities celebrate Ramadan

Turks welcome the holy month of Ramadan by decorating their mosques all over Turkey, as 89,000 mosques are lit up from sunset until dawn to celebrate Ramadan with lights called mahya, held in Sultanahmet area in Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey. The holy month is characterized by a boom in trade,

therefore, the Turkish people buy their needs of goods, food and favorite Ramadan sweets, just as other families do in most Islamic countries. Neighborhoods and shops in Istanbul are witnessing remarkable activity on Ramadan, as shop owners adorn their shops with decorations, and merchants take advantage of the fasting season

to import dates and manufacture well-known Turkish Ramadan sweets.

In this regard, the official at the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in Istanbul Ekmeleddin Mehmet Ihsanoglu said in a statement to KUNA Thursday that Ramadan in Turkey is characterized by its wonderful atmosphere and is an occasion for celebra-

tion, gathering and carrying out various activities. One of the things Turks do during Ramadan is to go perform Tarawih prayers after eating, while in the Hagia Sophia Mosque in Istanbul on the first day of the holy month, the Tarawih prayer was done for the first time in 88 years. For two years, Tarawih prayers were prohibited as

part of measures to confront the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is reported that one of the ways to wake people in Turkey at dawn is by beating the drums in the streets and neighborhoods while people are dressed in traditional costumes and singing Turkish songs.— KUNA

Beatles fan's lost letter turns to story of pandemic hope

Like so many victims of COVID-19, Brazilian Karlo Schneider never got to say goodbye to his family. Unlike most, he managed to get them a message a year after he died. Schneider's family, who describe him as a die-hard romantic with an infectious love of life, kissed him farewell when the Brazilian hotel manager left for work one morning in February 2021, and never held him again. Schneider came down with coronavirus symptoms that day, and stayed at the hotel to avoid infecting his family. Their only contact after that was in calls from his sick bed and one socially distanced look-the badly ill father in his car on his way to the hospital, his wife and three kids waving from the house.

But Schneider, who died at 40 that March, delivered his loved ones a letter a year later, with a little help from his friends, the Beatles and a viral video. The story starts at a dinner party in 2006, when Schneider, then expecting his first child, got the idea for he and his friends to write letters to his unborn daughter to open on her 15th birthday. A passionate Beatles fan with hundreds of rare records, he stashed the letters inside his most precious possession: his vinyl collection.

"He loved that kind of thing," says his wife, Alcione, who was six months pregnant at the time. "He was always asking things like, 'If you could leave a message in a bottle for someone in the



Undated handout picture released by the Schneider family on April 1, 2022 showing Karlo Schneider holding a beattles record next to his daughter Barbara Schneider (right), in Caico, Rio Grande do Norte state, Brazil. — AFP photos

future, what would you say?" He was the kind of dad who created elaborate treasure hunts for his kids, the kind of friend who showed up at dawn on your birthday to surprise you with a present, she says. Such escapades were so common at the Schneiders' home in the northeastern city of Natal that they soon forgot all about the letters, she says.

'Find those letters'

Fast forward 14 years, and the pandemic was wreaking worldwide havoc. Like many, Schneider lost his job. Struggling financially, he decided to sell most of his record collection. Things looked to be getting better in early 2021, when he got a job at another hotel in Mossoro, 280 kilometers (175 miles) away. But he soon caught Covid-19. It was the start of a brutal second wave that saw more than 3,000 people a day dying in Brazil. It happened very fast, says Alcione, 41. The moving truck arrived in Mossoro with their things on February 12. A week later, Schneider got sick. On March 2, he was intubated. By March 11, he was gone.

It was only later, sifting memories in her mind, that she remembered those long-ago letters. The impact hit slowly, she says. Barbara, their first-born, would be turning 15 in March, a week before the first anniversary of her dad's death. "Oh my God. I have to find those letters," she remembers thinking.

Unsaid goodbye

After failing to locate them in Schneider's remaining albums, she realized what had happened. With her blessing, Schneider's friends posted a video on Beatle-maniac discussion forums asking for whoever bought the albums to return the letters. The video soon went viral, inspiring a flurry of stories in the Brazilian media. Last September, a man called Alcione saying he had bought some vintage records around that time. He hadn't opened them yet, he said. He had himself lost his son to COVID-19, and was struggling with depression. But he promised he would look when he could.

In December, the man called again, asking her to meet him in Natal. There, he gave her Schneider's copy of John Lennon's "Imagine," with three letters inside. Barbara opened the one from Schneider on her birthday last month, with Alcione at her side. "He wrote that he was so in love with my mom. He talked about the Beatles. He asked if Paul McCartney was still alive," Barbara says, between laughter and tears. At the end of the letter, Schneider's blue pen ran out of ink.

The message fades, then ends abruptly-reminding his family of the way he died, his lungs weakening to nothing. "It was surreal," says Alcione. But "it was so, so good to get that letter," says Barbara, a poised, precocious high-schooler. "We never got to say goodbye. This gave me a chance to see him again."— AFP



From Kyiv to the Venice Biennale: Ukrainian artwork saved from war

On the day Russia invaded Ukraine, Maria Lanko loaded her car with several works of art and, like thousands of other Kyiv residents, headed west. One of those pieces, a monumental installation by Ukrainian artist Pavlo Makov, was set to be displayed in Ukraine's pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In New York on Wednesday, the curator told her story at the art gallery of Ukrainian-American Jim Kempner.

Speaking to a room of journalists, Lanko explained how she had to leave behind the massive base of the "Fountain of Exhaustion" and how she worked her way over six days through Romania, Hungary and Austria before arriving at the Italian coast. Eighty countries, including Ukraine, will have a pavilion at the 59th Biennale, which is set to begin on April 23 and runs through November.

Lanko thinks that now more than ever, it's important for Ukrainian art to be displayed, to help rebuff the common idea in the West that it is a subgroup of Russian art. "Nobody can tell the difference between these two countries and our cultures, but they're not just different, I believe they're quite the opposite," she said. Russia will not have a pavilion at this year's Biennale, after the country's organizers at the event protested

their leadership's decision to invade their neighbor.

"There is no place for art when civilians are dying under the fire of missiles, when citizens of Ukraine are hiding in shelters, when Russian protesters are getting silenced," said one of the pavilion's curators, Kirill Savchenkov, after his resignation. Lanko, one of the curators of the Ukrainian pavilion, arrived in Venice with "Fountain of Exhaustion" unbroken. The work, which has been reconstructed on site, consists of 78 funnels mounted in a triangle.

Water flows easily out of the top funnel, but after being split into the 77 subsequent funnels, it drips very slowly into the collecting basin—"symbolizing the exhaustion on a personal and global level," Lanko explained. Lanko's visit to New York-home to many Ukrainian-Americans and the center of the US art world-also served to raise money for the "Ukrainian Emergency Art Fund," which she and her co-founders established to "ensure the continuity and development of the Ukrainian cultural process during the war." She said that with the support of nearly 200 artists and others in the culture world, she raised more than \$52,000 on the trip.—AFP



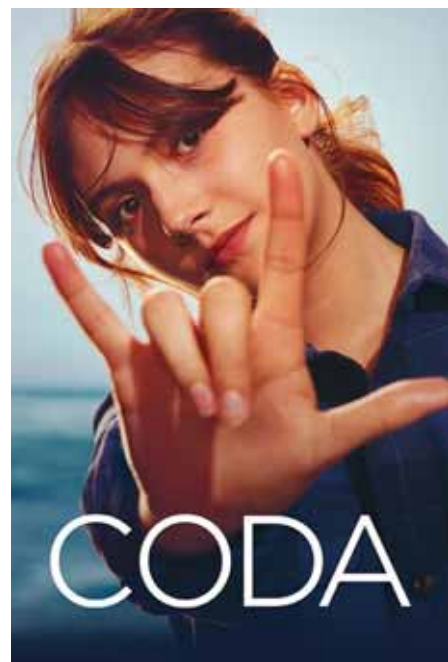
Kyiv's The Naked Room co-founder and curator Maria Lanko discusses her journey to Venice, Italy, through war-torn Ukraine to evacuate 'Fountain of Exhaustion' by artist Pavlo Makov during a press conference. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Streamers come of age after 'CODA' Oscar win

Almost buried by the attention surrounding *The Slap* at the Oscars was a historic first: a streaming film won best picture, taking Hollywood's top prize from the legacy studios that have long dominated the town. If Will Smith had not mounted the stage and hit Chris Rock, the best picture win for Apple TV+ crowd-pleaser "CODA" would have been the talk of Tinseltown ever since the Academy Awards.

"There was clearly going to be a streaming service break through that barrier. And I think it's an important break," said Kendall Phillips, a Syracuse



University professor who specializes in pop culture. "I do think it's going to open up a much wider body of films to be taken more seriously by Academy voters." For months before the ceremony at the Dolby Theatre, streaming's coming of age had appeared likely to be the main storyline from the 2022 Oscars.

The smart money for best picture was initially on arty Western "The Power of the Dog," Jane Campion's brooding meditation on toxic masculinity. The film, starring Benedict Cumberbatch as a sexually repressed cowboy, was a Netflix title that the streamer-the biggest player on the small screen-had spent heavily to promote as it chased Hollywood's ultimate stamp of approval. But a late surge from "CODA" as audiences warmed to its charming cast of loveable characters-and its hopeful message of a deaf family overcoming adversity-pushed it into the top slot.

Money

Streaming services first barged their way into Hollywood's premier awards in 2017, when Amazon's "Manchester by the Sea" bagged a best picture nomination. It lost out to "Moonlight," at the ceremony when "La La Land" was briefly and incorrectly announced as the year's winner. Netflix now has a growing stable of best picture nominations-including "Roma," "The Irishman," "Marriage Story," "Mank," "The Trial of the Chicago 7," and "Don't Look Up."

For the past three years, Netflix has snagged the most Oscar nominations of any distributor. This year alone it had 27,



though only won one-best director for Campion. Apple TV+, by contrast, received its first-ever Oscar nomination last year, and this year managed three wins from six nods.

Trade title Variety reported Apple had lavished more than \$10 million on its Oscars campaign-about as much as it cost to make "CODA." Netflix spent heavily on its bid for Oscar glory-Los Angeles was awash for months with advertisements puffing its prize bull.

For some in the industry, all that money being thrown around was a little difficult to swallow. "Everywhere you drive in LA you are faced with a billboard saying it's 'The Best Film of the Year,'" one

anonymous director told Indiewire. "If anyone is to blame for pushback it's Netflix themselves for pushing really hard on the movie."

Modern-day Medicis

There was off-the-record griping from some Academy members who felt they were unable to vote for a streaming movie because of a general distaste for the upstart format. For a start, there's nostalgia for the medium. Many moviemakers bemoan the solitary experience of watching on a small screen at home, and talk warmly of the joy of being in a dark cinema with scores of other movie lovers.

Kevin Costner emerged at the Oscars to award best director with an elegy to the artform (and some of the most eloquent speechifying of the night). "Once I too was a boy, in that magic castle of story and narrative, my seat there in the flickering dark of imagination... projected phantoms painting portraits of poets past," he waxed.

But, says Phillips of Syracuse University, audiences ultimately care about the content-and streamers are up to the task. "It's increasingly difficult to determine where [a film is] coming from, whether it's a streaming service production, or big studio production. Those lines have probably blurred forever," he said. Audiences who went to see "CODA" during its limited run in movie theaters didn't care who made it, he said. "That boundary, where one side is the motion picture theater experience, and the other side is the at-home streaming experience, I think that boundary is probably never going to be reestablished, at least the way it was, for many decades."

Increasingly, filmmakers themselves are less bothered about the distinction. "Netflix is not what I would have wanted historically, but they're a little like the Medicis of our time," Campion told the Los Angeles Times last year, referring to the moneyed patrons that funded many of the best-known pieces of Renaissance art. "The people at the top do love cinema; they want to see good things. When you've got a lot of money, beauty counts." — AFP

The metaverse threat: 'TV will die with its audience'

TV companies will need to radically adapt themselves to the fast-evolving world of online entertainment if they hope to survive, experts have warned. Broadcasters are already playing catch-up with online gaming giants in the battle for the attention of young audiences and the advertising dollars that follow. On the horizon is the so-called "metaverse"-a loose term covering the growing eco-system of interactive online worlds, games and 3D meeting places that are already attracting millions of users.



While older consumers are still wedded to traditional TV, viewership among under-35s has halved in a decade, according to Statista, and will drop precipitously as the metaverse develops. "Young people have evolved from passive spectators of TV to active players, and they've turned away from screens to smartphones," said Frederic Cavazza, co-founder of Sysk, a French firm spe-

cializing in digital transformation. "TV channels are going to die with their audiences."

'Part of the story'

To reach young people, broadcasters will have to compete with gaming platforms like Roblox, Fortnite and Minecraft-seen as precursors to the metaverse-that are already establishing a dominant position. Half of all 9-12-year-olds in the US use Roblox at least once a week, according to media research firm Dubit-doing everything from playing games to watching concerts to just hanging out with friends.

The audiences can be enormous: 33 million people watched rapper Lil Nas X perform on Roblox in 2020 — more than three times the number that watched him on TV at the Grammys this week. Broadcasters must choose whether they are sticking with a shrinking market for traditional TV programming, or start bringing their characters and brands into metaverse platforms, said Matthew Warneford, co-founder of Dubit. "It means bringing people into a world, making them part of the story, playing alongside their friends-the same way that Disneyland allows you and your friends to be in their world with Mickey Mouse," he said.

TV companies have time to adapt, but they face a major challenge in catering at once to older people watching traditional broadcasts, middle-aged people shifting to streaming and young people wanting interactive and social entertainment.

"If we want to stay relevant, we will have to position ourselves across all these usages," said Kati Bremme, head of innovation for France Televisions. The national broadcaster is still in research mode, she said, toying with augmented and virtual reality to build immersive cultural and sporting experiences. — AFP

Iranian director Farhadi faces legal action over alleged plagiarism

Iranian director and two-time Academy Award-winner Asghar Farhadi is facing legal action over accusations that he plagiarized his latest feature film "A Hero" from a former student. The film-winner of the Grand Prix in last year's prestigious Cannes Film Festival-tells the story of an Iranian inmate who gains fame after finding a purse of gold coins and tracking down its owner, instead of keeping it for himself.

Farhadi's former student Azadeh Masihzadeh claims that "A Hero" is based on her documentary "All Winners All Losers". On Sunday, she was allowed to proceed with legal action against the director based on her copyright claim. But the film's producer, Alexandre Mallet-Guy, said on Tuesday that he believed the case will be thrown out. "We firmly believe that the court will dismiss Ms. Masihzadeh, who cannot claim ownership on matters in the public domain," he said in a statement.



Asghar Farhadi

He noted that the story behind the film "has been disclosed in both press articles and TV reports years before Ms. Masihzadeh's documentary was published". The "story of this former prisoner finding gold in the street and giving it back to its owner is only the starting point of the plot of A Hero", Mallet-Guy added. "The remaining is Asghar's pure creation."

Farhadi's lawyer, Kaveh Rad, wrote on Instagram on Monday that there were "three complaints against the movie", two of which were dropped. The two dropped complaints concerned Masihzadeh's revenue claim and a defamation lawsuit filed by the real-life prisoner depicted in the film. Rad added that the decision to proceed with the copyright claim would be re-examined in a second court and afterwards in a court of appeal. Farhadi, who received two Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film for "A Separation" in 2011 and "The Salesman" in 2016, has not commented on the issue. The 49-year-old director is known for films that tackle everyday challenges in people's lives. — AFP



Number of spider species creeps up to 50,000

There are now 50,000 known different species of spider crawling the Earth, the World Spider Catalog announced Wednesday — and there might be another 50,000 out there. The WSC, based at the Natural History Museum of Bern in the Swiss capital, said the 50,000th spider registered is the *Gururium minuano*, which belongs to the Salticidae family of jumping spiders and hunts its prey on shrubs and trees in southern Brazil, Uruguay, and around Buenos Aires. It was described by the arachnologist Kimberly S. Marta and her colleagues from Brazil and is named

after the now-extinct Minuane people who lived in the area.

The first scientific description of a spider was in 1757 and while it has taken 265 years to reach 50,000, the rate of discovery is steadily increasing, and it is thought it could take less than 100 years to discover the same number again. "We estimate that there are still approximately 50,000 more spider species out there to discover," said the WSC's publishers. The spider catalogue is freely available on the museum's website. "Spiders are the most important predators in Earth's terrestrial habitats, and their ecological significance should not be underestimated," the museum said. "Consuming some 400 to 800 million tons of insects every year, they are the most important regulators of insect populations. Accordingly, they are also of fundamental importance to humans." — AFP

Oscars meeting to discuss Smith sanctions expedited after actor resigns

Possible sanctions against Will Smith for slapping Chris Rock at the Oscars last month will be discussed on Friday, 10 days earlier than previously scheduled, the body that oversees the awards said. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences brought forward its board meeting for procedural reasons after Smith resigned his membership from the group, meaning the "King Richard" actor's removal from the group is no longer on the table.

A possible suspension or expulsion for Smith would have meant a mandated longer wait before discussions could begin, in order to give him time to submit a written statement defending his behavior. With such a wait no longer necessary, it "is in the best interest of all involved for this to be handled in a timely fashion," said Academy president David Rubin, in a letter to board members Wednesday. Smith resigned from the Academy last Friday, five days after he assaulted comedian 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."

Attendees at the Dolby Theatre last month 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 hair. Jada Pinkett Smith has alopecia, a condition that causes hair to fall out. Half an hour after the astonishing attack, Smith was awarded the best actor Oscar for his role in sports biopic "King Richard." Smith-only the fifth Black man to win the movie

world's highest individual award for an actor-could have faced a rare expulsion from the Academy, but his resignation preempted 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," said Smith. It is unclear what, if any, actions will be taken against Smith by the Academy. Some have called for Smith to be stripped of his best actor Oscar. Rock's brother Kenny Rock told the Los Angeles Times that Smith "belittled (Chris Rock) in front of millions of people that watch the show." Stripping Smith's award is considered unlikely, as the likes of Harvey Weinstein and Roman Polanski did not have their Oscars revoked in the wake of scandals. Traditionally the best actor Oscar winner is invited to present the following year's best actress award-an honor which could now be called into question. "I'm hoping the Academy invites me back," said Smith during his tearful acceptance speech at last month's gala. — AFP

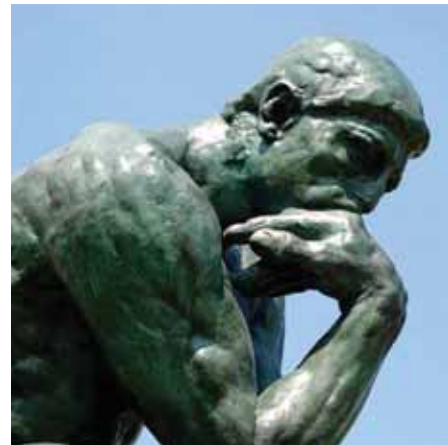
Rodin 'Thinker' auction expected to reach up to 14 million euros

A cast of "The Thinker" by Auguste Rodin will be auctioned in Paris on June 30, expected to reach between 9 and 14 million euros (\$10-\$15 million), Christie's said Thursday. One of the most iconic works of art in the world, it features a man resting his chin on his hand and was originally conceived as a representation of Italian author Dante. Around 40 copies are in existence-many of them made after the artist's death in 1917. The copy on sale in Paris, with black and brown patina, was part of a private Parisian collection and was made in

1928 by the Alexis Rudier foundry that cast several of Rodin's most famous bronzes.

"The Thinker" was initially conceived as a much smaller sculpture in the 1880s, part of Rodin's "Gates of Hell" series based on Dante's "The Divine Comedy". It was later enlarged and became a standalone piece. The French state commissioned 26 copies of the statue between 1919 and 1969, and there have been long-running legal battles over other versions of the statue. As well as copies at the Rodin Museum and his grave just outside Paris, some of the most valuable are found at Columbia University in New York, the Legion of Honor in San Francisco and the Ca'Pesaro museum in Venice.

The statue being auctioned at Christie's will go on tour from Friday, showing in New York and Hong Kong before being presented in Paris from June 23. The record for a Rodin "Thinker" was set at a Sotheby's auction in New York in 2013, when one sold for \$15.2 million. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

Picture of dresses on crosses wins World Press Photo

A poignant image of girls' dresses draped on crosses near Kamloops in Canada, where the remains of some 215 children were found last year on Thursday won the 2022 World Press Photo of the Year award. Edmonton-based documentary photographer Amber Bracken shot the evocative picture which a judge said "is the kind... that sears itself into your memory and inspires a kind of sensory reaction." To the right, little girls' dresses in red and ochre hang on crosses next to a highway at Kamloops, a small city in British Columbia, once the venue of a so-called residential school set up a century ago to forcibly assimilate Canada's Indigenous population.

To the left, a rainbow lands near where the mass grave was discovered last year, the first in a series that forced Canadians to confront their painful past. Bracken's picture for the New York Times comes as Pope Francis on Friday apologized to Indigenous communities for the abuse committed at church-run residential schools in Canada. Numerous investigations into the former residential schools are underway across Canada after the discovery of mass unmarked graves, with more than 4,000 children believed to be missing, according to authorities.

Bracken's photo was "a quiet



moment of global reckoning for the history of colonization, not only in Canada but around the world," said Rena Effendi, one of the judges. "It's a huge honor to win it, but I feel it's not a photo that could possibly belong to me," Bracken, 38, told AFP. "It was a representation of something that was created by the community to honor and remember their lost children," said Bracken. This year's winning photographs continued in the theme of highlighting the world's Indigenous communities.

Australian documentary lensman Matthew Abbott took the first prize in the Story of the Year category with a series of blazing images, showing how the native Nawarddeken people of the remote Arnhem Land used fire as a land-management tool to combat climate change.

By a practice called "cool burning", Indigenous Australians help prevent wild-

fires — which has devastated other parts of Australia due to increased heatwaves—thereby reducing the output of climate-heating carbon dioxide. "This has been done for tens-of-thousands of years, but now with the climate changing so rapidly, these practices are now being fully tested," Abbott told AFP. In other categories, Brazilian veteran photographer Lalo de Almeida won the Long Term Project Award for his pictures the impact of deforestation of the Amazon on Indigenous communities.

In the Open Format Award Isadora Romero won for her video exploring her family history in Columbia. Global winners each receive a 6,000-euro (\$6,500) reward and their work is to be exhibited in from April 15 in Amsterdam before being shown around the world. —AFP

Famed Japan manga artist Fujiko Fujio A dies

Famed Japanese manga artist Fujiko Fujio A, known for beloved children's cartoons including "Ninja Hattori" and "Little Ghost Q-Taro", has died aged 88, local media reported on Thursday. The artist, whose real name was Motoo Abiko, was found outside his home near Tokyo on Thursday, private broadcaster TBS and others said. Police declined to confirm the reports to AFP, but tributes to Abiko were tweeted by other artists and those in the publishing industry.

Abiko was the eldest son of a monk at a historic temple in central Toyama region. But his family left the temple after the death of Abiko's father when he was in fifth grade. "My father's death changed my life the most. If he had not died, I think I would have been a monk," he told the Asahi Shimbun daily in 2020. In high school, he became friends with Hiroshi Fujimoto, who later created Japan's much-loved cartoon "Doraemon", and the pair started to work together.

They formed a partnership that debuted in 1951, jointly producing works under the pen name "Fujiko Fujio", and shared a Tokyo apartment with other famous manga artists including Osamu Tezuka. One of the duo's early works was "Q-Taro", about a good-natured, mischievous ghost child who starts living with a human family, which found fans in Japan



This picture shows Japanese manga artist Fujiko Fujio A, whose real name is Motoo Abiko, in Tokyo. — AFP photos

as well as abroad.

Abiko also created various manga by himself, including "Ninja Hattori", a ninja who becomes best friends with a regular kid, as well as other works targeted at adults. Despite his long-time association with Fujimoto, Abiko once confessed he was reluctant to read "Doraemon" cartoons too closely. "I've been avoiding reading (them) as a protective measure, because when I read them, I'm influenced by them and think 'I can't draw like this'," he said with a laugh. —AFP



A guest works on her laptop at the Kruger Station in Skukuza, Kruger National Park. — AFP photos



A general view of the indoor dining area at the Kruger Shalati hotel in Skukuza, Kruger National Park.



A general view of the indoor dining area at the Kruger Shalati hotel in Skukuza, Kruger National Park.

South African train makes safari trip, but never moves

Baboons weave their way under the carriages of a train on a bridge. A hippo wades in the river below, while a lone leopard prowls, sniffing for an antelope to make its dinner. In the middle of the Kruger National Park, South Africa's most celebrated wildlife reserve, this luxury train takes passengers—but it never moves. Converted into a boutique hotel, the train provides a gilded lookout from which guests can gaze over the animal kingdom from the golden sunrise until the Milky Way spills across the nighttime sky.

A small platform added to the bridge holds a small round pool, where groups of humans gather at 4:00 pm (1400 GMT) for high tea, with a pleasant late summer breeze. A loud grunt silences the chirping of birds. "It's a hippo," a waiter quickly assures, as guests lean over the railing, hoping to spot it in the muddy Sabie River below. Two round ears stick out from the water. "Adorable," whispers Karen Lane, 56, who came from Johannesburg to celebrate 30 years of marriage to her husband, Rich.

"It's such an experience," says Chichi Mudau, a 36-year-old sales rep with a smart manicure and a Gucci bucket hat. "The place, the service is immaculate. Like a dream come true. I love everything about it." Moments later, the group will leave in open safari trucks to drive up close to giraffes, elephants and dazzles of zebras in their natural habitat—chewing grass, playing in water, and sometimes erupting into fights.

The bridge suspended over this dreamy landscape was abandoned for decades. The hotel won a tender in 2016 to transform it into posh accommodation, with a train that never moves but always has bird's-eye views. In the 1920s, this railway line was the only way into Kruger. But the last locomotive came through in 1979, and the railway fell into disuse.

Monkeys are players
"We went to a train graveyard to find the carriages," said Gavin Ferreira, 39, executive manager of operations. "They were pretty dilapidated. Some had been



A general view of the Kruger Shalati hotel in Skukuza, Kruger National Park.

looted," he told AFP. Repurposed into hotel rooms, the carriages offer "a step back into time," he said. Walking through the cars, they're numbered to 25, but follow the old hotel superstition whereby number 13 is skipped.

Each carriage has only one room, with a massive bed covered in fresh sheets and overstuffed pillows. Sunlight spills

through windows above the tub and sink, for gazing over the river while you brush your teeth. A silk bathrobe waits nearby. The small balcony beckons, but don't forget to close the door. "Monkeys here can get pretty aggressive," warns the butler, and they can come swooping in. When the little grey primates climb onto the bridge, they peer through the panes, looking curi-

ously at guests lying in bed. They're cute, but don't be fooled.

The Kruger Shalati initially expected to cater to Westerners. But when it opened in December 2020, the pandemic prevented them from travelling. South Africans booked it up instead. "The first months, we were fully booked," said reservations manager Ella West. "We need international guest rates for a place like this to get going." Now the train lures more Americans, the voyage made easier by an airstrip just four kilometers (three miles) away, she said.

When night falls, the train gently sways with its guests inside. "It's a natural movement," Ferreira said. "It comes from the expansion and retraction of the metal structured bridge." The heat of the day makes the metal expand, while the cool nights make it contract. "Our clients compliment us on the way it reminds them of a train in movement," he said. "It's a very subtle movement." — AFP



A guest of the Kruger Shalati hotel takes a picture of two hyenas during a game drive through the park in Skukuza.



Guests of the Kruger Shalati hotel enjoy a game drive through the park in Skukuza, Kruger National Park.



An elephant is seen around Skukuza, Kruger National Park.



A buffalo is seen around Skukuza, Kruger National Park.

Sports

Woods defies the odds in quest for sixth Masters title

AUGUSTA, Georgia: Tiger Woods launched his boldest Masters bid yet on Thursday, a quarter-century after his 12-shot triumph at Augusta National heralded a new era in golf. Then, the 21-year-old Woods cemented his superstar status with a record-setting victory that made him the youngest Masters winner, nabbing the first of his current 15 major titles.

His quest for No. 16 comes 14 months after Woods suffered career-threatening injuries to his lower right leg in a February 2021 single-car crash in California. The 46-year-old, who has slumped to 973rd in the world rankings, couldn't even confirm until Tuesday that he planned to tee it up, but make no mistake, Woods has his sights set on a record-equaling sixth Masters victory.

"I don't show up to an event unless I think I can win it," Woods said, expressing complete confidence in every aspect of his game. The challenge will be simply walking the hilly, 7,510-yard Augusta National course for four straight days. "That's going to be the challenge, and it's going to be a challenge of a major marathon," said Woods, who was unable to walk for months.

Woods teed off on Thursday alongside South African Louis Oosthuizen and Chilean Joaquin Niemann. Niemann, who won the Woods-hosted Genesis Invitational at Riviera in February, wasn't born when Woods won his first Masters title in 1997. But he's among a raft of young golfers whose careers were inspired by Woods.

Scottie Scheffler, 25, arrived at Augusta ranked number one in the world after winning his first three US PGA Tour titles in the space of two months. Spain's US Open champion Jon Rahm, 27, can regain the number one ranking he ceded to Scheffler with a first Masters victory, one of five players who can supplant the American this week along with reigning British Open champion Collin Morikawa, US PGA FedEx Cup champion Patrick Cantlay, rising Norwegian star Viktor Hovland and Aussie Cameron Smith.

Northern Ireland's four-time major-winner Rory McIlroy will be trying for the eighth time to complete a career Grand Slam with a Masters victory, while defending champion Hideki Matsuyama of Japan is battling fitness concerns as he tries to join Jack Nicklaus, Nick Faldo and Woods as the only players to win back-to-back Masters titles.

Matsuyama teed off in the group after Woods. Rahm teed off alongside Cantlay and Will Zalatoris, followed by Hovland, in a group with Spieth and Tokyo Olympic



AUGUSTA, Georgia: Tiger Woods of the United States plays his shot from the 18th tee during a practice round prior to the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on April 6, 2022. —AFP

champion Xander Schauffele. McIlroy was in the final group of the day alongside four-time major winner Brooks Koepka and England's Matthew Fitzpatrick. The action official got underway when honorary starters Nicklaus, Gary Player and Tom Watson made the ceremonial first tee shots, after early morning thunderstorms forced a 30-minute delay.

But all the focus is on Woods, and whether he can pull off the most miraculous comeback yet in a career marked as much by his gritty determination to defy pain as by his sublime skill. "It's amazing if you think about where he was at a year ago to now, I don't know how many people, if anybody, could be out here," said 2015 Masters winner Jordan Spieth. "But is anybody surprised?" Woods won the 2008 US Open with a broken leg, then battled through five back surgeries, including at last a spinal fusion, before he won his 15th major title at the 2019 Masters. "I mean, how many

comebacks has he had?" Spieth marveled.

Bombing it

Fred Couples, the 1992 Masters champion who has played his share of rounds - and missed his share as well - with back trouble, said Woods "looked phenomenal" in practice rounds that had patrons at Augusta National buzzing with excitement. "What impresses me the most is he was bombing it," Couples said of Woods's length off the tee. Former PGA Champion Justin Thomas, who Woods refers to as his "little brother" on tour, says Woods's game is "plenty, plenty good enough to play well". So Woods will once again defy the pain and try to defy the odds to move one step closer to Nicklaus's all-time record of 18 major titles. He would become the third-oldest major winner in history and would surpass Nicklaus as the oldest Masters winner by a matter of weeks. —AFP

Verstappen wary of Aussie GP as Leclerc looms

MELBOURNE: World champion Max Verstappen is eyeing a "smooth weekend" to build on his victory in Saudi Arabia, but is wary about a revamped Albert Park circuit as Formula One returns to Melbourne after a two-year hiatus. The 24-year-old Red Bull driver was a relieved man after battling to a thrilling win ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in Jeddah last month.

It was a satisfying triumph for Verstappen after Monaco's Leclerc clinched the season-opening grand prix in Bahrain where the Dutchman failed to finish. The young rivals again shape as the men to beat in the third race of the year, with seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton desperate for improvement from Mercedes on a track where he has taken eight poles, including the last six.

It will be a new experience for all drivers, with Albert Park undergoing its most significant modifications since first hosting a grand prix in 1996. A full resurfacing has taken

place with seven corners modified and two removed, bringing the number of turns down to 14, providing more overtaking opportunities and lap times up to five seconds quicker than in the past.

"It will be interesting to see the track updates, I think they will make quite a big difference, especially in turn six where the most significant change has happened," said Verstappen, who is 20 points behind Leclerc in the drivers' standings. "There should be more overtaking opportunities now too which is always positive. It's going to be interesting to see how the car performs in Australia, the track can sometimes be quite dusty. I hope we can have another smooth weekend as a team."

Verstappen made his Formula One debut in Melbourne in 2015 for Red Bull's junior team Toro Rosso. Hamilton, who has won more Formula One races than any driver in history, has topped the podium twice in Australia, but not since 2015.

His chances of doing so again appear slim on the evidence of the opening two races, where Mercedes struggled with speed and managing downforce, prompting the Briton to complain in Saudi Arabia his car was "undriveable". After being gift-



MELBOURNE: Fans take selfies with Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc of Monaco at the Albert Park Circuit on April 7, 2022, ahead of the 2022 Formula One Australian Grand Prix. —AFP

ed third place in Bahrain, when neither Red Bull finished, he managed just 10th in Jeddah, having qualified 16th. Team boss Toto Wolff is not holding out hope of big improvements in Melbourne. "There won't be a magic fix for the next race weekend," he said.

Albert Park had previously held the season-opening race every year since

1996, but was moved to third on the calendar this time to allow Covid restrictions to ease in Victoria state. Melbourne missed out in 2021 due to strict quarantine and entry regulations, after 2020 was sensationally scrapped just before the first official Friday practice session as concerns spiked following a McLaren staff member testing positive. —AFP

Plate removed from ex-India skipper's skull 60 years on

MUMBAI: Doctors have removed a metal plate from the skull of India's former cricket captain Nari Contractor - 60 years after it was put in following a near-fatal bouncer by West Indies' Charlie Griffith. The nasty blow to the back of his head when facing the Barbados fast bowler in a 1962 tour game put a premature end to Contractor's international career after 31 Tests and left him seriously hurt.

Contractor underwent numerous operations including having the titanium plate installed that same year. His son Hoshedar Contractor told AFP that the former skipper, now 88, was recovering well after the implant was taken out in a Mumbai hospital on Wednesday. "As

a family, our concern was about how he would be able to handle post-op at this age. But he's doing absolutely fine and is mobile," he said. "The doctors Dr Harshad Parekh and Dr Anil Tibrewala did a great job."

Contractor was losing skin in the area of his head where the plate was so they decided to remove it, his son said. Aside from his nasty injury, Contractor is also famous for scoring 81 runs against England at Lord's in 1959 despite a Brian Statham blow that broke two of his ribs. The left-handed opener said in a 2009 interview that when he was hit in Barbados he had been distracted when "somebody opened a window in the pavilion".

Frank Worrell, the West Indies captain at the time, several of his teammates and Indian players donated blood as doctors battled to save Contractor's life. Batsmen did not wear helmets at the time. "There were no sight screens at that time and my 100 percent concentration wasn't on that delivery. I saw it just inches away before it hit me," Contractor told the DNA newspaper. "But it isn't true that I ducked." —AFP

Africa played the game hard but stopped short of swearing or using foul language towards their opponents. Bangladesh cricket operations chief Jalal Yunus said on Tuesday that his board would make an official complaint to the International Cricket Council about what he described as biased umpiring and the "sledging" of the home team.

"I don't think they are justified whatsoever," said Elgar. "We play the game hard (but) if anything we were just giving back what we were getting when we were batting. This is Test cricket. It's a man's environment when it comes to playing at this level and I intend still to play the game hard. We don't swear or use foul language towards the Bangladesh batsmen because we still respect them. I think they need to harden up and maybe play the game at a



MUMBAI: This handout photo received on April 7, 2022 shows 88-year-old former Indian cricket team captain Nari Contractor laying on a hospital bed. —AFP

level they're not used to," said Elgar.

The South African captain said the message to his players was: "We do everything with dignity and we don't throw our badge or our name away. I honestly didn't see any bad sledging out there, even from their side. I just think this is Test cricket and we need to dry our eyes sometimes."

The umpiring in Durban was in the spotlight with an unusually high number of 21 reviews - 11 by Bangladesh and 10 by South Africa - with four reviews upheld for each team. South Africans Marais Erasmus and Adrian Holdstock were the men in charge under the ICC's coronavirus restrictions, leading the Bangladeshis to call for neutral umpires. "The umpiring was tough," said Elgar. "I don't think the wicket helped." —AFP

Other miracle sport comebacks

AUGUSTA, Georgia: With Tiger Woods set to tee off at the Masters just 14 months after suffering severe leg injuries in a car crash, AFP looks at other athletes who beat the odds and returned to action after being involved in accidents or attacks:

Ben Hogan

In 1949 the American golfer Ben Hogan, who had already won three major titles, was at the wheel of his Cadillac alongside his wife when they hit a bus head on. Doctors predicted Hogan would never walk again but the following year he won the the US Open and would go on to add five more major titles.

Niki Lauda

Austrian racing driver Niki Lauda survived the inferno of his Ferrari bursting into flames at the Nurburgring in August 1976, emerging with horrifying facial burns and damaged lungs. Just six weeks later he was back behind the wheel and the following year he won a second world title, adding a third in 1984.



Niki Lauda

Greg LeMond

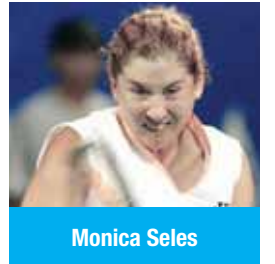
Greg LeMond, the first ever American Tour de France champion, was shot in the back in a hunting accident while on a turkey shoot with his in-laws in 1987. He needed several hours of surgery to remove almost 30 pellets. The injuries took time to heal but two years later LeMond won his second Tour de France in a race that was only decided at the finish line of the 21st stage on the Champs-Elysees, an eight-second advantage giving him victory over Frenchman Laurent Fignon.



Greg LeMond

Monica Seles

Monica Seles was just 19 in 1993 when a mentally unstable and obsessed fan of her rival Steffi Graf leapt from the crowd to stab her between the shoulder blades at a tournament in Hamburg. She was world number one at the time and had won eight Grand Slam titles. It was two full years before she was back on court. Although she would say she never again felt the confidence she had before, she did however add another Grand Slam title to her trophy cabinet with the 1996 Australian Open.



Monica Seles

Lance Armstrong

Texan Lance Armstrong emerged from a Norwegian deluge as surprise cycling world champion in 1993. Three years later he was diagnosed with cancer, which he not only survived, but became an icon for millions when he won one Tour de France after another. After years of denial, Armstrong admitted to doping and is now ostracized by the cycling community.

Paul Pierce

NBA player Paul Pierce was the new face at the Boston Celtics back in Sept 2000 when he suffered a frenzied knife attack in a nightclub, suffering 11 stab wounds to his face, neck and back. But he played the whole of all their 82 matches the following season, scoring an average of 25 points per game. Years later, Pierce revealed he had suffered from paranoia and depression due to the attack and had carried a gun for his protection.



Paul Pierce

Christian Eriksen

Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest during a European Championship match in June 2021. As his teammates surrounded him on the pitch, medics worked to revive him. After being fitted with a defibrillator he resumed his club career with English Premier League side Brentford and last month returned to international action for Denmark, scoring in each of his first two games back. —AFP



Christian Eriksen

Elgar defends South Africans against 'sledging' allegations

PORT ELIZABETH, South Africa: South African Test captain Dean Elgar on Thursday defended his team against allegations of "unbearable sledging" during the first Test against Bangladesh in Durban. He said the Bangladesh players needed to "harden up" if they wanted to play the game at a high level.

Speaking ahead of the second Test, which starts at St George's Park on Friday, Elgar said South

Sports

Celtics march on, Durant sparks Nets comeback

NEW YORK: Jaylen Brown scored 25 points on Wednesday as the Boston Celtics kept their push for the number two playoff seed in the Eastern Conference with a 117-94 victory over the Chicago Bulls. With the identity of the six automatic playoff teams in the East already settled, the only issue remaining is to determine the final playoff seedings.

Boston sits behind leaders Miami with two games remaining in the regular season. With Miami poised to lock up the top spot, needing just one win from their games against Atlanta and lowly Orlando, all eyes are on the battle for second seed where Boston, the Milwaukee Bucks and the Philadelphia 76ers are in a three-way tussle.

Milwaukee and Philadelphia's wins on Tuesday left all three teams locked on 49 wins apiece, meaning the Celtics' 50th win of the season on Wednesday allowed them to move one game clear of their rivals. Brown spearheaded a dominant performance for the in-form Celtics, who led from start-to-finish and had five players in double figures. Al Horford weighed in with 17 points and 10 rebounds while Jayson Tatum finished with 16 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists as the Bulls - occupying the sixth and final automatic playoff spot in the East - fell to a third straight defeat.

"We just came out with a lot of energy," Horford said, revealing the team is determined to maintain their form after center Robert Williams sustained a serious knee injury last month. "We understood it was an important game for us, we wanted to get back to the way we've been playing before Rob went down. We came out with a lot of good energy tonight and were able to sustain it for the whole

game. For the past month we've been playing playoff-level basketball. This is what I expect from our guys."

The Celtics' victory marks the first time since the 2017-2018 campaign that the franchise has posted 50 wins - a source of pride for Boston coach Ime Udoka after his team's sluggish start to the season. "When I signed on here it was pretty much a given that we were going to win 50 games, that's the expectation," Udoka said. "It's a good thing to get back to where we expected to be."

Durant spurs Nets revival

Elsewhere in the East, the Brooklyn Nets overturned a 21-point third-quarter deficit to down the New York Knicks 110-98 at Madison Square Garden, outscoring their city rivals by 38-16 in the final quarter to clinch victory. Kevin Durant led the way back for Brooklyn with a 32-point triple double that included 11 assists and 10 rebounds while Kyrie Irving tallied 24 points with eight rebounds and seven assists.

Brooklyn, who are assured of a place in the play-in tournament next week, improved to 42-38. But for Nets star Durant, Brooklyn's thrilling comeback was too close for comfort. "It's risky, I hate being down like that," Durant said. "I hate being that team, you know, get down, and we fight back. I don't want that to be a part of who we are. "But that situation may come and for us it's about sticking together, making the right play regardless of the score. That's what we leaned on tonight. We had a good spirit in that second half."

In the Western Conference, the playoff-bound



CHICAGO: Nikola Vucevic #9 of the Chicago Bulls moves against Grant Williams #12 of the Boston Celtics after a collision at the United Center on April 6, 2022. —AFP

Dallas Mavericks brushed aside the eliminated Detroit Pistons with a 131-113 win. Luka Doncic finished with 26 points, 14 assists and eight rebounds in just under 34 minutes on court, with Jalen Brunson adding 24 points. In the late game, the Western Conference-leading Phoenix Suns, already

assured of top seeding, suffered a 113-109 reverse on the road against the Los Angeles Clippers. The Suns rested stars Devin Booker, Chris Paul, Jae Crowder and Deandre Ayton for the defeat. Norman Powell led the Clippers scorers with 24 points. —AFP

Birthday boy Golovkin vows to deliver 'great fight'

TOKYO: Gennady Golovkin plans to turn 40 in style with "a great fight" against Ryota Murata on Saturday in a middleweight unification showdown in Japan, one day after his birthday. IBF world champion "GGG" Golovkin (41-1-1, with 36 KOs) is favorite to beat Murata (16-2), who holds the WBA version of the title, in Saitama, north of Tokyo.

The hard-hitting Kazakh will turn 40 on Friday and has not fought since Dec 2020, when he stopped Polish challenger Kamil Szeremeta in the seventh round. Golovkin promised to "live up to everyone's expectations" against home boxer Murata, with a blockbuster third fight against Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez possibly on the cards later this year if he wins.

"I've never been 40 before so this will be a new feeling for me," Golovkin told reporters at a press conference in Tokyo on Thursday. "It's a special feeling for me to be in Japan at this time. A lot of people have worked very hard to make it possible for me to be here ready to celebrate my 40th birthday."

Golovkin has been hailed as the biggest name to enter a ring in Japan since heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, who was knocked out in Tokyo by 40-1 underdog James "Buster" Douglas in one of boxing's



TOKYO: Middleweight IBF world champion Gennady Golovkin of Kazakhstan (left) and middleweight WBA champion Ryota Murata of Japan pose on April 7, 2022 ahead of their boxing world title unification fight on April 9. —AFP

biggest upsets in 1990. Saturday's fight was originally scheduled for December last year but was postponed because of coronavirus travel restrictions.

Golovkin said he had "a lot of respect" for underdog Murata, who won a gold medal at the 2012 London Olympics and is a household name in Japan. "We have had a lot of time to get ready for the fight so I think we will both be very well prepared," said Golovkin. "I can promise that it's going to be a great fight."

The 36-year-old Murata has not fought since he

successfully defended his WBA 'regular' world title belt against Canada's Steven Butler in Yokohama in Dec 2019. Murata was then installed as WBA 'super' champion in 2020, the sanctioning body's premier belt, after Alvarez vacated the crown to move up in weight. "We've had a lot of time and I've been sparring for a long time so it's good to be about to have a real match," said Murata. "I've trained well, but whether that comes out in the ring is in the lap of the gods. I can't promise anything, but I have trained well." —AFP

Scotland, Lions prop Tom Smith dies aged 50

LONDON: Tom Smith was hailed as one of Scotland's "best ever players" by national team coach Gregor Townsend on Wednesday following the former prop's death aged 50. Smith, capped 61 times by Scotland, had been diagnosed with colon cancer in 2019. He had won just three Scotland caps when he was selected for the Lions' 1997 tour of South Africa, where he helped out-scrummage a physically larger home pack during a 2-1 series win over the Springboks.

Smith was also involved four years later in the combined side's series win in Australia, where he became the only Scottish player to have played in six consecutive Tests for the Lions. "Tom was one of the toughest and most skillful players I had the pleasure to call a teammate," said Townsend after the Scottish Rugby Union announced Smith's death.

"He succeeded in the most challenging of environments and kept up a high level of play well into his thirties. Tom also did a tremendous amount for charitable causes and was a great family man. I am convinced that he will be regarded as one of our best ever players and his loss will be felt by all those who played with him or watched him for club and country over the years."

SRU chairman John Jeffrey added: "Today (Wednesday), Scottish Rugby has lost not only one of its greatest players but more importantly one of its greatest people. "Tom embodied everything we like to espouse about our great game. Pound for pound, he probably was Scotland's greatest international. Tom was without a doubt the most humble person I have ever met and all of Scottish Rugby's thoughts go out to Zoe and the children."

Smith captained Scotland and helped them win the last Five Nations Championship in 1999, with Italy becoming the 'sixth' nation the following year. Born in England to a Scottish mother and English father, Smith's club career featured spells in three countries, including stints at Glasgow, French Top 14 side Brive and English Premiership club Northampton. Following his retirement in 2009, Smith coached at Edinburgh and in France before his cancer diagnosis three years ago. —AFP

Cornet strikes as Burnley recover to beat Everton

BURNLEY: Maxwell Cornet scored five minutes from time as Burnley beat Premier League relegation rivals Everton 3-2 in a seesaw clash at Turf Moor on Wednesday. Victory saw Burnley remain in the relegation zone but move to within a point of Everton. Burnley took an early lead through Nathan Collins' first goal for the club but fell behind before half-time as Richarlison twice scored from the penalty spot.

Jay Rodriguez equalized in the 56th minute before Cornet's first goal since his return from the Africa Cup of Nations in January gave Burnley their first win in six games. It was also just the Claret's fourth win in 29 league games so far this season, with Burnley having lost their last four games without scoring a goal. The result meant Everton had now suffered six straight away defeats in the Premier League and facing the prospect of playing

second-tier football for the first time in 68 years, with manager Frank Lampard's dismay visibly evident at full-time.

Collins broke the deadlock with 12 minutes gone after yet another defensive error by Everton meant he hooked in a Cornet corner that had failed to be cleared by several defenders. Minutes later, however, Anthony Gordon was hauled to the ground by Ashley Westwood and Richarlison sent England goalkeeper Nick Pope the wrong way from the penalty spot.

Then, after Alex Iwobi's pass split the Burnley defense, Vitaliy Mykolenko was tripped in the box and referee Mike Dean, after prompting from the VAR, awarded a second penalty spot that Richarlison duly converted. Burnley equalized 11 minutes after the restart when Rodriguez turned in a cross that came through a crowd of players.

Pope then blocked Richarlison's overhead kick before Cornet became an increasing threat as rain swept over the ground. The Ivory Coast international sealed victory in the 85th minute when another defensive blunder saw Ben Godfrey fail to deal with a cross and that allowed substitute Matej Vydra to drill a cross into the path of Cornet, who made no mistake. —AFP



BURNLEY: Everton's Brazilian striker Richarlison attempts an overhead kick during an English Premier League match between Burnley and Everton at Turf Moor on April 6, 2022. —AFP

Benzema finds recognition at last after magical night

LONDON: Real Madrid might want both Kylian Mbappe and Erling Haaland this summer but Karim Benzema's latest Champions League hat-trick shows they already have the world's deadliest number nine. There is even an argument to say Benzema is the finest player in the world full-stop right now, after he upstaged Mbappe in Madrid's demolition of Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 and with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah struggling for form.

Carlo Ancelotti said in November Benzema was "not crying" about another Ballon d'Or passing him by, the rankings instead putting the Frenchman fourth. But if Real Madrid can turn their 3-1 first-leg quarterfinal victory over holders Chelsea on Wednesday into another march to lifting the Champions League trophy, this could, finally, be Benzema's year.

Madrid's pursuit of Haaland this summer certainly looks increasingly extravagant with every masterclass Benzema delivers, despite the 13 years age difference. After all who would risk disrupting a player playing as well as this? At 34, Benzema is getting



Karim Benzema

better and better or, in his words at least, people are starting to take notice. There is perhaps something in that analysis, that Benzema's supporting role alongside Cristiano Ronaldo at Madrid was, and continues to be, undervalued.

But even if Benzema was the same player then, with the identical, elite technical talents, it is only now he is using them to such singular, devastating effect. After the game at Stamford Bridge, Ancelotti pointed to Benzema's increased feeling of importance. "He is a player who feels more and more like a leader every day, he feels more important in the team," said Ancelotti. "This is what makes the difference in him, this personality."

It has been building since 2018, when Ronaldo was sold, Gareth Bale fell out of favor and then last year, Sergio Ramos left for PSG but Benzema stayed and every time, his sense of responsibility grew. Luka Modric, Toni Kroos and Casemiro may be the midfield grandeests, and Thibaut Courtois is crucial, but Benzema is the talisman, the one player Real Madrid now cannot replace.

He turns 35 in December, the day after the World Cup final in Qatar, when it is not inconceivable he could also be celebrating with France having missed out on their 2018 triumph. This season, he has scored the most goals of his career for Real Madrid and the most of his career in the Champions League. He has become the oldest player to score a hat-trick in the Champions League, twice, and the most prolific French scorer in history. —AFP



LONDON: Real Madrid's French striker Karim Benzema scores his third goal past Chelsea's French-born Senegalese goalkeeper Edouard Mendy during their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal first leg match at Stamford Bridge stadium on April 6, 2022. —AFP

Real Madrid in command against Chelsea

LONDON: Carlo Ancelotti hailed Karim Benzema's "fantastic" hat-trick as he fired Real Madrid to a 3-1 win against Chelsea that put the Champions League holders on the brink of elimination after Wednesday's quarter-final first leg. Benzema produced a masterclass at Stamford Bridge as the France striker netted twice in the first half with two perfectly-taken headers.

Kai Havertz reduced the deficit before the interval, but Benzema punished a woeful mistake from Chelsea keeper Edouard Mendy in the second half to complete his treble. It was the sublime Benzema's second successive Champions League hat-trick after he single-handedly inspired their epic comeback against Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 second leg. Ancelotti's side are in pole position to advance to the semifinals as they return to Madrid for the second leg on April 12.

After losing to Chelsea in last season's Champions League semifinals, Real will have the opportunity to exact revenge at the Bernabeu. "We had a fantastic performance up front from Benzema," Ancelotti said.

"He's getting better every day like wine. We played well. It was a good night. We have an advantage but we have a lot of respect for this team who were the winners of the last Champions League."

Real won the last of their 13 Champions League titles in 2018 and, while they may not be favorites in this year's tournament, their ruthless victory in west London was a significant statement of intent from the La Liga leaders. With 11 goals this term, Benzema has scored more times than any other Frenchman in a single European Cup campaign, moving past Just Fontaine's 10-goal haul in 1958-59. "They're magic nights. Today we came out to win, to show we're Real Madrid," Benzema said. "We played well from the first minute to the last. They're very important goals."

Chelsea were a shadow of the supremely organized side that marched to their second Champions League crown last year and won six successive games in all competitions before the recent international break. Blues boss Thomas Tuchel had dismissed Saturday's 4-1

home defeat against Brentford in the Premier League as nothing to worry about. But in truth that shock loss had exposed some major flaws in Chelsea's defence that Real gleefully exploited.

"The first half was a repetition of the second half against Brentford. We were so far off our level in every aspect that this game demands," Tuchel said. "The game was killed off with a big mistake in the second half. We gave it away in a moment that is simply impossible. "The individual decisions were far from our level and our standards. It is on all of us. I'm included in this."

Rapier thrust

Benzema put Real ahead in the 21st minute at the end of a rapier thrust. Vinicius Junior's cross was perfect for Benzema and he looped a superb header over Mendy into the top corner from 10 yards. Benzema was proving Madrid's maestro once again and three minutes later he doubled Real's advantage. Showing all his experience, the 34-year-old peeled away from Thiago

Silva before planting a clinical header into the far corner from Luka Modric's pin-point cross.

Five minutes before half-time, Jorginho's deft cross caught Dani Carvajal ball-watching and Havertz glided behind him to bury a powerful header past Thibaut Courtois. Tuchel sent on Mateo Kovacic and Hakim Ziyech at half-time, but Mendy's nightmare moment arrived just one minute after the break. There should have been no danger when Mendy intercepted a long pass outside his area, but the Senegal keeper horribly miscued his ball towards Antonio Rudiger.

Benzema punished Rudiger's surprising reluctance to commit to the tackle, stealing possession to slot into the empty net as Tuchel looked on in disbelief. Benzema is the first player to score hat-tricks in consecutive Champions League knockout ties since Cristiano Ronaldo for Real in 2017. Chelsea tried to hit back and Courtois made a brilliant tip-over from Cesar Azpilicueta's strike. But Romelu Lukaku's wretched headed miss summed up a night to forget for Chelsea. —AFP

Ajax boss Ten Hag closes in on Man United job

LONDON: Erik ten Hag is the strong favorite to be named Manchester United's next full-time manager, dealing a crushing blow to the dreams of embattled Paris Saint-Germain coach Mauricio Pochettino, according to British media reports on Thursday.

Both the BBC and the Daily Mail claim the 52-year-old Ajax manager is seen as fitting the profile the United board want for the man who they hope will restore the glory days the club enjoyed under Alex Ferguson. The Mail says United held talks with Ajax - whose chief executive is former United goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar - at the end of last week about the conditions under which Ten Hag can leave.

His contract is up at the end of next season and would cost United around £16 million (\$2.1 million) to prise him away whereas PSG might demand a far larger sum for Pochettino to leave. However, Pochettino's position at PSG is far from secure after a disappointing exit in the last 16 of the Champions League - the barometer by which coaches at the Qatar-owned club are judged.

Ten Hag - whose Ajax side were denied a place in the 2019 Champions League final in the final minute by Pochettino when he managed Tottenham - has been interviewed by United and is said to have demanded backing from United to pursue his transfer targets.

According to the Independent newspaper, Ten Hag told United's football director John Murtough and technical director Darren Fletcher he envisaged a "five-year project". He also addressed the futures of several present squad members, saying they are nowhere near "Champions League shape". —AFP



Erik ten Hag

Villarreal beat Bayern to raise Champions League upset hopes

VILA-REAL, Spain: Villarreal inflicted a shock 1-0 victory over Bayern Munich on Wednesday as Arnaut Danjuma's strike boosted the Spanish team's hopes of causing a huge upset in the Champions League quarterfinals. Danjuma diverted in Dani Parejo's shot in the eighth minute at La Ceramica to seal a surprise win, with Bayern perhaps even fortunate not to be further behind going into the second leg in Germany next week.

Gerard Moreno hit the post and then curled a long-range effort agonizingly wide after Bayern keeper Manuel Neuer had skewed a clearance, briefly leaving his own net gaping. "We produced a tremendous performance and to be honest we should have won by more," said Villarreal's Giovanni Lo Celso. "We were much better than Bayern tonight," said Dani Parejo. "We've beaten one of the best teams in the world."

Julian Nagelsmann's six-time European champions will still be heavy favorites to overturn the deficit at the Allianz Arena but Villarreal showed again they are not to be underestimated, having already sent Juventus crashing out in the last 16. "It's a deserved defeat, we weren't good," admitted Nagelsmann. "In the first half we had too little power, we didn't create chances and we gave up control."

Unai Emery's side were seen as one of the kindest opponents available in the draw last month, with perhaps only Benfica placed lower than them in the quarterfinals pecking order. Bayern, nine points clear at the top of the Bundesliga, up against a Villarreal side who sit seventh in La Liga, 12 points off the top four and into the last eight of the Champions League for the first time since 2009.

Yet Emery's side have a knack for rising to the occasion, having gone unbeaten in four league games against Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid this term, after defeating both Arsenal and Manchester United en route to winning the Europa League last year.



VILA-REAL, Spain: Villarreal's Spanish defender Raul Albiol and Bayern Munich's German midfielder Serge Gnabry fall down during their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal first leg match at La Ceramica stadium on April 6, 2022. —AFP

Faster, hungrier

They were faster and hungrier than Bayern all over the pitch in the first half and in the eighth minute, took the lead. The excellent Lo Celso found space on the halfway line and drove forward, playing right to Moreno, who pushed the ball forward to the line where Lo Celso had continued his run. Lo Celso stabbed a brilliant cut-back with the outside of his left foot to Parejo, whose skewed finish would probably have been saved by Neuer, only for Danjuma to intervene, diverting it away from the goalkeeper and into the opposite corner.

Villarreal kept coming and thought they had a second although it would have been a fluke. Off balance, Francis Coquelin wedged a left-footed cross into the box but it wandered off course, plopping over Neuer and into the net. Coquelin was just offside. Bayern were rattled, incapable of

establishing control. They should have been two down in the second half as Moreno struck the post from distance before being denied a simple finish by a last-ditch block from Alphonso Davies.

Moreno's best chance came just after the hour as Neuer came a long way out of his goal, only to scuff his clearance straight to the forward, who had an open goal and a whole half of pitch in front of him.

With Neuer sprinting back, a long shot curled just wide of the post. Davies unleashed two shots at Villarreal's goal while Kingsley Coman's rasping effort had to be tipped wide by Geronimo Rulli as Bayern briefly threatened. But it was their opponents who had the best chances on the counterattack, Lo Celso guilty of waiting too long in the area on one break, before Alfonso Pedraza blazed wide at the end of another. Bayern may be relieved the deficit stayed at one. —AFP