

**8** Zain Group publishes its 11th annual sustainability report



**15** First fencing championship for women kicks off in Ramadan



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	04:03
Shurooq	05:25
Dhuhr	11:49
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:13
Isha	19:33



# Amir expresses confidence in Kuwait's Armed Forces

## Crown Prince congratulates army personnel



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group picture during his visit to the Army Officers Club. — Amiri Diwan photo

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces has affirmed confidence in the country's Armed Forces and its sectors which defend their homeland. This came in a speech of His Highness the Amir that was read out by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the representative of His Highness the Amir, during a visit to the Armed Forces (Army Officers Club).

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal, which was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, said that the political leadership's confidence in the Kuwaiti Armed Forces is big. Upon arrival, His Highness the Crown Prince was received by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Major General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Crown Prince told the attendees "we are sure that you perfectly achieve your national duties", urging the military personnel to keep on their mission and maintain their full readiness. His Highness the Crown Prince extolled the efforts of the military installations sector in reclaiming agricultural lands, appreciating the goal of this project which ensures the food security of the Kuwait army units. — KUNA (See Page 2)

Ramadan Kareem

## Loving the Provider Allah - (Part 3)

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

According to the Noble Quran, God Almighty created us to worship Him. Worship from the Islamic point of view can be anything you do, say and think of as long as it pleases God and is good for you and your fellow human-beings. There are three pillars of worship, viz love, fear, and hope. Although we hope for God's forgiveness and reward, and fear sinfulness that would displease Him, love for God is the most comprehensive, and encompasses the other two.

Scholars of Islamic Jurisprudence unanimously suggest ten ways to prove our love for Allah, the Great Forgiver. In today's article, I will share the fifth and sixth among those ten ways, and will share the others in subsequent articles, so keep reading.

(5) Give in charity from things that are dear to you. This really challenges your heart. When clothes drive or food drive comes around for the poor, do not give the worn-out clothes you do not want, but give from your new, clean, and beautiful clothes. Have you heard how Aisha - Prophet's wife - used to give out the coins in charity to the poor? Aisha (ra) used to perfume the coins with musk before giving them in charity. When asked why, she explained that the charity reaches the Bountiful Allah before it touches the hand of the needy person.

The Beneficent, Allah says what can be translated as: "O you who believe, give charity from the wholesome things you have earned and from all that We have brought forth for you from the earth. Thus, do not target what is vile to give in charity, yet you yourselves would not take it, without closing your eyes to (accept) it. And know that Allah is Self-Sufficient, All-Praised." (Al-Baqarah 2: 267)

Allah, the Exalted, is Generous and Beneficent - among others - and constantly confers upon His servants different and multiple favors and bounties. How then would it be possible for those who enjoy His bounties and blessings, to be mean, niggardly and condescending? (See www.quran7m.com)

Continued on Page 6

## Dust storm covers Iraq

**BAGHDAD:** A dust storm blanketed Iraq again on Tuesday, sending people to hospital with breathing difficulties and leading airports to suspend flights. It follows a similar storm that blew over the country late last week and left dozens hospitalized with respiratory problems. The latest weather event cast an orange hue over the capital Baghdad, where it severely restricted visibility and coated buildings and cars in dust.

Pedestrians wore disposable masks to avoid inhaling the particles, AFP journalists said. "People have been hospitalized

with breathing difficulties, but most cases are minor," health ministry spokesman Saif Al-Badr told AFP. Dozens of flights were suspended in Baghdad and the Shiite holy city of Najaf during the morning, before flights resumed in the afternoon when conditions improved, airport sources said.

While sand and dust storms are not uncommon during the Iraqi spring, they are expected to become even more frequent "due to drought, desertification and declining rainfall", said the director of Iraq's meteorological office, Amer Al-Jabri. Iraq is particularly vulnerable to climate change, with record low rainfall and high temperatures in recent years. Experts have said these factors threaten social and economic disaster in the war-scarred country. — AFP



BAGHDAD: Vehicles drive along the underpass under Tahrir Square in the centre of Iraq's capital Baghdad during a dust storm on April 12, 2022. — AFP

## Space company offers first look at luxury cabins

**WASHINGTON:** A new entrant in the space tourism market promises customers views of the Earth's curvature from the comfort of a luxury cabin, lifted to the upper atmosphere with a giant balloon. Space Perspective on Tuesday revealed illustrations of its swish cabins, which it hopes to start launching from the Kennedy Space

Center in Florida from late 2024. More than 600 tickets have so far been sold, at \$125,000 each.

With five-feet (1.5 meter) high windows, deep seats, dark, purple tones and subdued lighting, the atmosphere contrasts with the white and sanitized capsules of its competitors. Wifi connectivity and a drinks bar round out the "Space Lounge" inside the company's Neptune capsule. Whether it really constitutes spaceflight is a matter of debate.

The balloon reaches an altitude of 20 miles, much lower than rivals Virgin Galactic, which goes just over 50

Continued on Page 6



WASHINGTON: This image shows the space lounge inside the spaceship Neptune's capsule. — AF

## 'X': US rolls out gender-neutral passports

**ALEXANDRIA:** It's just a small box to tick on an application form, but a huge breakthrough for D Ojeda, a non-binary person who on Monday became one of the first Americans to apply for a gender-neutral passport. "Even with my family, they still don't get it," said Ojeda, a 34-year-old activist who goes by D. and uses the pronouns "they,

them." "So at least I have the government to say who I am as a person."

The option to receive a passport with an "X" gender designation, which was made available Monday by US President Joe Biden's administration, was hailed as a blessing for an estimated 1.2 million Americans whose gender identity falls outside the categories of man or woman. It came at a time when Republican lawmakers across the country have been passing legislation that critics say curtails LGBTQ rights and was likely to further fuel tensions around gender issues in a deeply divided nation.

Continued on Page 6



VIRGINIA: A partially completed passport application, with an 'X' gender marker, is seen on a computer monitor in Alexandria. — AFP



# Kuwait leadership expresses confidence in Armed Forces

## Crown Prince represents Amir in Army Officers Club visit

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, affirmed confidence in the country's Armed Forces and its sectors which defend their dear homeland. This came in a speech of His Highness the Amir that was read out by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the representative of His Highness the Amir, during a visit to the Armed Forces (Army Officers Club). His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal, who was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, said that the political leadership's confidence in the Kuwaiti Armed Forces is big. Upon arrival, His Highness the Crown Prince was received by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Major General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Crown Prince told the attendees, "We are sure that you per-

fectly achieve your national duties", urging the military personnel to keep on their mission and maintain their full readiness. His Highness the Crown Prince extolled the efforts of the military installations sector in reclaiming agricultural lands, appreciating the goal of this project which ensures the food security of the Kuwaiti army units. The political leadership is following up on, with interest, the duties and tasks performed by the Kuwaiti army with loyalty and commitment, Sheikh Mishal said. His Highness the Crown Prince commended the Army's efforts in joint training and exercises at local, regional and international levels, in addition to plans and operations.

During the speech, His Highness the Crown Prince, on behalf of His Highness the Amir, congratulated all army's personnel on the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Crown Prince wished many happy returns of this good occasion for Kuwait, and Arab and Muslim nations. His Highness the Crown Prince also wished the military personnel every



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group picture during his visit to the Army Officers Club. —Amiri Diwan photos

success, and further security and stability to Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Later,

Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Major General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah also delivered a speech marking the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, greeting

as well His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, all attendees, and Kuwaiti people and residents, and army personnel. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addresses Kuwait Army officers.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed upon his arrival at the Army Officers Club.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a gift during his visit to the Army Officers Club.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah writes in the book of guests during his visit to the Army Officers Club.



Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Major General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah delivers a speech.

## Sheikh Mishal commends security forces' efforts

**KUWAIT:** Representative of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has expressed great appreciation to the Interior Ministry's personnel's enormous and sincere efforts to retain the homeland security, enforce the law and ensure people's safety. "Thank you for remarkable efforts to ensure security across the nation,"

His Highness Sheikh Mishal said during a visit to the Interior Ministry to congratulate the ministry staff on the holy month of Ramadan. He voiced confidence in the ministry's staff's ability to develop and modernize the security system. His Highness Sheikh Mishal vowed all support to the ministry's efforts to reform and restructure security bodies to achieve the aspired goals.

Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry Undersecretary Anwar Al-Barjas welcomed His Highness the Amir's Representative, Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal's visit to the ministry. He unveiled that the ministry had worked out a comprehensive strategy to establish security across the country and enforce the law. He added the ministry had made great strides in the digitization of transactions to cut paperwork and save people's time. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group picture during his visit to the Interior Ministry. —Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addresses Interior Ministry personnel.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets Interior Ministry personnel.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a gift during his visit to the Interior Ministry.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a picture with Interior Ministry personnel.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks with Interior Ministry personnel.



Local



KUWAIT: An overhead picture of a padel court in Kuwait. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



People play padel in a court in Kuwait.

# Padel craze sweeps across Kuwait

## New hit sport steals spotlight from football in Ramadan

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Padel has become a hit sport in Kuwait, stealing the spotlight from football tournaments in Ramadan. It is played by people of all ages and all walks of life, including social media celebrities. Padel is a racquet sport typically played in doubles on an enclosed court roughly 25 percent smaller than a tennis court.



Over 4,000 people play padel in Kuwait

Scoring is the same as in normal tennis and the balls used are similar, but with a little less pressure. The main differences are that the court has walls and the balls can be played off them in a similar way as in squash, and that solid, stringless bats are used. The height of the ball being served must be at or below the waist level.

Abdulaziz Tifoni, owner of Bounce Padel Courts and a player as well, said padel has become very popular in Kuwait. "The reason for the quick rise in popularity of padel in Kuwait is mainly because it's a very easy game,



A padel court in Kuwait.

which doesn't need great physical effort, and it's very rare to get injured during the game," he told Kuwait Times.

According to him, over 4,000 people play padel in Kuwait. "Presently, we have national men's and women's padel teams in Kuwait. Many women play padel in Kuwait, but the number of male players is higher. Currently there are more than 150 courts for padel," added Tifoni.

Padel is not a seasonal sport. "I play padel all year long; it's almost like football. Most of those who play padel also play football. I always play in a team as it's usually played in doubles, as few people play singles. There is no specific age for playing padel, but usually players are between 8 and 60 years of age," he pointed out. Tifoni opened his court in Jan 2021. "It's always fully

booked, as many people are practicing this sport, and everybody wants to try padel. The greatest number of padel players are in the age category of between 20 and 30 years," concluded Tifoni.

Padel is most popular in Spain and some countries in South America, especially Mexico, Argentina and Chile, but it is also relatively popular in the UAE, Italy, Qatar, Kuwait and Andorra, although it is now beginning to spread rapidly across Europe and other continents.

Padel is different from the sport known in the US and Canada as paddle tennis. It is also not to be confused with platform tennis, a winter and summer sport typically played at country clubs in the US and Canada, with courts heated from below to eliminate snow and water. The court, rules and styles of play are very different.



A player prepares to serve during a game of padel.

## Interior minister holds talks with Indian ambassador

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Indian Ambassador Sibi George in his office

on Tuesday. During the meeting, they discussed a wide range of topics covering all aspects of the bilateral relations between Kuwait and India. Both sides deliberated on ways and means of further strengthening the existing bilateral cooperation across various domains and matters of mutual interest.

Further, the two sides also discussed all matters related to Indian diaspora in Kuwait. The ambassador thanked the leadership and the government of State of Kuwait for taking care of the Indian community in Kuwait especially during the challenging times witnessed due to the pandemic.



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Indian Ambassador Sibi George exchange plaques during the meeting.



## Insurance federation aspires to increase contribution to economy

KUWAIT: Secretary General of Kuwait Insurance Federation (KIF), Adel Al-Rumaih, stated that the federation strives to increase contribution to the national economy as well as raise more awareness regarding the significance of insurance. Rumaih added that the federation's current contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) does not exceed two percent, but they aspire for even more contribution and development. In an interview, Rumaih commented that nationalizing jobs in the sector is only at 18 percent as there are no academic qualifications available locally. The market includes 25 Kuwaiti insurance and reinsurance companies and 11 non-Kuwaiti, as well as tens of insurance mediation companies, he illustrated, adding that the Insurance Regulatory Unit is an independent government body that oversees the insurance market financially and administratively.

Rumaih also indicated that the mounting insurance awareness created many legislations for obligatory insurance coverages as in the case of professional liability insurance. The federation has an active website with more than one million visitors, along with social

media platforms, all aiming to make insurance-related information accessible to the public. In terms of training courses available for the youth, the federation organizes in cooperation with specialized centers training courses and programs. It organized 64 training programs with the participation of more than 1,000 insurance sector employees. The federation also has a role in encouraging the youth to take up insurance as a profession as it collaborated with the Public Authority for Manpower to organize occupation day last December.

Rumaih called on local universities to look into establishing an insurance department, due to the increasing demand and versatile nature of insurance career paths. The federation, through its committees, examines new legislations and applicatory faults along with concerned parties, and aspires to apply all types of obligatory insurance coverages, Rumaih explained. He affirmed that the insurance market in Kuwait is in need of introducing a more modern electronic mechanism, to facilitate market study and better connect with government bodies as that will further develop the sector. — KUNA

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## Local

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## Kuwait Heritage



**KUWAIT:** Al-Derbaha, a famous children's game from the Kuwaiti heritage. The boys race while moving the frame forward, and whoever finishes first is the winner. The picture was taken circa 1958 in Mirqab and shows Ali Salimi (left), brothers Shuaibi (at the back) and brothers Faheed. (Source: A total commemorative printed images to the Ministry of Information in the 19602 and 1970s. Prepared by Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, heritage researcher at the Ministry of Information)

## Amir offers condolences on death of Saudi prince

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his condolences on Tuesday over the death of Saudi Prince Abdulrahman bin Saad Al-Saud. In a cable he sent to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, His Highness the Amir hoped the grieving Saudi royal family would find solace in this time of grief. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Saudi monarch.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his condolences on Tuesday over the victims of widespread flash floods in the Philippines, which resulted in human casualties and left homes inundated. In a cable he sent to Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, His Highness the Amir hoped the Southeast Asian archipelago would overcome this natural disaster, wishing a speedy recovery for those wounded amid the heavy downpour. —KUNA

# Kuwait celebrates girgian after two-year halt over coronavirus



**KUWAIT:** Children celebrate girgian. —KUNA photos



**Kuwaiti folklore researcher Adel Al-Saadoun.**



**KUWAIT:** The celebration of "Girgian", where people give children candy and nuts in mid-Ramadan month is back after two years of halting due to the coronavirus. Girgian is an old tradition celebrated in Kuwait and all Gulf countries in Ramadan, however, each country celebrates the festival differently. In Kuwait, children wear traditional colorful clothing, walking in groups in their area's streets and knocking on doors to sing some

traditional songs and receive candy. The boys' songs are different from what the girls sing for the occasion.

In this context, Kuwaiti folklore researcher Adel Al-Saadoun said that in old Kuwait, mothers used to sew special bags for boys, that can be hanged on the neck and tied around the chest to put the candy in. The girls used to wear the "bukhnag", which is a black and gold head cover, along with a special bag

to keep the candy. The boys would also wear the traditional Kuwaiti clothes "dishdasha" while collecting candy, and they would also carry drums and empty boxes to create some noise while they sing the girgian songs, he noted.

Saadoun said that nowadays, girgian celebration has some exaggeration as people distribute luxurious chocolates and nuts in big parties for both children and adults. Some people also include per-

fumes and bukhoor "incense" in their girgian for adults, he added. Meanwhile, housewife Hanaa Al-Wuhaib said that girgian lost its simplicity these days, as families started planning huge parties with different ideas for presentation even before Ramadan starts. People started exaggerating even in their clothing or the kind of expensive candy they give, as well as booking ballrooms for the celebration. —KUNA

## EU Ambassador to Kuwait Cristian Tudor holds ghabqa for media representatives

**KUWAIT:** On 11 April, EU Ambassador to Kuwait Cristian Tudor convened a ghabqa with media representatives on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan to thank them for their cooperation with the EU Delegation in Kuwait and inform them about plans for the coming period, including Europe Day celebrations next month. During the ghabqa, Ambassador Tudor also praised the lively and vibrant nature of the Kuwaiti media.

Ambassador Tudor hailed the excellent EU-Kuwait bilateral relations as evidenced by the first visit of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell to Kuwait last month. The talks with the Kuwaiti leadership focused on how we could further enhance our relations. We have identified cooperation on health, food security, education, digital and green transition as our priorities. Another example is the visit of Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for Budget and Administration in February, the first such visit by an EU Commissioner since the establishment of the EU Delegation here in 2019. The

aim of the visit was to strengthen cooperation between the EU and Kuwait in the financial and economic sector as well as investments in the renewable energy sector. We are also enhancing inter-parliamentary relations as testified by the visit of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula to Kuwait last November.

Ambassador Tudor reiterated that Kuwait is a close and reliable partner of the EU. Both sides support a rules-based world order and peaceful conflict settlement based on the principles of the UN Charter and humanitarian values. This was evidenced by Kuwait's stance on Ukraine, including its support to relevant UNGA resolutions. The EU also appreciates Kuwait's mediation efforts with regard to the Gulf rift and other regional conflicts. We also work closely with Kuwait to develop new forms of cooperation and to build a stronger partnership with Gulf countries to promote inter alia regional security.

Ambassador Tudor also said that the EU wants to become Kuwait's partner of choice in implementing Kuwait 2035 Vision, which aims to chart a path towards economic and social development. We also aim to work with Kuwait



**EU Ambassador to Kuwait Cristian Tudor**



on the issue of climate change and the transition to a greener economy. For their part, the EU Member States have agreed on a Green Deal to achieve carbon neutrality in Europe by 2050. Another important area of the EU-Kuwait relations is to facilitate people-to-people contacts, including among young people. 2022 was announced as the European Year of Youth. Europe-Day on 9 May represents the first opportunity for a wider public outreach post-COVID. In this context, the EU Delegation and 17 EU Member States represented in Kuwait will hold a large celebration, highlighting national features and their joint aspirations under the roof of the EU. The date was chosen for a reason as it marks the anniversary of the historic 'Schuman Declaration' that set out his idea for a new form of political cooperation in Europe, which prepared the ground for what is now the European Union.







India hopes for Pakistan reset after Sharif election

## On the trail of the dead in a Ukrainian village

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PANITAN: Photo shows coast guard personnel evacuating local residents from their flooded homes on a makeshift raft in the town of Panitan, Capiz province as heavy rains brought on by Tropical Storm Megi inundated the area. —AFP

# Megi death toll rises to 42

## Rescuers hunt for survivors in Philippines

**BUNGA, Philippines:** Rescuers hampered by mud and rain on Tuesday used their bare hands and shovels to search for survivors of landslides that smashed into villages in the central Philippines, as the death toll from tropical storm Megi rose to 42. Tens of thousands of people fled their homes as the storm pummelled the disaster-prone region in recent days, flooding houses, severing roads and knocking out power.

At least 36 people died and 26 were missing after landslides slammed into multiple villages around Baybay City in Leyte province—the hardest hit by the storm—local authorities said. Just over 100 people were injured.

Three people were also killed in the central province of Negros Oriental and three on the main southern island of Mindanao, according to the national disaster agency. Most of the deaths in Leyte were in the mountainous village of Mailhi where 14 bodies were found after a “mud-flash” buried homes, Army Captain Kaharudin Cadil told AFP.

“We recovered most of the bodies embedded in the mud,” said Cadil, spokesman for the 802nd Infantry Brigade. Drone footage showed a wide stretch of mud that had swept down a hill of coconut trees and engulfed Bunga, another commu-

nity devastated by the storm.

At least seven people had been killed and 20 villagers were missing in Bunga, which was reduced to a few rooftops poking through the mud. “It’s supposed to be the dry season but maybe climate change has upended that,” said Marissa Miguel Cano, public information officer for Baybay City, where 10 villages have been affected by landslides.

Cano said the hilly region of corn, rice and coconut farms was prone to landslides, but they were usually small and not fatal. Apple Sheena Bayno was forced to flee after her house in Baybay City flooded. She said her family was still recovering from a super typhoon in December. “We’re still fixing our house and yet it’s being hit again so I was getting anxious,” she told AFP.

‘Nothing to go back to’

Rescue efforts were also focused on the nearby village of Kantagnos, which an official said had

been hit by two landslides. Kantagnos resident Daniel Racaza, 26, said he was asleep when an avalanche of mud and water swept over the riverside community.

He managed to escape with his boyfriend and 16 relatives, but an aunt was caught in the torrent. “I only managed to save my cellphone and we have nothing to go back to,” Racaza told AFP by telephone from a high school where they are sheltering.

Some other residents also fled in time or were pulled out of the mud alive, but four villagers have been confirmed dead and many are still feared trapped. A Philippine Coast Guard video on Facebook showed six rescuers carrying a mud-caked woman on a stretcher, while other victims were piggybacked to safety.

“We’re looking for many people, there are 210 households there,” Baybay City Mayor Jose Carlos Cari told local broadcaster DZMM Teleradyo. First major storm of 2022 -

The military has joined coast guard, police and

fire protection personnel in the search and rescue efforts, which have been hampered by bad weather. By late afternoon Tuesday, it was suspended due to losing light.

A state of calamity was declared in Baybay City, freeing up funds for relief efforts and giving local officials power to control prices. National disaster agency spokesman Mark Timbal said landslides around Baybay City had reached settlements “outside the danger zone”, catching many residents by surprise.

Tropical storm Megi—known in the Philippines by its local name Agaton—is the first major storm to hit the country this year. Whipping up seas, it forced dozens of ports to suspend operations and stranded more than 9,000 people at the start of Holy Week, one of the busiest travel periods of the year in the mostly Catholic country.

The storm comes four months after super typhoon Rai devastated swathes of the archipelago nation, killing more than 400 and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless. Scientists have long warned typhoons are strengthening more rapidly as the world becomes warmer due to climate change.

The Philippines—ranked among the most vulnerable nations to its impacts—is hit by an average of 20 storms every year. —AFP

## Biden, Modi in ‘candid’ Ukraine war talks

**WASHINGTON:** President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a “candid exchange of views” on the Ukraine crisis at a virtual summit Monday, but the United States appeared to have made little progress in wooing India away from its neutral stance on Russia’s invasion.

“It is important that all countries, especially those with leverage, press Putin to end the war,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters after the virtual summit, which was followed by an in-person meeting with his Indian counterpart and the defense ministers from both countries.

“And it’s also important that democracies stand together and speak with one voice to defend the values that we share,” Blinken said after the talks, described by one US official as “warm and productive.”

Biden made no major demands of India, a key strategic ally in US plans to contain growing

Chinese power in the Asia-Pacific region, and there was no indication of significant progress toward a unified posture on the Ukraine conflict.

But White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Biden “made clear that he does not believe it’s in India’s interest to accelerate or increase imports of Russian energy and other commodities.”

Tightrope

Modi has tried to walk a tightrope between maintaining relations with the West and avoiding alienating Russia, but has raised concerns in Washington by continuing to buy Russian oil. In his talks with Biden, he merely said the situation was “very worrying” and recalled his support for talks between Russia and Ukraine, which Washington views with skepticism.

Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar showed a hint of annoyance when he told reporters asking about Biden’s push for India to cut energy imports from Russia that “probably our total purchases for the month would be less than what Europe does in an afternoon.”

Biden has been pressuring world leaders to take a hard line against Moscow, although a US official said there was no “concrete ask and concrete answer” on energy imports. “India has to make its

own decisions about how it approaches this challenge,” said Blinken, noting however that India “has made very strong statements ... condemning the killing of civilians in Ukraine” and was “providing significant humanitarian assistance.” —AFP

campaign is finding traction, with huge rally turnouts, endorsements from pop stars and Catholic priests, and a bump in a recent poll raising hopes among her fervent fans. “I’m really craving for change, for decency in the highest position,” said Rocelle Mendoza, 29, who uses her own money to print Robredo T-shirts and aprons that she gives away at markets in the capital Manila.

“We are aware that we have to climb a mountain. And I think it’s also why we’re no longer hesitating to spend.” Some analysts have likened the feverish support for Robredo to the people-driven movement for former president Corazon Aquino in the 1986 snap election campaign that led to the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos Senior.

Robredo, a widow and former congresswoman, made a last-minute decision to enter the presidential race in October after Marcos Jr declared his candidacy. That set up a rematch with her rival in the 2016 vice presidential contest that she narrowly won. A volunteer-driven campaign mushroomed across the country, putting the mild-mannered Robredo in second place in the polls. — AFP



I only managed to save my cellphone

## Russia closes in on the city of Mariupol

**KRAMATORSK:** Russian troops aimed to take control of the city of Mariupol on Tuesday, part of an anticipated massive onslaught across eastern Ukraine, as defending forces tried desperately to hold them back. Russia is believed to be trying to connect occupied Crimea with Moscow-backed separatist territories Donetsk and Lugansk in Donbas, and has laid siege to the strategically located city, once home to more than 400,000 people.

“It is likely that in the future the enemy will try to take control of the city of Mariupol, capture Popasna and launch an offensive in the direction of Kurakhove in order to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk region,” the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said on Facebook. The Russian defense ministry said it army had thwarted an attempt to break the siege with “airstrikes and artillery fire” at a factory in a northern district of the city.

But the Ukrainian army insisted that “the defense of Mariupol continues”. “The connection with the units of the defense forces that heroically hold the city is stable and maintained,” the Land Forces of Ukraine wrote on Telegram. In his nightly address, President Volodymyr Zelensky made another plea to his allies for more weapons to boost the defense of the city.

“We are not getting as much as we need to end this war sooner. To completely destroy the enemy on our land... in particular, to unblock Mariupol,” he said. He made a similar appeal for military assistance to South Korea’s National Assembly earlier in the day, telling lawmakers Russia had “completely destroyed Mariupol and burned it to ashes” killing “at least tens of thousands of people”.

Late Monday, Britain said it was trying to verify reports that Russia had also used chemical weapons in the city. Western officials have previously expressed concerns that as the conflict drags into its seventh week, Russia could resort to such extreme measures. Ukrainian lawmaker Ivanna Klymush said Russia had used an “unknown substance” and that people were suffering from respiratory failure. —AFP

## Volunteers in door-to-door blitz for Marcos Jr rival

**MANILA:** Clutching pink flyers and face masks, diehard supporters of Philippine presidential hopeful Leni Robredo are going door to door across the archipelago nation in an against-the-odds bid to win over voters. Nearly two million volunteers are involved in a grassroots movement for Robredo, the incumbent vice president, as she battles to close the gap with frontrunner Ferdinand Marcos Junior before the May 9 polls.

Voter surveys show the son of the country’s former dictator heading towards a landslide victory, the endgame of a decades-long, well-funded effort to return the powerful clan to the presidential palace they fled 36 years ago.

But there are signs Robredo’s pink-coloured



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden (L) alongside US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (R) and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (C), takes part in a virtual meeting with India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Washington. —AFP



LAS PINAS: Photo shows a volunteer (R) for opposition presidential candidate and current vice president, Leni Robredo, helping a delivery worker put a banner for Robredo on a tricycle during a house-to-house campaign in Las Pinas, suburban Manila. —AFP



## International

On the trail of the dead  
in a Ukrainian village

‘What am I supposed to feel when it’s civilians, not soldiers, who were killed?’

**MAKARIV, Ukraine:** There is a rhythm to the way the bodies are collected in the Ukrainian village of Andriivka. A yellow question mark is sprayed on a home. The police arrive with a crew to dig out the shallow grave. Then the relatives are confronted with the remains of their kin.

Some are stoic and resigned-the body is just the remnants and their loved one is long gone. Others

All the men were buried by their fellow Ukrainians. But villagers say they were killed by Russians.

**Ruslan Yaremchuk**

They buried Yaremchuk in a garden behind a modest white cottage, his head pointing towards a rusted wheelbarrow. Now the body, its arms spread high, is being pried from the earth again by a three-man team. Yaremchuk’s final outfit was a blue cableknit jumper, jeans and grey hiking boots. On his right hand is a handsome silver ring.

Neighbour Viktor Haniuk knew his first name only-Ruslan-but he buried him in this patch of green with the help of another local. As the exhumation continues, nearby police scribe a report in the margins of a diploma that reveals his surname. Yaremchuk studied electrical engineering at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, it seems.

On the doorstep of the cottage are three open ration packs. As Russians swept in, the packs were airdropped for troops. “This man went to steal them,” says 42-year-old Haniuk. “Most likely he was shot for these rations.” He said his neighbour was shot “behind the ear”. Yaremchuk is zipped inside a body bag and the police team continue their rounds.

**Leonid Bondarenko**

Next is Bondarenko. He was buried by the spring bulbs in the front plot of a pink cottage. There is a floral-wreathed cross above the makeshift grave. It marks the date he died-March 6, 2022. His body is parcelled in a patterned blue duvet. Three workers pull him out of the ground, revealing his blood-

January 2010 but these cases are “illustrative, rather than exhaustive” and the true number of cases likely to be higher.

The group said it had documented how prison officials frequently deny prisoners access to adequate healthcare, including diagnostic tests, regular check-ups, and post-operative care. “This leads to worsening health problems, inflicts additional pain and suffering on sick prisoners, and ultimately causes or contributes to their untimely deaths.”

It said 64 out of the 96 prisoners died in prison rather than hospitals. In the vast majority of cases, prisoners who died were young or middle aged, it said. A large proportion of the deaths took place in prisons in northwestern Iran that house many inmates from the Kurdish and Azerbaijani minorities and in southeastern Iran where prisoners mostly belong to Iran’s Baluch minority.

Abtin, 47, who had been convicted on national security charges and was seen by activists as a political prisoner, died of COVID-19 about six weeks after he first displayed symptoms in Tehran’s Evin prison, Amnesty said. “The authorities caused or contributed to his death by deliberately denying him timely access to specialised medical treatment at a facility well-equipped to deal with cases of Covid-19 after he fell ill with COVID-19 in early December 2022,” Amnesty said.

It said Jebeli had died after being subjected to “more than two years of torture and other ill treatment through the denial of access to adequate specialised medical care” for conditions including kidney stones, a history of strokes, sciatica in his legs, high blood pressure, and an umbilical hernia.

Jebeli, who had been imprisoned in a financial dispute, died in hospital where he had been transferred after he was found unresponsive by other prisoners and had lost all control of his bladder and bowel movements, Amnesty said. — AFP

evil practice in Islam will bear the burden of that sin and the burden of those who act upon it after him, without their burden being reduced.’ (Saheeh Muslim # 1, 017)

(6) Memorizing, reciting Allah’s Beautiful Names and Attributes, understanding them, and acting upon them. Learning and memorizing the Names and Attributes of Allah (swt) will increase our reverent love and awe for Him. Abu Huraira narrated that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said what can be translated as: “Allah has ninety-nine Names, one-hundred minus one, whoever memorizes (understands and implements) them, will enter Paradise.” (Al-Bukhari # 7, 392) Among the names and attributes of the Exalted, Allah, is ‘Al-Ghaffaar’, which means “He who excessively conceals the sins of His servants, so that a sinful person is not publicly shamed and humiliated.”

And ‘Al-Ghaffour’ means “the One who conceals the sins of His servants a great deal and forgives them continuously. His forgiveness is much greater than His punishment.” When you read and reflect on these two among the complete names and attributes of Almighty Allah, it encourages you to avoid sins as much as you can, and if you happen to commit a sin, you repent immediately - being sure that you will be forgiven.

With such an attitude, you should avoid slandering and exposing sinners, unless their sins cause harm to society. You should also explore the most effective ways of encouraging the sinners to repent from their sins and abandon them. It is imperative also to understand that in as much as you seek Allah’s forgiveness, you should be able to forgive those who wrong you.

*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.*



ANDRIIVKA, Ukraine: Communal workers exhume a body of a man buried near his house in Andriivka village, Kyiv region. — AFP

streaked head. His son Oleksandr, 39, loiters outside the gates of the house with resigned unease.

His father was killed in shelling and a neighbour buried him a few days later. “I don’t know how we ordinary people are meant to respond to this. They destroyed the whole village,” Oleksandr says. His father’s body is the fifth of the day so far and there

are more still waiting to be tended.

“What am I supposed to feel when it’s civilians, not soldiers, who were killed?” asks 25-year-old police officer Artem Yeliseyev. “Today we saw a man who was 30 and a man who was almost 70,” he says. “They are both murdered. It’s difficult for me to talk about my feelings.” — AFP

‘They destroyed  
the whole  
village’

dash to touch the corpse, as if trying to awake it from slumber. On Monday, AFP saw the bodies of three men in civilian clothes exhumed from gardens in Andriivka, 33 kilometres (20 miles) west of the capital, Kyiv.

They were Ruslan Yaremchuk, 46, Leonid Bondarenko, 68, and Yuriy Kravchennia, 46, according to relatives, neighbours and ID documents. A village official said three other bodies had already been excavated earlier in the day.

Andriivka-home to around 2,000 before the war-was occupied by invading Russian forces during their month-long northern offensive to take Kyiv.

Amnesty accuses Iran  
of denial of medical  
care to prisoners

**PARIS:** Rights group Amnesty International on Tuesday accused Iran of deliberately denying life-saving medical care to prisoners, saying it had confirmed 96 cases since 2010 of detainees dying after a lack of treatment. The report by Amnesty comes after several high profile cases this year alone of prisoners who died in custody due to what activists say was a failure by Iran to properly treat their illnesses.

These include the Iranian poet and filmmaker Baktash Abtin who died in January after contracting Covid-19 and Shokrollah Jebeli, an 82-year-old dual Australian-Iranian national, who died in March after a succession of medical problems. Amnesty said such deaths by deliberate denial of healthcare amounted to an extrajudicial execution while the failure of Iran to provide accountability were another example of the systematic impunity in the country.

“The Iranian authorities’ chilling disregard for human life has effectively turned Iran’s prisons into a waiting room of death for ill prisoners, where treatable conditions tragically become fatal,” said Diana Eltahawy, Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International. “Deaths in custody resulting from the deliberate denial of healthcare amount to arbitrary deprivation of life, which is a serious human rights violation under international law,” she added.

**‘Untimely deaths’**

Amnesty said it had confirmed the deaths in custody of 92 men and four women in 30 prisons in 18 provinces across Iran in such circumstances since

Clashes rock  
W Bank city

**JENIN:** Fresh clashes between Zionist soldiers and Palestinian militants rocked the West Bank city of Jenin on Tuesday as a Palestinian stabbed a police officer before being shot dead. Zionist troops launched a fourth day of operations around Jenin after an assailant from the flashpoint district shot and killed three people in a Tel Aviv bar last week in the latest of a spate of attacks that have stunned the Jewish state.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett-who warned in response that there would “not be limits for this war”-overnight visited the Tel Aviv shooting scene and vowed: “We will not let our enemy stop our lives. We will continue to live our lives and at the same time we will fight where they are located, in their bases, at their source-and, please God, we will win.”

The Palestinian official news agency Wafa said “clashes erupted” for a fourth day between young Palestinian men and Zionist soldiers “who fired live bullets, stun grenades and tear gas at them”. The Zionist army said its “soldiers responded with live ammunition toward suspects who hurled explosive devices at them, as well as toward armed suspects in the area”.

“Soldiers and other security forces apprehended 20 wanted terror suspects during the night and early morning.” In Zeita, near the border with Zionist entity, commandos found “weapons and arrested wanted persons suspected of aiding terrorist activities,” the army said. The latest violence to rock Zionist entity came in the Mediterranean port city of Ashkelon, where police said an officer was checking a Palestinian man in his 40s who then “pulled out a knife and attacked the officer”.



RAMALLAH: Palestinians run for cover from teargas during clashes with Zionist security forces at the northern entrance of Ramallah, near the Israeli settlement of Beit El, in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

The policeman “fired and neutralized the suspect, whose death was declared on site,” police said, adding that the officer was hospitalized with light wounds from the attack using a kitchen knife. Police said the man hailed from Hebron-a powder keg where around 1,000 Jewish settlers live under heavy military protection among 200,000 Palestinians. Ashkelon said it deployed extra police on motorcycles to patrol schools and commercial areas.

Palestinian youth have also clashed elsewhere with security forces, including Ramallah where they threw rocks and were targeted with tear gas on Monday. The rise in violence comes during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and days before the Jewish festival of Passover and Christian Easter. —AFP

Loving the  
Provider...

Continued from Page 1

Jarir bin Abdilllah (ra) reported in a long Hadeeth (prophetic tradition) translated as: “One early morning when we were with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) some people approached him barefooted, skimpily dressed; wearing striped woollen garments, carrying swords over their shoulders; most of them or rather all of them belonging to the tribe of Mudhar.

Allah’s Messenger (PBUH) showed signs of anger on his face because of the poverty-stricken state in which he saw them. He then entered his house and then came out and ordered Bilal to perform the Call to Prayer (Atha’n). After concluding the Prayer, the Prophet (PBUH) delivered a sermon in which he said, what can be translated as: “O mankind, fear your Lord who created you from a single soul, and from it, created its mate, and from both He spread (around) many men and women. So, fear Allah, in whose name you seek (consideration) of one another. And, therefore, be dutiful to your kith and kin. For indeed, ever is Allah (infinitely) knowing and watchful (of all that you do).” (An-Nisa’a 4: 1).

Then he recited what can be translated as: “O you who believe, fear Allah, and let every soul look to what it has prepared for tomorrow. Thus, be ever God-fearing, indeed, Allah is infinitely aware of all that you do.” (Al-Hashr 59: 18). People started giving charity in different amounts. A man from the Ansar (Muslim inhabitants of Medina) brought a bundle which was almost too big for his hands to hold. People continued coming one after the other till I saw two mounds of food and clothing.

That resulted in a glow (of happiness) on the face of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as if it were gold. He then said, ‘He who initiates a good practice in Islam will have a reward for it and a reward for those who act upon it after him, without their reward being diminished. And he who initiates an

‘X’: US rolls out  
gender-neutral...

Continued from Page 1

At their home in the Washington suburb of Alexandria, Ojeda began to fill out the long online passport application form, putting down their first and last name, then choosing from three options for gender: M for male, F for female and X for people who don’t identify as either. They chose the latter. They also ticked the box for “gender change,” to reflect the difference from their previous passport, which identified them as female. They didn’t have to provide any medical documentation for the change.

“I think that’s incredible,” said Ojeda, who works as an organizer at the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and holds a doctorate degree in psychology. “What makes it difficult for trans people is just how hard it is to get anything changed,” such as legal documentation, said Ojeda. When Ojeda and their NCTE

Space company  
offers first look...

Continued from Page 1

miles high, or Blue Origin, which breaches the Karman Line, 62 miles above sea level, the internationally-recognized space border. SpaceX Crew Dragons fly even deeper into space. But 20 miles is still far higher than commercial planes, which ascend around six miles high. “We are above 99 percent of Earth’s atmosphere,” co-founder Jayne Poynter told AFP, meaning passengers will really see the inky black of space.

There’s no special training required. The balloon climbs at a serene 12 miles per hour, and the company pitches itself as a greener, zero-emissions alternative to rocket fuels. They intend to get the hydrogen for the balloon from renewable sources, rather than extracting it from fossil fuels. The price for the

colleagues learned of the new passport option, they “started crying at each other,” Ojeda added, seated at their desk in a blue sweater, with a thin beard and with their hair pulled back.

The State Department announced in October that it had issued the first American passport with the X designation for gender after a long legal battle waged by a person from Colorado who is intersex. But it was only on March 31, the International Day of Transgender Visibility, that the State Department announced it was extending that right to all Americans, as well as adopting other measures on the federal level meant to simplify administrative hurdles for transgender and non-binary people.

A few other countries have similar policies. Australia began issuing X-gender passports in 2011, with New Zealand, Canada, Germany and Argentina joining the roster since then, as well as, Pakistan and Nepal. Ojeda already boasts a driver’s license from their home state of Virginia, where their gender is marked as X. Ojeda said the procedure was simple: they received an appointment, filled out the application and the X box was already there. — AFP

two-hour-up, two-hours-gliding, and two-hour-down voyage, which ends with an ocean splash-down, is significantly less than Virgin Galactic tickets that cost \$450,000 for a ride on a spaceplane.

Blue Origin doesn’t disclose its prices but they are thought to be far more, while four entrepreneurs who flew to the International Space Station on a SpaceX ship paid a reported \$55 million each to the company Axiom Space for the privilege. “We wanted to find a way that really changed the way people think about spaceflight that makes it much more approachable and accessible,” said Poynter.

One thing the passengers won’t experience is feelings of weightlessness. With Virgin’s spaceplane and Blue Origin’s rocket, passengers can unbuckle and float when the rocket engines are cut but the ship keeps coasting upwards for a few minutes, before gravity pulls it back down. Passengers on SpaceX spaceships and those on the ISS likewise experience apparent weightlessness because the vessels are orbiting the Earth. Space Perspective plans 25 flights in its first year, with all seats now booked. — AFP



## International

# India hopes for Pakistan reset after Shehbaz Sharif election

**'We need a relationship with Pakistan based on diplomatic norms of peaceful co-existence'**

**NEW DELHI:** India hopes that Pakistan's new prime minister will herald a diplomatic thaw between the two nuclear-armed foes after years of tensions, analysts say. The pragmatic and business-friendly Shehbaz Sharif faces daunting challenges as leader among them relations with a neighbour his country has fought three wars against in the past 75 years.

But he hails from an elite political family seen in India as conciliatory towards New Delhi and willing to settle disputes with dialogue instead of denunciation-unlike his immediate predecessor. "He is not someone who will go to the extreme of antagonising India," Ajay Darshan Behera, a professor of international studies at New Delhi's Jamia Milia Islamia university, told AFP.

Unusually for a senior Pakistani politician, Sharif has actually visited India, in 2013 as chief minister for Punjab—a state that was split between them in the bloody 1947 partition of the sub-continent. Sharif visited his family's ancestral village on the Indian side of the frontier and met with then-prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, along with other officials.

And for his part, his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi has attended a Sharif family wedding. The Hindu nationalist leader made a surprise trip to Pakistan in 2015, a year after taking office, when he was hosted by Sharif's elder brother Nawaz, himself prime minister at the time.

Both siblings have usually had "cordial relationships" with Indian leaders, said Imtiaz Gul of the Center for Research and Security Studies in Islamabad. "This is a good entry point basically for India to resume dialogue," he added. Modi's trip was followed by several rounds of trust-building talks aimed at repairing relations that had sunk to a

low ebb after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, which India accused Pakistan of sponsoring.

But that came to an abrupt halt the following year with renewed conflict in Kashmir, a territory hotly disputed by both countries. A series of tit-for-tat air raids were then staged over the region's frontier in 2019, with brinkmanship and radio silence between the two governments heightening fears of another all-out war.

During Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, diplomatic relations were downgraded and direct trade was suspended after a dispute over India's attempt to entrench its grip over the part of Kashmir it controls. Khan was also critical of Modi and called for international action to stop what he claimed was a "genocide of Muslims" in the disputed region.

## 'Peace and stability'

With Khan's weekend ouster, Delhi-based political analyst Sujit Dutta said the changing of the guard left Sharif the opportunity to move past the rancour of recent years, adding that any overture would be "seen very positively" by India.

## Modi attended Sharif family wedding



"We need a new relationship with Pakistan based on basic diplomatic norms of peaceful co-existence and peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue," Dutta told AFP.

"That will surely help Pakistan and certainly India too," Modi congratulated Sharif on Twitter after the latter's election win and reiterated his desire for "peace and stability" in the region. Sharif also offered an olive branch of his own, telling parliament Monday that Pakistan wanted a "better relationship with India".

But he also cautioned that no lasting peace would be possible without a resolution to Kashmir's

cases of marital rape, was proposed a decade ago and drafted in 2016 but ran into delays. Islamic groups said it promoted promiscuity and conservative lawmakers called for it to criminalise extramarital sex and LGBT relationships in the world's largest Muslim-majority country.

The law focuses on the handling of sexual violence from prevention to victim recovery, ordering compensation for victims and allowing community-based organisations to provide counselling. Physical sexual abuse inside and outside marriage now carries a maximum 12-year prison sentence and forced marriage—including cases involving children—carries a maximum nine-year jail term.

Non-consensual distribution of sexual content is now punishable by a maximum prison sentence of four years. President Joko Widodo in January called on parliament to accelerate the passing of the bill after years of roadblocks and following a high-profile case that sparked outrage last year of an Islamic boarding school teacher who raped 13 of his students.

Widodo's order to his government came as the country witnessed a sharp increase in incidents of gender-based violence against women after the onset of the pandemic. The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) reported 338,496 such cases in 2021, a 50 percent rise from the previous year.

work after the birth. Instead, the 25-year-old Filipina says bosses pushed her and her partner for an abortion despite terminations being both taboo and a crime in her deeply Catholic homeland.

"I thought, 'how dare (they)'. "Having an abortion is a mother's choice, not someone else's," she told AFP. When she refused to have an abortion, her supervisors forced her to quit. Japan's health ministry says 637 technical interns quit because of pregnancy or childbirth between 2017 and 2020, including 47 who said they wished to continue the programme. But advocates say that is likely the "tip of the iceberg", and no statistics capture how many others have been pressured to avoid or end pregnancies.

## Interchangeable, cheap labour

"Most technical interns are of reproductive age... but the idea of them getting pregnant during their stay in Japan is often considered out of the question," said Masako Tanaka, a Sophia University professor who studies the reproductive rights of migrant women.

Technical interns are covered by Japanese laws banning harassment or discrimination based on pregnancy. But "maternity harassment" remains a problem for Japanese women, and foreign technical interns are often even more vulnerable.

Reports of pregnancy-based discrimination in

for decades, but fresh waves have flooded the country since the Taliban returned to power in August, testing the patience of authorities and ordinary people. On Tuesday around 200 Afghans gathered at a square in central Kabul, carrying posters reading "Iran should stop its cruelties" and "We want justice".

Public demonstrations have been banned by the Taliban, but they allowed it to proceed with armed guards watching. "The Iranian security forces and even common people there have been treating us badly these days," said protester Manzoor Ahmad Farooqi, recently returned from Iran.

"When their police see us they pin us to the ground and beat us." Tuesday's protest came



**RAWALPINDI:** Supporters of newly elected Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif dance to celebrate at the party office in Rawalpindi. —AFP

status. "I would suggest Prime Minister Modi let us resolve the Kashmir issue and divert all our energies to bring prosperity in our countries," he said.

## 'They don't have much choice'

As prime minister, Sharif will have to contend with crippling debt, galloping inflation and a feeble currency that have kept Pakistan's economy stagnant for the past three years. The dire fiscal outlook will impress upon Sharif the importance of resuming the commercial links with India cut off by Khan's government, said Behera of Jamia university.

"There is imminent economic sense in improving trade ties with India," he said. "Pakistan is going through a very difficult time. They don't have much choice." But for India's government, decades of entrenched mistrust and hostility have also raised the spectre of unforeseen troubles.

"While the broad signs are positive, the relationship with Pakistan is very unpredictable and it takes just one terror attack... to change the discourse," the Indian Express newspaper quoted an unnamed senior government official as saying. "We will wait and watch every move closely." —AFP

## Indonesia passes long-awaited sexual violence bill

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's parliament passed a long-awaited sexual violence bill on Tuesday, a landmark decision that raises hopes of justice for victims after the country recorded a spike in reported cases during the coronavirus pandemic. Indonesian women's rights activists have for years condemned the lack of avenues for victims of gender-based and sexual violence to seek justice in a country where abuse is often considered a private affair and victims are discouraged from filing a report.

Cheers and applause from women's rights activists rang out after speaker of parliament Puan Maharani announced a majority of lawmakers had backed the bill at a plenary session. "This law is a real manifestation of the country's efforts to prevent any form of sexual violence and to care, protect and rehabilitate the victims as well as to enforce justice," Bintang Puspayoga, minister of women empowerment and children protection, told the plenary session.

The bill, which seeks to combat sex crimes and provide a legal framework for victims including in

## Pregnancy trap for workers in Japan scheme

**TOKYO:** When Vanessa, a worker with Japan's "technical intern" programme, told her supervisors she was pregnant, she says they first suggested an abortion and then pressured her to quit. It's an example, activists say, of the abuses faced by vulnerable workers in a controversial programme that helps Japan meet its labour needs.

The programme, which had around 275,000 workers from countries including China and Vietnam last year, is supposed to give participants specialised experience that will be of use in their home country. It's a valuable source of labour given Japan's ageing population and small pool of migrant workers, but the scheme has been dogged by allegations of discrimination and physical abuse.

And female technical interns can face particular pressure around pregnancy. Vanessa, who asked to be identified by her first name only, was working in a care home in southern Japan's Fukuoka when she discovered she was pregnant, and hoped to return to

## Afghans protest against Iranian 'cruelties' in Taliban-approved demo

**KABUL:** Dozens of Afghans protested Tuesday against Iranian "cruelties" after videos appearing to show refugees being beaten circulated widely over the weekend. Tehran announced the closure until further notice of its Afghan missions "in order to obtain necessary assurances guaranteeing total security", its foreign ministry said.

Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees



**BANDA ACEH, Indonesia:** File photo shows a woman under an Indonesian flag holding a placard that reads "stop violence against women and children" during a protest against sexual abuse in front of the people's representative council (DPR) in Banda Aceh. —AFP

Activists largely welcomed the law as a step forward for the country but said it could have been more far-reaching in the sex crimes it included. The text does not include articles on rape and forced abortion. The government argued both of those crimes had been regulated in the country's health law and will be included in later legislation. —AFP



**TOKYO:** File photo shows Hiroki Ishiguro (R), a lawyer who has represented technical interns, walking with others to the Supreme Court in Tokyo to submit an appeal and signed petitions for acquittal of Vietnamese technical intern trainee Le Thi Thuy Linh, who received a three-month suspended sentence in January for having "abandoned" the bodies of her stillborn twins in 2020. —AFP

2019 prompted Japan's immigration agency to remind employers about the rights of interns. "We understand that it's entirely possible that technical interns, as human beings, get pregnant and give birth, and they shouldn't suffer detrimental treatment for that," an immigration agency official told AFP. —AFP

after videos circulated at the weekend purporting to show Iranian border guards and civilians beating Afghans, although it was unclear when and where the images were filmed.

Iranian officials have dismissed the videos as "baseless and invalid". Protests first erupted Monday in Herat, the western city that serves as a launchpad for Afghans wanting to cross to Iran—officially and illegally.

Protesters set fire to an Iranian flag outside Tehran's consulate in the city, and smashed CCTV cameras. A statement on Iran's foreign ministry website said the embassy in Kabul had also been targeted.

The statement, issued Tuesday, said the ministry summoned Afghanistan's charge d'affaires in Tehran "to vigorously protest the attacks on the Iranian embassy in Kabul and the consulate general in Herat".

## Taiwan issues wartime survival handbook

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's military published a handbook on Tuesday advising civilians on how to prepare for a potential Chinese invasion, including where to find bomb shelters and how to stockpile emergency supplies. 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 necessary.

Those threats have turned more bellicose under Xi Jinping, China's most authoritarian leader in a generation. Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine has also heightened fears that China might one day follow through on threats to annex its smaller neighbour.

The 28-page guide contains information which "the general public can use as an emergency response guideline in a military crisis or natural disaster," defence ministry spokesman Sun Li-fang said during an introduction at an online press conference.

It is the first time Taiwan's military has published such a handbook. Drawn from similar guides by Sweden and Japan, it tells residents where to find bomb shelters via mobile phone apps and what to do in an emergency including how to distinguish air raid sirens.

"The guide is for the public to better prepare themselves before a war or disaster happens," Liu Tai-yi, an official of the ministry's All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency, said. It includes information on basic survival skills for the public during air raids, massive fires, building collapses, power outages and natural disasters.

"We hope the public can familiarise themselves where the safety shelters are beforehand," he added. Beijing's increased sabre-rattling has spurred diplomatic support for Taipei and visits from Western nations shaken by China's more muscular tone.

Taiwan remains massively outgunned against China but the mountainous island would be a formidable challenge for any military to conquer. Taiwan last year stepped up its training regime for reservists and has increased purchases of military equipment such as jets and anti-ship missiles. —AFP

fares in Tehran "to vigorously protest the attacks on the Iranian embassy in Kabul and the consulate general in Herat".

Human trafficking is big business along their shared 900-kilometre (550-mile) border. The two nations also have the Persian language in common-known as Farsi in Iran and Dari in Afghanistan—but a majority of Afghans are Sunni Muslims compared to their mostly Shiite neighbours.

Iran has long had testy relations with the Taliban, who raided Tehran's consulate in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 and murdered 10 diplomats and a journalist. The Taliban said the raid was carried out by a renegade force acting against. —AFP



# Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2022

## Zain Group publishes its 11th annual sustainability report

A resilient journey across a challenging year



Zain's five year Corporate Sustainability strategy based on four pillars aligned with UN's Sustainable Development Goals



**Bader Al-Kharafi: Zain focused on providing meaningful connectivity and driving equitable systematic change, centered on a five-year corporate sustainability strategy**

**KUWAIT:** Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the publication of its 11th consecutive annual sustainability report, entitled 'A resilient journey across a challenging year'. In the report, Zain summarizes its sustainability-related activities during the year based on its new five-year Corporate Sustainability strategy that is grounded on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with the purpose being centered on and driven by empowering and establishing long lasting value for the communities it serves.

The 11th edition of the report showcases how Zain continues to improve and adapt its activities to align to international best practices and reporting that follows the GRI Standards Framework. Zain is also implementing the Sustainability Accounting Standard Board (SASB) framework for Telecommunications Services. Both standards are externally assured by Ernst & Young (Al-Aiban, Al-Osaimi and Partners) providing limited assurance.

Commenting on the publication of the 11th consecutive annual sustainability report, Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, "Throughout 2021, Zain remained unwavering in its determination to drive equitable systemic change in the communities in which it operates by providing access to meaningful connectivity, especially in the face of many socio-economic and environmental challenges, and lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hindered development across the globe."

"Nevertheless, 2021 was a significant year for progress with respect to Zain's sustainability agenda, underscored by the many initiatives successfully implemented across our footprint, and highlighted by the upgraded A- score received from CDP indicating our regional leadership in addressing climate change."

Jennifer Suleiman, Zain Group's Chief Sustainability Officer commented, "We are all aware of how tumultuous the last couple of years have been to live and work through. Being a customer-

11th consecutive report charts Zain's activities through the unprecedented circumstances brought about by the global pandemic

Zain stands out distinctly in the region with respect to the transparency it reports sustainability activities and outcomes, and in its regional leadership in addressing climate change

focused organization with the responsibility to maintain meaningful connectivity and productivity for 7,000 staff and 50 million customers in an inclusive and equitable manner, was a challenging situation to overcome. The contents of this report highlight how together we have managed that responsibility and supported our communities extremely well under the circumstances. We continue to learn and transition across all of our diverse sustainability activities and are delighted to be pioneering this area across the region."

### Qualitative and quantitative progress in Zain's Corporate Sustainability strategy

Zain's five-year Corporate Sustainability strategy formulated in 2020 is centered on four pillars: Climate Change; Social Business; Inclusion; and Generation Youth. It is based on the UN's SDGs, aiming to establish purpose-driven activities anchored in meaningful connectivity to drive equitable systematic change. Qualitative and quantitative targets have been embedded to ensure measurable metrics are set to assess and track the progress of Zain's sustainability-related activities. The vision is to reduce inequalities, safeguard the planet, foster innovation, and build prosperous communities.

### Highlights from Zain's 2021 Sustainability initiatives

Most of the sustainability programs implemented by Zain in 2021 addressed the challenges wrought

including one worth \$1 billion that was maturing on July 25. China is Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender and owns about 10 percent of the island's foreign debt, followed by Japan and India. The government has borrowed heavily from Beijing since 2005 for infrastructure projects, many of which became white elephants.

Sri Lanka also leased its strategic Hambantota port to a Chinese company in 2017 after it became unable to service the \$1.4 billion debt from Beijing used to build it. This sparked concerns from Western countries and neighbor India that the strategically located South Asian nation was falling victim to a debt trap.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said Tuesday's default would not stop Beijing from lending support to Sri Lanka's beleaguered economy. "China has always done its best in providing assistance to Sri Lanka's economic and social development. We will continue to do so in the future," he said. Sri Lanka's snowballing economic crisis began to be felt after the coronavirus pandemic torpedoed vital revenue from tourism and remittances. The government imposed a wide import ban to conserve dwindling foreign currency reserves and use them to service the debts it has now defaulted on. But the resulting shortages have stoked public anger. At least eight people have died while waiting in fuel queues since March 20 with two of the deaths reported on Monday.

"It's been depressing to be so frightened of the future and where it's going," protester Vasi Samudra

by the pandemic and the company's response to them:

- Expanding digital financial services, providing far-reaching benefits to needy groups within communities in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan and Sudan, reaching a combined customer base of 1.5 million, undertaking 25 million transactions with an aggregate value of \$2.3 billion in 2021

- Through its value chain, Zain was able to maintain 80,116 jobs.

- The annual Zain Ramadan commercial in partnership with UNICEF entitled, "No one is safe, until we are all safe", addressed the challenge of vaccine hesitancy across the region, with the 2.55-minute-long video going viral and exceeding 10 million views on YouTube, as well as on regional satellite and local TV networks

- In Kuwait, the Shlonik application created by Zain assisted the Ministry of Health to ensure residents adhere to quarantine regulations, with 1.77 million people registering on the app.

- Supporting governments, Zain organized vaccination drives in markets resulting in over 12,000 vaccinations

- Fostering the development of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), Zain launched the Women in Tech initiative undertaking 256 mentorship sessions across its operating markets

- Zain worked with the Canadian Center for

Children Protection to integrate Project Arachnid, software to reduce the availability of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) globally successfully integrated in Kuwait and is currently working on integrating it across other markets

- Launch of a Child Online Safety Booklet in collaboration with UNICEF, promoting safe esports and gaming to schools and universities

- Zain Jordan's Basma Line+, a mobile bundle package, attracted 329 people from the deaf and mute community, while in Kuwait, Zain introduced two postpaid packages dedicated to people with disabilities

- With respect to products for the youth, in Sudan, discounted data bundles reached 6.2 million users

- The Zain Kids platform became available in several markets offering safe online content, reaching 1.6 million children, a quadrupling of child subscribers over the year

- Launch of BE WELL, a Group-wide diversity and inclusion program aiming to foster the mental well-being of employees across operations

- Zain began to measure its water consumption across operations, implementing water reduction initiatives aiming to eliminate plastic consumption in addition to reducing waste in its warehouses by 50 percent by 2025

- Zain's climate actions saw the company upgraded to A- in latest 'CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2021', ranking it first in-region and among leaders globally. This ranking is higher than the regional average for Asia of B-, and higher than the Media, Telecommunications & Data Center Services sector average of B. Additionally, Zain took a major step in expanding its Scope 3 emissions inventory to report more accurately.

More detailed information of Zain's 2021 sustainability report, entitled 'A resilient journey across a challenging year' can be downloaded by visiting <https://zain.com/en/sustainability/sustainability-report/>.

## Sri Lanka defaults on foreign debt

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka announced a default on its \$51 billion foreign debt Tuesday as the island nation grapples with its worst economic crisis in memory and escalating protests demanding the government's resignation. Acute food and fuel shortages, as well as long daily electricity blackouts, have brought widespread suffering to the country's 22 million people in the most painful downturn since independence in 1948.

The government has struggled to service foreign loans and Tuesday's decision comes ahead of negotiations for an International Monetary Fund bailout aimed at preventing a more catastrophic hard default that would see Sri Lanka completely repudiate its debts. "We have lost the ability to repay foreign debt," Sri Lanka's Central Bank governor Nandalal Weerasinghe told reporters in Colombo. "This is a pre-emptive negotiated default. We have announced (it) to the creditors." Officials say the move will free up foreign currency to finance desperately needed food, fuel and medicine imports after months of scarce supplies.

Just under half of Sri Lanka's debt is market borrowings through international sovereign bonds,



COLOMBO: Motorists queue to fill their tanks up at a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Colombo on April 12, 2022.— AFP

Devi told AFP at an anti-government rally in Colombo Monday. "There are already people who are suffering... We are all here because we are being affected by the economic problems."

Crowds have attempted to storm the homes of government leaders and security forces have dispersed protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets. Thousands of people were camped outside President Gotabaya

Rajapaksa's seafloor office in the capital Colombo in the fourth straight day of protests calling for him to step down. Economists say the crisis has been made worse by government mismanagement, years of accumulated borrowing and ill-advised tax cuts. International rating agencies also downgraded Sri Lanka last year, effectively blocking the country from accessing foreign capital markets to raise new loans.— AFP



## Business

# Ukraine war crisis pushes US inflation to new 4-decade high

## Analysts skeptical White House's moves to curb prices will be effective

WASHINGTON: US inflation continued to surge in March, sending the consumer price index (CPI) up 8.5 percent over the past 12 months, its largest increase in more than four decades, the Labor Department said Tuesday. Compared to February, prices climbed 1.2 percent, in line with analysts' forecasts, though "core" CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, rose 0.3 percent, less than expected.

The report was the first to fully encompass the shock caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's sanctions against Moscow, which have caused energy and food prices to spike worldwide. US gasoline prices soared 18.3 percent in the month, accounting for about half the increase in overall CPI.

Total energy prices increased 11 percent compared to February, which included a 22.3 percent jump in fuel oil prices, the report said. Other components driving the price surge were food, which rose one percent, and shelter, including rents, which climbed 0.5 percent. Both monthly increases were the same as in February. Airfares rose 10.7 percent, but used cars prices, which surged in 2021 as the US economy recovered from the pandemic, dropped 3.8 percent.

Americans have been weathering steadily accelerating price increases that hit 7.9 percent over the 12 months to February, a rate not seen in four decades. But as the Federal Reserve raises interest rates, some economists believe the report will also mark the peak of the inflation wave that began last year as the economy recovered from COVID-19 — though it could be a while before consumers feel relief.

"The subsequent slowing may not be meaningful given all the supply restrictions on products from Russia and Ukraine as well as the growing supply chain bottlenecks on finished goods from China due to the COVID lockdowns there," Karl Haeling of LBBW said. The inflation wave has become a political liability for President Joe Biden, and before the data's release, the White House temporarily waived a seasonal ban on sales of E15 gasoline, which is cheaper but usually not allowed to be sold during the summer. But that won't stop the Labor Department from reporting another sky-high year-on-year inflation number in March that analysts believe could hit somewhere around 8.5 percent.



WASHINGTON: Gasoline prices hover around \$4.00 a gallon for the least expensive grade at several gas stations in the nation's capital on April 11, 2022. — AFP

### Nearing the peak?

After years of muted price pressures, inflation began climbing as the economy recovered a year ago, driven by the Fed's pandemic-era easy money policies, global shortages of components and delays in shipping, and government stimulus packages that fattened Americans' wallets and drove up demand. The consensus among economists is for CPI to accelerate by 1.2 percent in March compared to February, but for "core" CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, to rise by 0.5 percent in March, the same as the month prior.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics predicted "this will be the peak" of the annual increases—but only because future reports will be compared to months in 2021 when prices were already climbing. Gasoline will play a big role in March's price gains, Shepherdson said, adding 0.7 percent to the monthly figure overall. Food prices also rose in the month, he

said, as did hotel prices and airfares, though prices for scarce used cars may decline after recent surges.

### Hitting demand

While analysts are skeptical that the White House's moves to cut pump prices will be effective, a recent decline in global oil prices may ultimately take some pressure off Americans. Meanwhile, the Fed is moving to tighten lending conditions to stop inflation, though whether they can do so without causing a recession is an open question. The central bank hiked interest rates a quarter-point higher from zero last month, and are widely expected to raise them by a half-point next month, and continue increasing throughout this year. "There is no road map for what the Fed is trying to accomplish except in world (with) supply constraints," Grant Thornton economist Diane Swonk warned on Twitter. The "Fed needs to hit demand. Hard. Very hard," she wrote. — AFP

food for four days as initially ordered by authorities. Seven days later, his portions are "getting smaller and smaller".

"I've thought about my meals and my food intake more than I ever have in my life," said Tsai, whose business organizes public lectures in normal times. Some residents have resorted to bartering or paying over the odds for food as the lockdown grinds on. A Shanghai resident surnamed Ma said she paid 400 yuan (\$63) just for a box of instant noodles and a soda. "I'm just trying to stock up," she said. "I'm not sure how long this will continue."

### 'Unreasonable, unsustainable'

Shanghai is now a city of silence with the quiet broken only by robot dogs and drones broadcasting orders to test for COVID and stay inside. Workers in hazmat suits—dubbed the "Big Whites"—carry out testing inside residential compounds, where every few days residents line up for swabbing filled with dread at a positive result.

Some have seen the lighter side. One foreigner queuing for testing last week dressed in a tuxedo complete with bow-tie has made waves online as people make the most of their few minutes outside.

Dog owners have been unable to walk their pets and are forced to put their pooches through crash courses on using a litter tray—or sneak out in the dead of the night for the animals to relieve themselves. "I trained my dog to pee and poop inside, but it came to a point where, to keep myself sane and my dog sane, I took him down at 3am," said one owner.

Authorities are struggling to provide enough beds at makeshift hospitals for people who test positive.

The government has said 130,000 new beds are ready or under construction as part of its mass quarantine regime. But the policy is testing the tolerance of many. Leona Cheng, a student in her early 20s, emerged from 13 days of quarantine on Friday. "It is unreasonable and unsustainable," she told AFP of Shanghai's strategy. "Too many people are getting infected and the rate of infection is too fast." — AFP



Fadwa Darwish



Saleh Al-Selmi

## Shanghai locals sleep at work and ration food

SHANGHAI: By day it's Romeo's workplace, by night it's his home. Like many other finance sector workers in Shanghai, he has moved into the office to keep the wheels of commerce turning during a harsh COVID lockdown of the megacity.

Anticipating that creeping closures would catch him out, Romeo decamped to the Pudong finance district in late March shortly before the city shut down. The business hub has since become the epicenter of China's biggest COVID-19 outbreak since the virus emerged more than two years ago, recording around 25,000 infections a day. Most of Shanghai's 25 million residents are under strict stay-at-home orders, raging at food shortages and fearful of testing positive for COVID as it would land them in a giant quarantine centre. Some, like Romeo, are living strangely dislocated lives as businesses struggle to keep operating in one of the world's major financial hubs.

"There are people sleeping on the first and second floors, each person goes to their own office," Romeo told AFP, declining to use his real, Chinese name. "There's no forced conversation... everyone is quiet and respectful of each other's distance and privacy."

At night the social graces of office hours continue, he said. For other workers in Shanghai, privacy is in short supply. Social media videos show staff sleeping on bunks in closed factories that are trying to continue manufacturing their goods.

### \$63 noodles

Shanghai's slide into crisis caught many unprepared. Frank Tsai, who is locked down in his apartment in Puxi, the western half of Shanghai, stocked up with



SHANGHAI: Most of Shanghai's 25 million residents are under strict stay-at-home orders, raging at food shortages and fearful of testing positive for COVID as it would land them in a giant quarantine centre.

## UIC signs MoU with ICMA

KUWAIT: Union of Investment Companies (UIC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with International Capital Market Association (ICMA). The agreement was signed as part of the professional relations initiative by the Investment Studies Center, the training arm of Union of Investment Companies. The MoU focuses on collaboration with international training establishments to offer advanced training programs for professionals on subjects related to stock markets.

The International Capital Market Association is a non-profit international establishment that operates according to Swiss civil law in Zurich. It has offices in London, Paris, Brussels and Hong Kong. Its history spans over 50 years and it operates primarily in the area of international securities. ICMA is a leader in providing basic principles and recommendations on stock market operations that laid the foundation of its success.

## Dubai's DEWA shares soar in Gulf's biggest IPO since 2019

DUBAI: Shares in the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority rose 16 percent on Tuesday in the Gulf region's biggest initial public offering since Saudi oil giant Aramco in 2019.

DEWA shares soared 19 percent in the first minutes of trading before paring back to 16 percent at 11:00 am (0700 GMT). The Dubai stock exchange was down 0.5 percent after the first hour of trade.

The state-owned utility last week said it had raised 22.3 billion dirhams (\$6.1 billion) in the Gulf's largest IPO since Aramco's world-record flotation. Some nine billion shares, an 18 percent stake, were listed, with the initial price set at 2.48 dirhams (\$0.68).

The deal, in which more than 65,000 institutional and retail investors participated, values the company at 124 billion dirhams (\$33.9 billion), the company said. The record for the largest public listing in the Gulf, and in the world, is held by Aramco, which raised \$29.4 billion by listing a 1.7 percent stake on the Riyadh Stock Exchange in December 2019.

The emirate of Dubai, which lacks the large oil reserves boasted by some of its neighbors, has diversified its economy by focusing on finance, tourism and trade. But it is facing increased competition in the region, notably from Saudi Arabia, which is also seeking to reduce its dependence on oil and gas. — AFP

## DHAMAN, KBA seek to boost cooperation

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) held a meeting with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) to discuss means of cooperation and matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by KBA Secretary-General Dr Hamad Al-Hasawi and DHAMAN CEO Thamer Arab.

During the meeting, the active and tangible role of KBA was emphasized in various financial, economic and societal development fields, which contributes to achieving the national development plan based on the New Kuwait 2035 Vision, along with the role of DHAMAN in providing mandatory health assurance for residents working in Kuwait's private sector bodies, including banks, once beneficiaries of health assurance services are transferred from the Ministry of Health to DHAMAN.

During the meeting, Dr Hamad Al-Hasawi stressed the vital and important role Kuwaiti banks play in supporting various sectors, projects, companies and investments, as well as supporting community and civil society organizations as a whole within the framework of the Association's efforts to support and develop banking performance in Kuwait in order to achieve the requirements of the nation's economy and support additionally solidifying its monetary and financial pillars. He also added that the banking sector in Kuwait constitutes an essential base in the country's economy and seeks to develop society, which means the need to maintain the overall health and safety of bank employees in cooperation with various entities, including DHAMAN, which will in the future provide mandatory health assurance services for private sector employees and their families.

On his part, Thamer Arab expressed faith in the partnership with various organizations and authorities, especially KBA, as it represents an important and vital sector that has several contributions in various aspects in the country, as the banking sector is one of the main catalysts for growth in Kuwait through its developmental contribution, adding that DHAMAN is looking forward to supporting the banking sector by providing integrated healthcare that focuses on raising healthcare indicators through prevention and community awareness to achieve integrated healthcare for a New Kuwait with DHAMAN being the first healthcare public-private-partnership (PPP) organization in the Middle East and the first in the Middle East to provide its services based on the health maintenance organization (HMO) model by providing health assurance with an integrated network of healthcare centers and hospitals that include many medical specialties and related services.

## Nokia to quit Russian market, 2,000 affected

HELSINKI: Nokia will pull out of the Russian market, meaning layoffs for the some 2,000 staff the Finnish telecoms provider has in the country, the company said Tuesday. The announcement comes a day after rival Ericsson decided to suspend its activities in the country indefinitely. Hundreds of mainly Western companies have announced the suspension of their activities or their departure from Russia since the invasion of Ukraine on February 24 and the severe sanctions imposed upon Moscow. Nokia, which stopped deliveries to the country in early March, "can now announce that we will exit the Russian market," the mobile telecoms giant said in a statement.

"It has been clear for Nokia since the early days of the invasion that continuing our presence in Russia would not be possible," CEO Pekka Lundmark said in a post to Twitter. Nokia has 2,000 employees in Russia, including about 200 working with research and development, a spokeswoman told AFP. "Unfortunately in these circumstances redundancies are unavoidable. However, for certain roles that can be done outside of Russia, we will offer relocation," Maria Vaismaa, Head of Public Relations for Nokia, wrote in an email.

"The safety and wellbeing of our employees is our priority and we aim to manage this change in an orderly manner," she added. The move will result in a provision of 100 million euros (\$108.6 million) in Nokia's first quarter accounts, due to be published on April 28, the group said. Russia accounted for less than two percent of Nokia's 2021 net sales and the group said it was maintaining its financial forecasts for 2022 "considering the strong demand we see in other regions."

On Monday, Swedish rival Ericsson announced an indefinite suspension of its operations in Russia and said it would put its 600 employees on paid leave. The departure of the two Western heavyweights in the global 4G and 5G market clears the way for China's Huawei in Russia.—AFP



## Business

# WTO sounds alarm against dividing world economy over war in Ukraine

## War has darkened prospects of world trade: Okonjo-Iweala

GENEVA: The WTO warned Tuesday that Russia's war in Ukraine had darkened the prospects for world trade as it sounded the alarm against the global economy dividing into rival blocs over the conflict.

The World Trade Organization said the war would damage world trade growth this year and drag down global gross domestic product (GDP) growth as well. "This is not the time to turn inward," WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told a press conference at the global trade body's headquarters in Geneva.

"In a crisis, more trade is needed to ensure stable, equitable access to necessities. Restricting trade will threaten the well-being of families and businesses and make more fraught the task of building a durable economic recovery from COVID-19."

The former Nigerian foreign and finance minister said countries and international organizations must work together to facilitate trade amid sharp inflation pressures on essential supplies and growing difficulties for supply chains.

"History teaches us that dividing the world economy into rival blocs and turning our backs on the poorest countries leads neither to prosperity nor to peace," said Okonjo-Iweala. The WTO said world GDP, at market exchange rates, is expected to increase by 2.8 percent in 2022 — down 1.3 percentage points from the previous forecast of 4.1 percent after rising 5.7 percent in 2021.

Growth should rise to 3.2 percent in 2023 — close to the average rate of three percent between 2010 and 2019. The WTO now expects merchandise trade volume growth of three percent in 2022 — down from its previous forecast of 4.7 percent—and then 3.4 percent in 2023.

### 'Immense human suffering'

"The war in Ukraine has created immense human suffering, but it has also damaged the global economy at a critical juncture. Its impact will be felt around the world, particularly in low-income countries, where food accounts for a large fraction of household spending," Okonjo-Iweala said.

"Smaller supplies and higher prices

for food mean that the world's poor could be forced to do without. This must not be allowed to happen." The WTO said Western sanctions on Russian businesses and individuals were likely to have a strong effect on commercial services trade.

In 2019, the European Union accounted for more than 42 percent of Russia's services imports and 31.1 percent of its services exports. "Prior to the pandemic, travel/tourism and air transport services were the largest traded services by Russia, accounting for 46 percent of its exports and 36 percent of its imports," said the WTO.

"These services, already hit hard by the pandemic, may be heavily affected by economic sanctions." The WTO said the war in Ukraine was not the only factor currently weighing on world trade.

It said lockdowns in China to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were once again disrupting seaborne trade at a time when supply chain pressures appeared to be easing. "This could lead to renewed shortages of manufacturing inputs and higher inflation," it said. — AFP



GENEVA: World Trade Organization (WTO) director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (center) looks on between WTO chief economist Robert Koopman (left) and WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell during a press conference on WTO trade forecast at the intergovernmental trade organization in Geneva on April 12, 2022. —AFP

## KFH core partner in success of 'Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: KFH Group Acting CEO, AbdulWahab Essa Al-Rushood said that protecting customer data and providing the best secured digital banking services have always been a priority for KFH and one of its pros. Al-Rushood added that KFH is coping with and adopting advanced security systems to protect customers data according to the best global standards in this field. He emphasized that this trend is part of KFH digitalization strategy.

Al-Rushood emphasized that KFH is a core partner in the success of the "Be Aware" campaign, launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait for the second year respectively in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association. He added that the campaign goals are compatible with KFH's efforts to protect customers' data and keep them aware of their rights and obligations. KFH believes in enhancing financial literacy among various society segments while achieving the best benefit from banking services.

He indicated that the accelerating banking industry digitalization efforts regionally and globally have called for an enhancement of cyber security strategies to avoid any electronic fraud attempts.

In this context, Al-Rushood affirmed that KFH has adopted a multilayered cyber security approach to ensure the safety of the bank's digital assets. Also, it has applied the best hedging methods including continuing review of the bank's systems, evaluation of the safety and security of the e-services provided by the bank, activation of control regulations and other procedures to enhance cyber security.

He added that with the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, e-services and digital banking operations witnessed a remarkable momentum accompanied by an increase in cyber risks and electronic fraud. Considering these facts, it was necessary to raise our customers' awareness of these challenges and combat all e-fraud attempts by not sharing confidential information, account No., ATM card details, passwords, personal identification code, security pin on the back of the card and avoid replying to any telephone calls or suspicious messages which they may receive whether in the form of SMS or through social media, especially if the sender's No. is unknown or unidentified.

Al-Rushood indicated that the seminars and awareness messages which KFH continues to post on its website or social media accounts are considered as an integral part of its efforts to combat cybercrimes and fraud which have coincided with the expansion of banks in providing online banking services. The "Be Aware" campaign aims to spread awareness of customers' rights concerning personal finance transactions whether consumer or installment financing, the mechanism to lodge complaints regarding banking services, various banking cards, methods to avoid fraud attempts, awareness on the risks of the encashment of loans and high-risk investments and other important issues and topics.

The awareness campaign "Be Aware", which is continuing for the second year respectively, aims to spread banking literacy among society and increase public awareness on the most important financial issues and the method to protect assets from any fraud attempts. It also aims to highlight the role of the banking sector in general and the banking products which the bank provides by presenting and posting instructions and tips through media and social media platforms.

## Gulf Bank to announce winner of Al-Danah's KD 100,000 prize Thursday

KUWAIT: In keeping with its commitment to providing its customers with exceptionally unique services and periodic draws, Gulf Bank is set to announce the lucky winner of its quarterly Al-Danah draw prize of KD 100,000. The draw is set to take place on April 14, under the supervision and in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young. The draw will take place in Gulf Bank's Head Office, and the winner's name will be announced on the bank's social media channels.

On this occasion, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Mohammed Al-Qattan, said: "The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win



Mohammed Al-Qattan

KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000."

Al-Qattan added that Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that proudly creates two millionaires a year. Al-Danah customers stand to win the semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million on July 21, 2022 and the grand prize of KD 1.5 million on January 19, 2023. Al-Qattan continued, "We also pride ourselves on providing our customers with an exceptional and noteworthy banking experience that complements our societal role of encouraging a culture of savings; by rewarding savers with monthly, semi-annual and annual draws, we hope to motivate our customers and reinforce their saving habits, encouraging others to do the same. This is why the Bank recently decided to increase the number of Al-Danah Millionaires to two millionaires per year."

He added: "At Gulf Bank, we are keen to provide

the best services and products to our esteemed customers, as we strive to continuously increase our customer satisfaction levels. Customer satisfaction was our main motivation for adjusting the new draw structure for the Al-Danah account, and continues to be the main driving factor behind our periodic launches of various products and services that are characterized by growth, simplicity and innovation, as we continue to exceed the requirements and needs of our customers. Our team continues to pay close attention to the smallest of details in keeping with developments in the local and international banking market as we continue to consolidate Gulf Bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future."

### Exclusive loyalty program

As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to reward customers for their loyalty, the Al-Danah account provides account holders with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2021 have been transferred and added to the 2022 chances, and this will be repeated in 2023 onwards. Terms and conditions apply.

## Honda to invest \$40 bn in EV tech over next decade

TOKYO: Japanese automaker Honda said Tuesday it will invest nearly \$40 billion into electric vehicle technology over the next decade as it works towards switching all sales away from traditional fuel cars.

Global auto giants are increasingly prioritizing electric and hybrid vehicles, with demand growing for less polluting models as concern about climate change grows. Honda said in a statement that it plans to launch 30 EV models by 2030, with an annual production volume of more than two million units.

The company said it would allocate around five trillion yen (\$39.9 billion) over the next 10 years "in the area of electrification and software technologies to further accelerate its electrification".

The investment is the latest step in its push to have electric and fuel cell vehicles account for 100 percent of all sales by 2040, a target announced a year ago. Honda and Japanese tech conglomerate Sony announced last month they would start a new company to develop and sell electric vehicles, with sales of their first electric model expected to begin in 2025.

At present, around 10 percent of European car sales are EVs, and the US figure is just two percent.



TOKYO: Honda president Toshihiro Mibe speaks about the automobile electrification business during a press conference at the company's headquarters in Tokyo on April 12, 2022. —AFP

But demand is growing, and other major automakers including Honda's Japanese rivals are investing money and resources into electric vehicles.

Earlier this year, the auto alliance grouping Nissan, Renault, and Mitsubishi Motors promised to offer 35 new electric models by 2030 as it announced a total investment of \$25 billion in the sector. Toyota, the world's top-selling carmaker, has also recently hiked its 2030 electric vehicle sales goal by 75 percent, aiming to sell 3.5 million EVs a year from then. —AFP

## Musk dodges limits in Twitter board seat refusal: Experts

KUWAIT: Elon Musk's rejection of a Twitter board seat frees him to boost his ownership stake in the social media platform and dodge obligations to promote its best interests, experts warned Monday. News last week that the controversy-courting Tesla boss had become Twitter's largest shareholder sparked a roller-coaster of developments that ended with the platform's CEO saying Musk had walked away.

Close watchers of the firm speculated about what could come next, but saw potentially ominous signs in the world's richest person's intentions regarding Twitter. "This now goes from a Cinderella story with Musk joining the Twitter board and keeping his stake under 14.9 percent, helping move Twitter strategically forward, to likely a 'Game of Thrones' battle between Musk and Twitter," Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said in a note to investors.

Musk's deal to join the board included an agreement to keep his share in the company under 15 percent. But now, he can continue to amass stock and

push for change without having to play nice with Twitter board members, said Techspontential analyst Avi Greengart.

"Everyone seems to think Musk wants a bigger part of the company than the board would let him have," said Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi. Musk confirmed Monday he wouldn't be joining the board, while offering no explicit explanation in an updated filing to US market authorities.

But he reserved the right to take a range of actions like sell his shares or buy more and engage Twitter's board or management in discussions "without limitation" on topics ranging from structure and governance, to management or strategy, the filing said.

Possible scenarios now include Musk trying to force his will on Twitter, or even push to sell the company, said Ives. Musk could also decide the game is over and shift focus to his many other endeavors, such as electric cars, space exploration and even linking human brains to computers, Ives added.

### Critic or conquerer?

A tech world star with more than 81 million followers on the microblogging platform, Musk last week disclosed a purchase of 73.5 million shares—or 9.2 percent—of Twitter's common stock. Twitter chief executive Parag Agrawal had announced that Musk would be joining the board, describing him as "a pas-

## Al-Houshah wins ABK's Alfouz prize

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Mariam Mohammad Al-Houshah as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The winner was announced on 11 April 2022. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD 100 only.

ABK encourages everyone to open Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances in winning in the upcoming draw which will happen on Monday, 18 April 2022. The higher the deposits are, the higher the chances to win.



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX, speaks during the Satellite 2020 at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC. —AFP

sionate believer and intense critic of the service which is exactly what we need."

Musk himself tweeted that he was "looking forward to working with Parag & Twitter board to make significant improvements to Twitter in coming months!" Musk's appointment was to be contingent on a background check and a requirement that he would have to act in the best interests of the company once appointed, Agrawal said in a statement. Musk fired off a series of barbs at Twitter over the weekend that have since vanished. —AFP

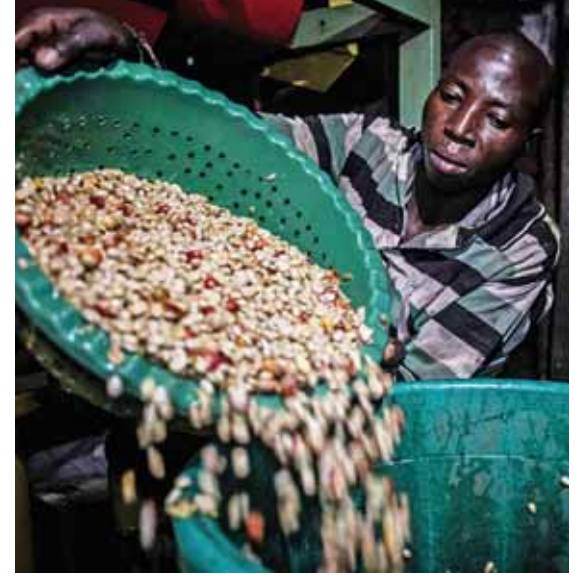




A woman in Idjwi in the coffee field picks the red berries to bring them to the washing station, in Idjwi, Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP photos



A Rebuild women's hope association worker discusses the price of red coffee beans with a woman at the Hala washing station on the island of Idjwi in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Bizimana Rutshurro, 35, has been a machinist's helper for two years.

# WOMEN BREW BRIGHTER FUTURE IN DR CONGO COFFEE INITIATIVE

The afternoon sun beats down on Lake Kivu in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where on an island, row after row of coffee bushes are bringing forth a rich harvest of berries. And the main beneficiaries will be women—the outcome of an equity project in a sector where women are notoriously sidelined and under-paid. “Women are the ones who work the land, but when it comes to harvesting (the crop) and marketing (it), they get pushed aside—it becomes a man’s business,” said Marcelline Budza, a 33-year-old feminist and entrepreneur.

“That was what disgusted me.” Nine years ago, Budza founded an NGO called Rebuild Women’s Hope (RWH) to expand the role of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s coffee sector. RWH set its eyes on Idjwi, an island of some 300 square kilometers (115 square miles) located in the middle of Lake Kivu, where some of the world’s most-lauded coffee is grown. Arabica coffee

from Idjwi has a worldwide reputation—a richness that comes from being grown at high altitude, in dark volcanic soil and without chemical fertilizers.

“It’s exceptional,” said Daniel Abamungu Cinyabuguma, manager of the Muungano agricultural cooperative in Goma, on the shore of the great lake. The berries are picked, washed and sorted before being allowed to ferment and then dry-labor-intensive work that in the DRC has long been dominated by men. “Men denigrate the women, saying that coffee growing isn’t for them,” Budza said. Overcoming prejudice—not to mention red tape, tax demands, fraud and lack of credit—has taken years of effort, which are now being rewarded, she said. Today, RWH employs at least 12,000 women at the peak of the coffee-harvesting season. The women chiefly work in processing the coffee and in office administration, and are paid at the same rate as the nearly 900 men.

“My goals are being achieved,” said

Budza. “Women can now smile, they can be financially independent.” Rosette Nyakalala Bisengi, a 24-year-old cultivator and coffee sorter confirmed things had improved. But she still earns only 2,500 Congolese francs (\$1.25) a day and would like to double that. Even so, she said, “I have enough money to buy a goat, a chicken... I send my children to school, I buy them clothes.” RWH produces between six and 10 containers of coffee per harvest, each holding 19 tons of coffee. The coffee comes from its own fields, but also from a number of small producers. “Our coffee is consumed in the United States, Europe and Asia. We have really good results,” said Budza. “We hope to expand and reach 20 containers (per harvest), using only local labor.” — AFP



Women sort coffee at the Hala washing station to remove waste and dirt on the island of Idjwi.

## Cabello focused on friendships after split from Mendes

Camila Cabello is focused on ‘friendships’ after splitting from Shawn Mendes. The 25-year-old pop star dated Shawn for two years before they announced their split in November, and Camila suggested she’s not looking for another romance for the time being. The brunette beauty - who shot to fame as part of Fifth Harmony - told ‘The Late Late Show With James Corden’: “This is my first time being single in my 20s. That’s not even what I’m looking forward to right now. I think right now it’s about girlfriends ... I feel like my focus is on my friendships right now and just growing as a person.” Shawn and the ‘Havana’ hit-maker confirmed their break-up via a joint statement last year. The pop duo said on Instagram at the time: “Hey guys, we’ve decided to end our romantic relationship but our love for one another as humans is stronger than ever. [heart emoji] We started our relationship as best friends and will continue to be best friends.



“We so appreciate your support from the beginning and moving forward [heart emojis] Camila and Shawn (sic)” Prior to that, Shawn admitted that he loved spending time in lockdown with the chart-topping star. Reflecting on their lockdown experience, he shared: “I spent most of the pandemic in Miami with Camila and her family, it was beautiful, truly so special. I often go back to look at photos and the simplicity of that time, we were lucky. It was nice, just riding bikes. I hadn’t joyfully ridden my bike around a neighborhood since I was 12 before that. We were making dinner, just doing normal things. The Latin culture is also just so beautiful, so being able to immerse myself in that culture is always really healing.” — Bang Showbiz

## ‘Intizar Faraj’: A play that reflects Lebanese reality

“Intizar Faraj” is a play that reflects the reality in Lebanon with its problems and worries, be it in the diaspora or at home, in a comic style. The play, written and directed by Chairwoman of LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA), was the final activity by LAPA in celebration of World Theatre Day at the end March, and reflected the academy’s efforts in strengthening basic values it believes relies on inclusion, participation and Arab and humanitarian unity.

The youth excelled in reflecting Lebanese reality with two consecutive shows at the LAPA theater at Al-Qibliya School, and even though its theme was “waiting”, it remained holding on to hope, and the awaited “relief” in the story did not materialize. This play was an opportunity to discover young talents in Kuwait. It was delivered in the Lebanese dialect, portraying the worries of the Lebanese people and their dreams following the Beirut Port blast. Talented young Lebanese participated with the support of experienced people in Kuwait, as artiste Yousuf Al-Baghly trained the actresses. Hawraa Ibrahim, who played the lead role of Intizar, was excellent, as well as Sally Saba who co-starred with her in a first experience for her and played the role of her sister Izdihar.

Egyptian actress Sarah Rashad was excellent in her secondary role as Intizar’s friend Suad. The fourth character Nisreen was played by Therese Alhamedh in her first acting experience,



as Intizar’s friend. The LAPA theater was crowded over the two days with the Lebanese community who wanted to watch “Intizar Faraj”. The tragicomedy play touched the feelings of the audience between laughter and sadness and longing for the homeland.

The play is about two middle-aged sisters who meet after 30 years without communicating with each other - Intizar and Izdihar. Intizar is the elder sister who insisted on staying in Lebanon and cared for her parents. She then rekindled an old relationship with her relative and love of her life Faraj, her sister’s ex-fiance. She is later surprised by the visit of Izdihar, who left Faraj and her family and went

abroad, which coincided with Faraj getting ready to return home after he got homesick.

There are confrontations between the sisters in several scenes. The play shows the suffering of both of them and their stand towards the awaited guest, who could not arrive because airports were shut due to the coronavirus pandemic. The play ends with Intizar resuming her relationship with her sister Izdihar without the arrival of Faraj, which reflects the suffering of the Lebanese who are waiting for relief from abroad.



## Jolie signs multi-year deal with Fremantle

Angelina Jolie is determined to “tell important stories and bring them to a global audience” after signing a multi-year deal with Fremantle. The Oscar-winning actress will make “sophisticated, powerful and internationally focused” documentaries, original series and feature films after agreeing a three-year deal with the production company. She said: “To have the freedom to tell important stories and bring them to a global audience is at the heart of this agreement with Fremantle. I am excited to be working with such a passionate and forward-looking team that has an international perspective.” Angelina, 46, will direct, produce and star in the productions, depending on their focus. The Hollywood star and Fremantle “share a global perspective on important storytelling, championing underserved and diverse voices from across the world”.

And Jennifer Mullin, Fremantle’s



Global CEO, is thrilled to have joined forces with the acclaimed actress. She said: “Fremantle and Angelina share the passion and ambition of telling compelling stories from everywhere in the world, for everyone in the world. “We embrace and support the creative independence of our partners and look forward to working with Angelina to bring powerful and unique stories to a global audience.” Meanwhile, Angelina previously revealed that her career was “thrust upon” her by her mother. Despite her success, Angelina explained that she preferred to work behind the camera, where she isn’t so visible. She said: “My mom always wanted me to be an actor. And I started going to theatre and going on auditions young. I only realized about five years ago that I actually didn’t want to be an actor.” Asked if being a celebrity was important to her, she replied: “I don’t really like being the focus of attention, which is why I like being behind the camera more.” — Bang Showbiz





Mahmud Fannas, a man who carries out the traditional role of a "Musaharati" or a "Ramadan drummer", who awakens Muslims for the pre-dawn traditional "Suhur" meal before the start of the following day's fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, walks along an alley in the old city of Lebanon's southern city of Sidon.



Traditional dawn awakens known as 'Musaharati' beat drums and chant religious songs to wake up Muslims before sunrise for the 'suhur' meal before the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan.— AFP photos



Lebanese "musaharati" Mohammed Fanas wakes up observant Muslims for their overnight "suhur" meal before the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan in the old city of the southern port of Sidon.



Lebanese "musaharati" Mohammed Fanas wakes up observant Muslims for their overnight "suhur" meal before the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan in the old city of the southern port of Sidon.



## Syria's Ramadan drummers defiant as tradition wanes



Mahmud Fannas, a man who carries out the traditional role of a "Musaharati" or a "Ramadan drummer", who awakens Muslims for the pre-dawn traditional "Suhur" meal before the start of the following day's fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, walks along an alley in the old city of Lebanon's southern city of Sidon.

**R**amadan drummers who awaken the faithful for their pre-dawn meal are dying out across the Muslim world but the tradition lives on in Syria's capital despite growing reliance on smart phones. Around one hour before the call to prayer rings out at dawn, Ramadan drummers, known as Musaharati, walk through narrow streets to wake the faithful. They include Hasan Al-Rashi, 60, one of the 30 Musaharati left in Damascus.

His voice breaks the nighttime silence in the capital's Old City, as he sings and pounds his drum. "Despite the advent of smart phones and other

technologies, people still like to wake up to the voice of the Musaharati," Rashi told AFP.

"The Musaharati is a part of the customs and traditions of the people of Damascus during the month of Ramadan," he added. "It is a heritage that we will not leave behind." While performing his Musaharati task, Rashi carries a bamboo cane in one hand and a drum made of goatskin in the other. He walks quickly from home to home, using his stick to tap on doors of families who have asked for his services. "Wake up for Suhur (pre-dawn meal), Ramadan has come to visit you," Rashi sings.

### 'Duty'

Although they do receive gifts, the Musaharati don't usually expect financial rewards. They sometimes carry bags or straw baskets to store food and other gifts that are given to them. For Rashi, it's not about the freebies. "We feel joy when we go out every day," he said. "Some children follow us sometimes and ask to beat the drum," Rashi added. Ahead of the call to prayer, Sharif Resho asks one of his neighbours for a glass of water before the start of his fast.

The 51-year-old Musaharati usually accompanies Rashi every night, also beating his drum and singing. "My

equipment is simple, it is my voice, my drum and my stick," he said. Resho, whose father was also a Ramadan drummer, has carried out Musaharati duties for nearly a quarter of a century. Syria's more than decade-long war and the coronavirus pandemic did not stop him from carrying on, he said. "I will keep waking people up for Suhur as long as I have a voice in my throat," Resho told AFP. "It is a duty I inherited from my father, that I will pass on to my son."—AFP



Haitham Nasr, 22, a Palestinian youth whose foot was amputated during the 2018 "March of Return" demonstrations along the border with Zionist entity, tours the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip as he carries out the traditional role of a "Musaharati" or a "Ramadan drummer" who awakens Muslims for the pre-dawn traditional "Suhur" meal.



Traditional dawn awakens known as 'Musaharati' beat drums and chant religious songs to wake up Muslims before sunrise for the 'suhur' meal before the day's fast during the holy month of Ramadan.



Fifty-year-old Palestinian Nizar Al-Dabbas, a "Musaharati" who plays the traditional role of "Ramadan drummer", awakens Muslims for the pre-dawn traditional isuhuri meal before the start of the following day's fast, during the holy month of Ramadan in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip.



## Lifestyle | Features

## Britney Spears, newly free, says she is pregnant

Britney Spears on Monday announced she is pregnant with her third child, five months after a judge ended the controversial guardianship of the pop icon said barred her from having more children. "I got a pregnancy test... and uhhhhh well... I am having a baby," the 40-year-old said on Instagram. A Los Angeles judge in November dissolved the conservatorship long overseen by Spears' father-an arrangement the singer said had prevented her from having a contraceptive IUD removed despite her desire for more kids.

Spears' representatives did not immediately respond to AFP request for comment. "I thought 'Geez... what happened to my stomach???' " Spears wrote, saying that her 28-year-old partner Sam Asghari, whom she has started referring to online as her "husband," speculated she was "food pregnant." "It's growing!!! If 2 are in there... I might just lose it," added the singer, prompting online chatter that she may be expecting twins. After a highly public 2007 breakdown, when Spears attacked a paparazzo's car at a gas station, the star was placed under a conservatorship headed by her father Jamie Spears, which ultimately lasted nearly 14 years.



In this file photo singer Britney Spears (left) and boyfriend Sam Asghari arrive for the premiere of Sony Pictures' "Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Fans had long sounded alarm that the "...Baby One More Time" singer was unhappy with her father as guardian, and in June 2021 she asked a Los Angeles judge to end the legal arrangement that had left her "traumatized." Her allegation that the conservatorship was preventing her from removing a contraceptive IUD—despite her wanting to have authority over her own birth control method in order to get pregnant—sparked outrage from reproductive rights groups and her

fans, many of whom were already involved in the fervent #FreeBritney movement.

"I would like to progressively move forward, and I want to have the real deal," Spears told the court in a bombshell hearing last summer. "I want to be able to get married and have a baby. I have an (IUD) inside of myself so I don't get pregnant. They don't want me to have children—any more children," she said during the gripping 20-minute statement. The

formal end to the guardianship in November 2021 came after the pop phenom's father Jamie Spears was removed from his position in charge of her finances and estate at a hearing in September.

**'Baby-making'**

Britney Spears said Monday that she "won't be going out as much" to avoid trailing paparazzi. She is already mother to two teen sons, Sean and Jayden, with her ex-husband Kevin Federline. In her post Monday Spears also opened up about struggles with perinatal depression during previous pregnancies, saying it was "absolutely horrible." "Women didn't talk about it back then... some people considered it dangerous if a woman complained like that with a baby inside her... but now women talk about it everyday... thank Jesus we don't have to keep that pain a reserved proper secret," the pop star wrote.

During a highly publicized apparent mental breakdown that followed her 2006 divorce and custody battle, Spears was captured in gas stations barefoot and driving with one son in her lap. Today she and other turn-of-the-millennium female pop stars have drawn sympathy, after documentaries that emphasized the role

of the early-2000s celebrity journalism machine in triggering breakdowns and questionable behavior.

But at the time they were paparazzi punching bags, who were also mocked and belittled by national news outlets. Matt Lauer—the now-disgraced former morning television personality—once pushed Spears to tears in a 2006 interview aired on national television, after needling the young artist over her maternal fitness while she was pregnant with her second child. On Monday Spears did not provide a due date.

She met Asghari in 2016 when they co-starred in a music video for her single "Slumber Party." Spears announced their engagement on social media in September 2021, but has yet to divulge a date for the nuptials. Asghari also took to Instagram Monday, saying that "fatherhood is something I have always looked forward to and I don't take lightly. It is the most important job I will ever do." Asked by entertainment tabloid TMZ in December about the couple's holiday plans, Asghari was frank: "Baby making." "A lot of baby making!" — AFP



## Sony, Lego to put \$2bn into Epic Games metaverse effort

Japanese giant Sony and Lego's Danish parent firm announced Monday a \$2 billion investment in US gaming powerhouse Epic Games for its work toward joining the metaverse vision for the internet's future. Scores of tech firms have been rushing to invest in building the 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. In the form of video games like Epic's hit Fortnite, the precursors of the metaverse already exist in a minimalist way, with people coming together not

only to play, but also to interact and participate in events.

The \$2 billion (1.84 billion euros) in funding is aimed at advancing Epic's "vision to build the metaverse and support its continued growth," the three firms said in a joint statement. Sony, already a shareholder in Epic Games, and Kirkbi, Lego's parent firm, are each investing \$1 billion, the firms said. "All three companies highly value both creators and players, and aim to create new social entertainment exploring the connection between digital and physical worlds," they added.

The investment brings Epic Games' valuation to \$31.5 billion, the US game studio said. With 350 million users worldwide, its Fortnite game is free to download, but generates billions in revenue with the purchase by players of additional items for their characters, including clothing. The game has quickly become a global phenomenon, to the point that some games are now followed live by millions of viewers. — AFP

## Meta tests sale of virtual goods in metaverse

Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, will give content creators the opportunity to sell virtual items to users in Horizon Worlds, its main platform in the metaverse, the company said Monday. "For example, someone could make and sell attachable accessories for a fashion world or offer paid access to a new part of a world," the Californian tech group said in a press release. The metaverse, touted by Meta and other companies as the future of the internet, consists of a set of parallel "universes" accessed primarily through augmented and virtual reality platforms.

It already exists in a basic way in the form of video games such as Minecraft, Fortnite and Roblox and social platforms such as Horizon Worlds, and VRChat, where people come together not only to play, but also to interact and participate in events. Meta, whose income is overwhelmingly dependent on large-scale targeted advertising, has made it its mission to make a major contribution to the emergence of the metaverse, and is staking out its place in the next battle for the public's attention. To that end, the social networking giant is seeking to attract content creators who are likely in turn to attract more new users.

It had already set up a \$10 million fund for creators on Horizon in October, where more than 10,000 different "worlds" already exist, according to the company. "While we're launching this today as a test with a handful of creators to get their feedback, these types of tools are steps toward our long-term vision for the metaverse where creators can earn a living and people can purchase digital goods, services, and experiences," Meta said. — AFP



## Film industry guns for fresh start at Cannes

The Cannes Film Festival will hope to relaunch the industry's hopes with another star-packed line-up to be announced on Thursday. After a slow return to cinema-going after the COVID-19 pandemic, the film business will be hoping for a boost on the French Riviera when the 75th edition of the world's leading cinema festival returns from May 17 to 28. Tom Cruise is already confirmed for the festival promoting the world premiere of "Top Gun: Maverick", the sequel to his 1986 blockbuster. Also attending is



Idris Elba attends the Los Angeles premiere screening of "Sonic The Hedgehog 2" at Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Tom Hanks, who co-stars in "Elvis" as the rock'n'roll star's manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

The latter is the latest spectacle from Australian director Baz Luhrmann, who has previously lit up Cannes with "Moulin Rouge!" and "Gatsby". The rest of the line-up will be announced on Thursday, including the 20-odd films competing for the top prize Palme d'Or. The selection committee, who have been working their way through more than 2,000 entries in recent weeks, have a tough act to follow after last year's vintage edition.

Coming after the festival was cancelled by the pandemic in 2020, it launched several films that went on to global success, especially "Drive My Car". After picking up three awards at Cannes, it went on to win this year's Oscar for best international feature film—and was the first Japanese film to be nominated in the best picture category.

**Big-name speculation**

Last year's jury-led by US director Spike Lee-gave the Palme d'Or to Julia Ducournau's body-horror "Titane"—ensuring the festival maintained its reputation for boosting bold and edgy filmmaking alongside starry entertainment. The organizers have left it late to announce who will chair the jury this year, but Penelope Cruz and Marion Cotillard are among the favorites according to industry insiders.

Film experts have also been picking through the release schedules for ideas on who might be in competition. Many are hoping to see the return of David Cronenberg, whose upcoming sci-fi/horror cross-over stars Viggo Mortensen, Kristen Stewart and Lea Seydoux. Also hotly tipped is Australian George Miller, the man behind "Mad Max", who takes a

new direction with "Three Thousand Years of Longing" about a djinn (played by Idris Elba) offering three wishes to Tilda Swinton.

Another possibility is Terrence Malick, who won previously for "Tree of Life" starring Brad Pitt. His new film follows the life of Jesus Christ and stars Mark Rylance as Satan. Though women have been getting more of a presence on the festival circuit, they remain poorly represented. One possible contender in competition at Cannes might be US director Kelly Reichardt, with her new film, "Showing Up". Her lo-fi hit "First Cow" was on many critics' end-of-year lists in 2021.

**Shadow of war**

As with everything in the arts at the moment, the Russian invasion of Ukraine hangs over the selection. Possible names include exiled Russian filmmaker Kantemir Balagov, 30, whose film "Beanpole" won the directing award of the Un Certain Regard section in 2019. Or there may be the return of Kirill

Serebrennikov, who was unable to attend Cannes last year for his Palme nominee "Petrov's Flu", after being banned from travelling due to a controversial court case.

One possible Ukrainian entry is a film about the Allied destruction of German cities at the end of World War II by director Sergei Loznitsa. Meanwhile, festival director Thierry Fremaux has been pushing for a change to the rule that bars streaming platforms from competing at Cannes. But French cinema distributors, who have a seat on the festival board, continue to block the move even as big-name directors such as Martin Scorsese and Jane Campion have turned to Netflix and other streamers for financial support. In the short term, that means that the much-anticipated Marilyn Monroe biopic, "Blonde", starring Ana de Armas, a Netflix film, cannot compete for Palme, although fans are still hoping it will get a premiere on the Cote d'Azur. — AFP



## Four solo artists shortlisted for Britain's Turner Prize

Four artists commended for their solo exhibitions are competing for the UK's Turner Prize for contemporary art this year, Tate Britain, which organizes the award, announced on Tuesday. The 2022 shortlist contrasts with last year's lineup, which for the first time saw five artist collectives vie for the prestigious, but often controversial British visual arts award. This year's nominees include Heather Phillipson, best known in Britain for her artwork displayed in London's Trafalgar Square of a giant swirl of replica whipped cream, topped with a sculpted cherry, fly and drone.

Titled "The End", it sat for two years from January 2020 on the empty fourth plinth on the world-famous landmark in the centre of the British capital. Phillipson, who works in video, sculpture and drawing, was nominated for that work and a solo exhibition—"Rupture No 1: blowtorching the bitten peach"—at Tate Britain. The prize's jury "applauded the audacious and sophisticated way Phillipson splices absurdity, tragedy and imagination to probe urgent and complex ideas," the museum said in a statement. The other contenders include Toronto-born, London-based artist Sin Wai Kin—formerly known as Victoria Sin, who identifies as non-binary—in part for a solo show at Hong Kong's Blindspot Gallery.

"Drawing on their own experience existing between binary categories, their work realizes fictional narratives to describe lived realities of desire, identification, and consciousness," Tate Britain said. Ingrid Pollard, who works primarily in photography, but also sculpture, film and sound, was nominated for her exhibition "Carbon Slowly Turning" in Milton Keynes, central England. "Pollard's work questions our relationship with the natural world and interrogates ideas such as Britishness, race and sexuality," Tate Britain said. The jury also selected Veronica Ryan, a Montserrat-born British sculptor, for two UK showcases of her "sculptural objects and installations using containers, compartments, and combinations of natural and fabricated forms".

Alex Farquharson, Tate Britain's director and co-chair of the prize jury, said galleries and museums reopening last year after multiple pandemic lockdowns had led to "a terrific 12 months for contemporary British art". "Art has provided much-needed enjoyment and escape over the past year, but it has also helped to reconnect us with each other and the world around us, as the practices of the four shortlisted artists variously exemplify," he said.

The Turner winner to be announced at an award ceremony in Liverpool, northwest England, in December—will scoop £25,000 (\$33,000, 30,000 euros), and the other nominees will each receive £10,000. An exhibition of their works will be held at Tate Liverpool from October 20, 2022 to March 19, 2023. Over the years, the prize has courted headlines because of installations including an unmade bed and works made from elephant dung and human hair. — AFP



## Sports

# Australia's Victoria state to host 'bold' 2026 Commonwealth Games

**SYDNEY:** The Australian state of Victoria said on Tuesday that it will host the 2026 Commonwealth Games, with all sporting events taking place outside the state capital Melbourne and scattered across several towns. The state's premier Daniel Andrews praised the Commonwealth Games Federation for embracing Victoria's pitch, admitting that its model is "a bit riskier than just running it in the middle of a large city".

The 2026 Games will be held in four regional hubs across the state in the towns of Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Gippsland, each with its own athletes' village. The Commonwealth Games Federation's president Louise Martin described Victoria's pitch as "a bold and innovative vision" for

the multisport event, which takes place every four years. "In Victoria we believe we have found the perfect partner for the next stage of our journey," she said.

The state has confirmed 16 sports for the Games so far. Geelong will host aquatics, gymnastics, triathlon, hockey, beach volleyball and table tennis, while Ballarat will be home to athletics and boxing. Netball, weightlifting, squash and lawn bowls will be played in Bendigo, with badminton and rugby sevens centered in Gippsland. Cycling will be between Gippsland and Bendigo, and Twenty20 cricket played across all four hubs.

The opening ceremony will be held at Australia's largest sports stadium, the Melbourne Cricket

Ground, which can hold more than 100,000 spectators. The Australian Olympic Committee's chief executive Matt Carroll noted that more than "30 major global sporting events are coming to Australia across the next 10 years".

That includes the Summer Olympics in Brisbane in 2032. "We have spoken about the green and gold runway leading into Brisbane 2032. Now to host a Commonwealth Games in 2026 is a major marker on that runway," Carroll said. Australia will also host the FIFA Women's World Cup, along with New Zealand, next year. Australia is the preferred candidate for the men's and women's rugby World Cups in 2027 and 2029, respectively.

Andrews said the 2026 Commonwealth Games

were expected to bring a "\$3 billion boost to the Victorian economy", which had to weather long lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be the sixth time that Australia has staged the Commonwealth Games and the second time in Victoria, after Melbourne hosted the 2006 event.

Australia's Gold Coast in Queensland was home in 2018 to the last edition of the "Friendly Games", as the Commonwealth Games are also known. The Games typically attract more than 4,000 athletes from the 54 nations of the Commonwealth, almost all of whom are former territories of the British Empire. The 2022 Commonwealth Games are due to be held in Birmingham, England, from July 28 to Aug 8. — AFP

## News in brief

## Platini, Blatter fraud trial in June

**LAUSANNE:** Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter and former UEFA chief Michel Platini will appear before Swiss prosecutors on charges of fraud between 8-22 June, the criminal court concerned said Tuesday. The pair face charges of 'disloyal management', 'breach of trust' and 'forgery of securities' in a case stemming from a 2011 payment from FIFA to Platini that earned Platini and Blatter bans from football in 2015. — AFP

## Huddersfield beat Luton

**LONDON:** Huddersfield climbed to third in the English Championship table with a 2-0 win at home to play-off rivals Luton on Monday. Jonathan Russell put Huddersfield ahead on the hour mark, with Luton missing a chance to equalize when Elijah Adebayo was off target from the penalty spot after Danel Sinani brought down James Bree. Naby Sarr made sure of victory a minutes from the end of normal time when he rose unopposed at the far post to head in Sorba Thomas' corner. — AFP

## Teen Olympic sailor drowns

**TUNIS:** Tunisian sailor Eya Guezguez, who represented her country at the Tokyo Olympics, has died aged 17 in an accident during national team training, the International Olympic Committee announced Monday. The accident occurred when the boat she was sailing with her twin sister Sarra capsized in high winds in training. Eya drowned, but her sister was rescued. The twins competed at Tokyo aged just 16. The sisters competed together in the 49er FX class in Tokyo where they finished 21st. — AFP

## Nadal still unable to train

**MONTE CARLO:** Rafael Nadal has not yet been able to resume training with a racket, said one of his team said on Tuesday, adding that the world No. 4 will "logically" miss the Barcelona tournament next week. "He is still suffering from his ribs and as expected when his injury was announced, he needs four to six weeks. We are at three, so logically he will not be able to play again in Barcelona," a person close to Nadal said. — AFP

## Maloney in positive cocaine test

**TOULOUSE:** Former Australian rugby league international James Maloney has been stood down after testing positive for cocaine, his French club Lezignan confirmed Tuesday. The 35-year-old tested positive in a test carried out after a match against Carcassonne in the Elite One Championship, France's highest domestic league competition, at the end of February. He is suspended pending a decision by the French anti-doping agency. — AFP

## Climber dies after scaling peak

**KATHMANDU:** A Greek climber died Tuesday on Nepal's rugged Mount Dhaulagiri, expedition organizers said, in the first recorded fatality of this year's busy Himalayan spring climbing season. Antonios Sykaris' death came a day after a triumphant Instagram message announcing he had made it to the top of the world's seventh-highest peak. Sykaris was an experienced climber who had summited five other mountains higher than 8,000 m, according to his website. — AFP

## Ramos wants 5 more years

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's veteran Spanish defender Sergio Ramos would like to play four or five more years of top-level football before retiring, according to an interview he gave to Prime Video. The 36-year-old Ramos joined PSG in July after winning the Champions League four times with Real Madrid, the 2010 World Cup and two European Championships with Spain. "I'd like to play between four and five years at the top before moving on to a new experience," Ramos told the Ligue 1 broadcaster. — AFP

## Fernandinho stuns Guardiola by announcing departure

**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City captain Fernandinho shocked manager Pep Guardiola by saying Tuesday he planned to leave the English champions at the end of the season. The 36-year-old former Brazil international, who has won four Premier League titles since joining City from Shakhtar Donetsk in 2013, revealed his intentions at a pre-match press conference ahead of Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal second leg away to Atletico Madrid.

Fernandinho, asked if he would like to extend his stay at the Etihad for another year, replied: "I don't think so." Guardiola, who was alongside the midfielder, was taken aback by his skipper's announcement. "Oh! I didn't know. You give me the news," he said. "I didn't hear it. We will see what happens. I don't know what will happen. He is so important. I'll ask him," the Spaniard insisted.

Guardiola said Fernandinho had

been "an incredible player for Manchester City". The manager added: "At the end of the season we talk, maybe it's because of his family. I would love it. We will talk." Fernandinho made his last start for English title-holders and table-toppers City in the home Champions League tie against Sporting in early March, but Guardiola said his club captain remained an important figure.

"The role he plays this season - I like the people who behave behind the scenes," he explained. "I know what he has done, behind me, he handles many of our players and stars for the benefit of the team. I praise him and he was here when I arrive. Raheem (Sterling), Kevin (De Bruyne), John (Stones), a few players. We know him well, from day one to now always here. An incredible player for Man City. There are things nobody knows but I know exactly." City, yet to be crowned kings of



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City's Spanish Manager Pep Guardiola attends a press conference at the Manchester City training ground on April 12, 2022, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal 2nd leg match against Atletico Madrid. — AFP

Europe after losing last season's Champions League final to English rivals Chelsea, will travel to Spain

with a 1-0 lead from the first leg thanks to a goal from Kevin de Bruyne. — AFP

## Williamson stars as Hyderabad down Gujarat in IPL

**MUMBAI:** Kane Williamson's attacking half-century and an unbeaten 34 by Nicholas Pooran helped Sunrisers Hyderabad hand newcomers Gujarat Titans their first loss in this season's IPL on Monday. Chasing 163 for victory, Hyderabad were propelled to victory by a 64-run opening stand between Williamson (57) and Abhishek Sharma (42) and reached their target with five balls and eight wickets to spare in Mumbai.

Williamson fell to his opposite number Hardik Pandya in the 17th over but the left-handed Pooran

kept up the charge in his 18-ball blitz as he completed the Indian Premier League win with a six. Hardik's unbeaten 50 went in vain after he steered his side to 162-7 but Gujarat - one of two new franchises in the expanded 10-team IPL - went down to their first loss in four matches.

"Batting wise, I think we were 7-10 runs short and would've made a difference in the end," said Hardik. "Bowling wise, we had a good start but had two bad overs. I think they bowled well (in the last 5 overs). Our motto has been the same which is to learn from the mistakes."

Williamson escaped when an lbw shout that was not reviewed and replays suggested the ball would have hit the stumps. The New Zealand skipper was on two. The star opener raised his fifty with a six off Lockie Ferguson before he mistimed a hit to long-on. Hyderabad bowlers kept the opposition batters in check for

the first 10 overs despite a few hits from Hardik.

Umran Malik kept the speed guns busy and clocked the fastest delivery of the IPL so far at 153.3 kph as he began his spell by hitting the helmet grill of Hardik but the batter counter attacked by two boundaries. Malik, an up and coming quick from the Indian-administered Kashmir, finished off his first over with the wicket of Matthew Wade, trapped lbw for 19.

Hardik put on crucial partnerships including a 40-run stand with David Miller and then he and Abhinav Manohar got 50 brisk runs for the fifth wicket. Manohar smashed a quickfire 35 after being dropped thrice in a poor effort in the field by the Hyderabad players. Hardik completed his fifty off the penultimate ball of the innings and pace bowler T Natarajan finished with the wicket of Rashid Khan to return figures of 2-34. — AFP

## Rugby chiefs mull 20-minute red card global trial

**LONDON:** World Rugby are to examine the possibility of introducing the 20-minute red card as a global law trial. The rule, which is currently being trialed in the southern hemisphere's elite Super Rugby club competition, means a player who is sent off can be tactically replaced by a substitute after 20 minutes. England lock Charlie Ewels was sent off after just 82 seconds against Ireland at Twickenham in the Six Nations last month, meaning the hosts had to play almost the entire game down to 14 men.

Ireland eventually pulled away in the last quarter to win 32-15 as the disadvantage of being a man down caught up with England. Many pundits argue a red card is often too harsh a punishment and ruins a game as a spectacle but others believe the 20-minute red is an insufficient sanction for serious foul play. Ewels saw red as part of World Rugby's determination to stamp out head-high challenges, with the global governing body eager to lower tackle heights in response to concerns about the long-term health impacts of concussion on players.

The Super Rugby trial, however, has so far proved inconclusive. "That's been discussed before



**CLERMONT-FERRAND, France:** Clermont's Samoa flanker Fritz Lee is tackled during the European Champions Cup rugby union match between Clermont and Leicester at the Michelin stadium on April 10, 2022. — AFP

and will be discussed again," World Rugby chief executive Alan Gilpin told Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper. "It would be great if more competitions, even in a closed trial, would use it because that would give us more of an overview of the effect it would have on the game."

Gilpin added: "We need to see more of the data

to see whether that strikes the balance between safety and spectacle better. "There is more work to do to analyze that and the concern is, if a team goes back to 15 players, is that enough of a deterrent to drive that behavioral change? We would like to see it trialed more widely before drawing any conclusions." — AFP

## NZ rugby review reveals body-shaming, cultural insensitivity

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand Rugby's chief executive says the governing body has "to do better" after coaches were found to have made culturally insensitive comments to the country's top women players and indulged in favoritism and body-shaming. The findings were in an independent "cultural and environmental" review of the Black Ferns, the New Zealand women's team, sparked by allegations from hooker Te Kura Ngata-Aerengamate.

She alleged in December on Instagram that she had suffered a mental breakdown because of critical comments made by head coach Glenn Moore. The post was made shortly after the Black Ferns'

disastrous 2021 tour of the northern hemisphere in which they lost all four Tests to France and England. At the time, Chris Lendrum, NZ Rugby general manager of professional rugby and performance, said the allegations were "distressing to read".

The review said the on-tour situation had been "not well managed or monitored". Defending champions New Zealand host the World Cup this year, beginning Oct 8. Moore will still be in charge and said he was "committed" to learning from the review. "Participating in high-performance sport, whether as a coach, player, or part of the management team, can present unique challenges," Moore said in a statement. "The findings have highlighted a number of those challenges. There are learnings from the review. I am committed to ensuring those are taken on board."

NZR chief executive Mark Robinson apologized in a statement released late Monday. "No one should be in any doubt about our commitment to the progression of women's rugby in this country," said Robinson. "This report highlights that

we haven't got everything right and we apologize for not having provided all the tools for our people to succeed."

The review found that Ngata-Aerengamate's concerns were "not isolated" and other players, notably of Maori or Pasifika background, had experienced similar behavior from members of management. About 50 percent of the squad are Maori and 25 percent Pasifika. Asked why they did not complain, they said they were worried "it would adversely affect selection chances".

The review said a greater understanding from management was needed on how to communicate with these players in a sensitive and inclusive manner with regard to gender, culture and sexuality. The report added that focus on weight measurements rather than performance led "to some experiencing body-shaming". NZR said it would create support and resources to improve team culture and place emphasis on the health and wellbeing of players and management, with the work already under way. — AFP



Sports

# First fencing championship for women kicks off in Ramadan



KUWAIT: Female epeeists participate in the fencing championship on Monday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Al-Tahadiy Disabled Sports Club, in cooperation with Al-Arabi Fencing Academy, held the first Ramadan fencing championship for female athletes with and without disabilities on Monday at Al-Arabi Sporting Club. Kuwaiti fencer Tareq Al-Qallaf, Director of Fencing at Al-Tahadiy Disabled Sports Club, told Kuwait Times: "Twenty-five female athletes are competing in the fencing championship, while 25 male fencers will compete in the championship that will be held on Sunday."

He noted that the fencing championship for athletes with and without disabilities aims to boost the game in the coming years to lead to the Gulf Fencing Championship. It also seeks to deliver the concept of 'fitting in' for disabled athletes and remove barriers in society.

Lulwa Al-Ayoub, Kuwaiti Olympic fencing champion and Chairperson of the Women's Committee at the Kuwaiti Fencing Federation, said: "The Women's Committee was formed by the Olympic Committee to activate women's role in all sports. At the same time, we built an academy to speed up the role of women in sports in Kuwait and create a Kuwaiti female fencing team."

Ayoub pointed out the matches were in two categories - under-15 and over-15. "Today's championship is a unique and outstanding tournament to introduce players to others and motivate one another," she said.



## Qurain, Fatat reach final

KUWAIT: Qurain and Fatat women basketball teams reached the final of the Women's Basketball League. Qurain defeated Gulf University 75-47, in which Qurain had full control under the direction of coach Fahad Barjas, ending the first quarter 28-10. At halftime, the score was 44-22. The second half was no different, as the third quarter score was 17-8 and 14-12 in the fourth.

Meanwhile Fatat did not have any difficulty in defeating Salwa Al-Sabah team 73-38, as the first quarter score was 18-5, while in the second it was 17-8, 19-10 in the third and 19-15 in the fourth. The matches were played on Sunday evening at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex in Sabah Al-Salem.




# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
<b>Clinics</b>	
Kaizen center	25716707

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381



**NOTICE**  
March 21, 2022

Mr. Prasant Thapa, son of Mr. Ballav Thapa, resident of Kathi Gaon Chamung Chiyabagan, PO-Pokhrabong, Darjeeling-734216, West Bengal and Ms. Anusha Rai, daughter of Mr. Dilip Rai, resident of Pokhrabong Busty No 5, PO-Pokhrabong, Darjeeling-734216, West Bengal both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters/ telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

First Secretary (Community Affairs)  
and Heritage Officer,  
Embassy of India, Kuwait.  
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Fatema** Mustafa Luqmani, holder of Indian passport no. R1656447 have changed my name to Fatema Burhanuddin Taheri. (C 1439)

I, **Shehzad** Shabbir Siddiqui, holder of Indian passport no. T0707872 have changed my name to Shehzad Shabbir Rattlamwala as per the Gazette no. M-19118034. (C 1440) 13-4-2022

I hereby declare to change my name from SHAIK AKBAR in passport no. M5452661 to AKBAR GHOUSE PEER SHAIKH. (C 1438) 11-4-2022

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ATLANTA: In this file photo taken on Feb 1, 2021, Head Coach Frank Vogel of the Los Angeles Lakers stands with LeBron James #23 against the Atlanta Hawks during the second half at State Farm Arena. — AFP

## Vogel fired by Lakers after season flop

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers sacked head coach Frank Vogel on Monday, saying a change of leadership was needed after the club's shock failure to reach the playoffs. Lakers general manager Rob Pelinka confirmed Vogel's dismissal in a statement, a day after the club's miserable campaign drew to a close. "This is an incredibly difficult decision to make, but one we feel is necessary at this point," Pelinka said.

Speculation over Vogel's future intensified after the Lakers' final regular season game on Sunday, with ESPN reporting that the coach - who led the franchise to a 17th NBA championship in 2020 - would be fired. Talking to reporters later Monday, Pelinka said the Lakers' season had been "disappointing at every level". "When you have disappointment you need to take ownership of that and make adjustments to be better," Pelinka said.

"Today's not going to be a day of finger-pointing or unwinding all the specific reasons, we just felt organizationally, that it was time for a new voice." The sacking came as Lakers players addressed the media in end-of-season interviews. Lakers superstar LeBron James said before the dismissal was confirmed he had "nothing but respect" for Vogel. "I respect Frank as a coach, as a man,"

James said earlier Monday.

"The partnership that we've had over the past few years has been nothing but just candid, great conversations. He's a guy who gives everything to the game. Prepared us every single night with his coaching staff. I don't know what's going to happen, but I've got nothing but respect for him."

Vogel bristled when asked about his reported dismissal immediately after the Lakers' 146-141 overtime win over the Denver Nuggets on Sunday. "I haven't been told s\*\*\* and I'm going to enjoy tonight's game, celebrate what these young guys did in terms of scratching and clawing and getting back in this game and getting a W, and we'll deal with tomorrow, tomorrow," Vogel told reporters.

### Dismal record

The Lakers finished the 2021-2022 campaign in 11th place in the Western Conference, missing out on the postseason with a dismal record of 33 wins and 49 losses. It is only the fourth time in James' career that he has failed to reach the playoffs, and the second time it has happened since he joined the Lakers in 2018. The team had been tipped as championship contenders before the season after acquiring nine-time NBA All-Star Russell

Westbrook in a blockbuster trade. But injuries meant that the Lakers were only able to field their big three of James, Westbrook and Anthony Davis in 21 games during the 82-game season. James said Monday that the team's inability to find consistent results had been the most challenging aspect of the season. "It felt like every time we would take a step forward, we would take three of four steps back," James said. "We'd have a huge win at home against a playoff-contending team like Utah - and then go on the road and lose to Houston. That was the mental side, playing with your psyche like 'What the heck is going on?' How can we be so great one night and the next night be so mediocre? That was the most challenging part of the season for sure."

James meanwhile batted away questions about his future with the Lakers, saying he had not discussed the two-year contract extension he will be eligible to sign in August because of collective bargaining agreement rules. However he insisted he still wanted to challenge for more NBA titles with the Lakers. "I came here to win a championship. And I want to win more. So I accomplished what I wanted to accomplish, but I'm still hungry for more," James said. "I'm confident that this organization wants the same." — AFP

on it, I added more strings to my bow. I'm a more complete player now." The 26-year-old played for France at the European Championship and is determined to be in the squad for this year's World Cup. "It's a big goal for me, I have to show what I'm worth," he says.

That Lemar has become more defensively-minded at Atletico Madrid will come as little surprise given Simeone is now seen as the pre-eminent defensive coach in the game, a master of how to play without the ball. Those methods have lifted Atletico out of mediocrity and into Europe's elite - bringing two La Liga titles and a pair of Champions League finals along the way - but aesthetically, it is a style that continues to frustrate.

Atletico were beaten 1-0 by Manchester City last week in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-finals but statistically, they suffered a hammering. City had 15 shots to Atletico's nil and afterwards, Pep Guardiola said: "In prehistory, today and in a hundred thousand years, attacking a 5-5-0 (formation) is very difficult."

Atletico captain Koke responded on Instagram with a picture of the club's crest and the caption: "In love with your story since prehistory. Proud to be from Atleti." Lemar is asked what he would say to Simeone's critics. "I have nothing to say to them, except look at the results over the years. Look at the results since the coach arrived at Atletico Madrid. 'It might not look pretty, but it works. Atletico win, that's the most important thing.'"

And while there has been a shift, a greater emphasis on possession this season, if only to accommodate their attacking talents, Lemar says Simeone's principles are unwavering. "If you knew Simeone as a player, that's still the identity of Atletico now," Lemar says. "We're a feisty team. We get to every ball. We never accept defeat, in matches or in training. Everyone has to fight for their

place. The coach always tells us never to take our spots for granted. He says competition and rivalry is what makes us grow."

Atletico have tended to grow in adversity too, Simeone's sides finding their fire burns brightest when their backs are against the wall. It is why even though Manchester City were so clearly superior in the first leg, there is belief that a comeback is possible in the return at the Wanda Metropolitan on Wednesday.

"It's always been that way with Atleti but I'm not going to lie, and maybe it helps, but we get scared as well sometimes when we have to come from behind, even if we know we can change the game in a second," Lemar says. "It was annoying to concede that goal against City but if you want to go through, you have to score. We saw there were some opportunities to get at them and we're going to go hard in this second leg. Let's hope it comes off." — AFP



MADRID: Atletico de Madrid's French midfielder Thomas Lemar poses during an interview on April 11, 2022. — AFP

## Man Utd fans plan 'constant' protest against Glazers

LONDON: Manchester United fans are planning a protest against the Glazer family, the owners of the English football giants, on Saturday. A supporters' group called 'The 1958' has organized a protest march that will end at United's Old Trafford ground before the start of the Premier League game with Norwich. The 1958, trying to rally support for the march, tweeted that "the club's a mess so we need to act and raise awareness again" and said Saturday's demonstration would be the "start of the constant, relentless, peaceful and legal protests" against the Glazers rather than "another Liverpool".

In April of last year, some United fans stormed the club's Carrington training base and many more then broke into Old Trafford before a behind-closed-doors Premier League game against arch-rivals Liverpool, forcing the fixture to be postponed. United have been under the American-based Glazer family's ownership since a controversial takeover in 2005. The Glazers have never been liked by United fans, but their reputation sank to a new low after their leading role in the attempted launch the European Super League.

United co-chairman Joel Glazer was named vice-chairman of the despised breakaway competition, which collapsed soon after its launch last year when all six Premier League clubs involved withdrew in the face of the furious public backlash. Many United fans blame the Glazers for the club's on-field decline. The record 20-time champions of England have not won a Premier League title since Sir Alex Ferguson's final season in charge in 2012/13, with no silverware of any kind added to the Old Trafford trophy cabinet for five years.

This season United sacked manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer in November and have slipped to seventh in the Premier League under interim boss Ralf Rangnick. Executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward was replaced by Richard Arnold in February. United are 23 points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City with seven games of the season remaining and are also out of all cup competitions.

A recent survey, conducted between October and December 2021 by the Manchester United Supporters Trust, found 78 per cent of respondents were "dissatisfied" with those at the Old Trafford helm over the past year. More than three quarters (77 per cent) from the sample of 19,956 supporters also said they lacked confidence the club have "a clear strategy to return to the top". — AFP

## Lemar: 'It might not look pretty, but it works'

MADRID: "It's not about advice, says Thomas Lemar. "It's more when he talks, the way he talks, his honesty. That's what makes you play out of your skin." Lemar knows better than anyone the power of Diego Simeone. After joining Atletico Madrid for 60 million euros from Monaco in 2018, Lemar struggled. He scored four goals in his first two seasons and many assumed Atletico would look to cut their losses the following summer.

Yet Simeone saw a player that needed help not a transfer. He moved Lemar from left wing to central midfield and, together, they got to work. Last season, Lemar was an ever-present in the midfield three and fundamental to Atletico winning La Liga.

"I had a discussion with the coach last year and we spoke about how to improve my situation in the team," Lemar says in an exclusive interview with AFP. "He listened, he found a role that suited my strengths. I was more comfortable and it made it easier for me to fit into Atletico's style. Now my aim is to repay him as much as possible on the pitch."

When Lemar came from Monaco, he was a winger, creator and scorer, one of the world's most exciting young attackers, who had drawn interest from Liverpool and Arsenal. But when that role failed to translate at Atletico, Lemar had to adjust. "I worked hard on my negative points and turned them into positive points, and I became a better, more versatile footballer," said Lemar.

"Especially defensively, in recovering the ball, in getting into the right defensive position. I worked