



5 Fleeing war, orphans face trafficking threat



8 Marzouq Al-Kharafi elected new HEISCO Chairman, Bader Al-Kharafi Vice Chairman



16 City see off Atletico in fiery clash, book semis



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	04:00
Shurooq	05:22
Dhuhr	11:48
Asr	15:23
Maghrib	18:14
Isha	19:34

VOLVO

Ukraine war raises risks for Mideast, World Bank warns

Russia 'would deploy nuclear arms' if Finland, Sweden join NATO



SEVASTOPOL: File photo shows the Moskva, missile cruiser flagship of Russian Black Sea Fleet, entering Sevastopol bay. Russia's Black Sea fleet involved in the naval assault on Ukraine has been 'seriously damaged' by an explosion, state media reported April 14, 2022, as Moscow threatened to strike Kyiv's command centers. — AFP

DUBAI: The war in Ukraine has "multiplied risks" for the Middle East and North Africa's poorer countries by raising food and energy prices, the World Bank said Thursday, warning of potential social unrest. In its latest update to its MENA growth forecast, the development lender said inflationary pressures set off by COVID-19 "are likely to be exacerbated" by Russia's invasion.

"The threat of COVID-19 variants remains and the war in Ukraine has multiplied risks, particularly for the poor," the World Bank's MENA vice president, Ferid Belhaj, said in the report, titled "Reality Check". World Bank president David Malpass said this week that the Russian war on Ukraine has started a chain reaction in the global economy, pushing energy and food prices higher, exacerbating debt concerns and potentially worsening poverty and hunger.

"Rising food prices may have far-reaching effects beyond increasing food insecurity," said the report, adding: "Historically in MENA, increases in bread prices have... contributed to increased social unrest and conflict. "This link between food prices, conflict and low growth poses a serious concern for the humanitarian crisis in fragile, conflict and violence-affected states in MENA," it said.

Ukraine is a key source of grain, while Russia is a

major producer of energy and fertilizer needed for agriculture. The MENA region is heavily dependent on wheat supplies from both countries. According to the report, inflation in oil-rich Gulf countries is expected to reach 3.0 percent this year compared to 1.2 percent in 2021, and will rise to 3.7 percent in oil-importing countries from 1.4 percent last year.

"For some oil importers, food subsidies would be hard to maintain due to limited resources," while "rising oil prices could delay reforms", the report said. Despite that, the World Bank forecasts that economic growth in the region will be 5.2 percent in 2022, the fastest rate since 2016. "The region as a whole is buoyed by oil" and is doing "much better" than any other in the world, lead economist for the MENA region Daniel Lederman told AFP in an interview.

However, the expected growth is "insufficient and uneven". "Insufficient because a large number of economies in the MENA region will still be poor in terms of their GDP per capita relative to where they were in 2019 in the eve of the pandemic," he said. And "uneven because the faster (recovering) economies for 2022 are expected to be oil exporters, but oil importers are expected to suffer".

Continued on Page 6

Ramadan Kareem

Loving Praiseworthy, Allah - (Part five)

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

The most pleasing human emotion is love and the most beautiful form of love is to love the Almighty and Majestic Creator, Allah. We worship God, perform good deeds, and draw closer to Him because we love Him and hope for His bounties and blessings, the most important being to see Him in Paradise. The love of a worshiper for his Creator is very satisfying and fills his heart, especially when he knows that Almighty Allah loves him.

Among the names and attributes of Allah is Al-Wadoud, meaning "The Most Loving and Affectionate, The Beloved, The Kind and Loving God." According to scholars of Islamic Jurisprudence, there are ten ways in which to prove our love for the Almighty Allah. In today's article, I will share the ninth and tenth, as such we will have completed discussing those ten ways in which to prove our love for our infinitely wise Creator, Allah, since the beginning of the series. I hope you have benefited from the shared information!

(9) Observing moderation in enjoying worldly pleasures. Preventing yourself from indulging in worldly desires helps you live a healthy and balanced life and keeps you in constant awareness of the transient nature of this world. For example, saving money is good, but greed and miserliness are discouraged. While there is nothing wrong with enjoying a delicious meal, gluttony and overeating is discouraged in Islam.

The Infinitely Aware, Allah, communicates to us what the people of Qa'roun (Korah) told him when they saw him pride himself in pomp and glory what can be translated as: "Rather, with all that Allah has given you, seek the (the glory of the abode of the) Hereafter. But do not forget your share of (the good life) in this world, but do good (to Allah's servants) as Allah has been good to you. Yet do not seek to sow corruption in the land. For, indeed, Allah does not love the sowers of corruption." (Al-Qasas 28: 77)

You are encouraged to spend your wealth in charity and good works because it is Allah, the Provider, Who has given it to you, and you should spend it in His cause.

Continued on Page 6

Kuwait labor force fell to 2.476 million

KUWAIT: The size of labor force in Kuwait edged lower in 2021 to 2.476 million workers from 2.662 million workers in the end of 2020, according to the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB). While the number of household workers declined to 594 thousand in 2021 which was 1.993 million workers in the end of 2020, Al-Shall reported on Thursday quoting CSB. Household workers constitute nearly 24 percent of total labor force in Kuwait as of the end of 2021 (25.1

Philippines landslides kill 148

ABUYOG: The death toll from landslides and flooding in the Philippines triggered by tropical storm Megi rose to 148 on Thursday, official figures showed, as more bodies were found in mud-caked villages. Scores of people are still missing and feared dead after the strongest storm to strike the archipelago nation this year dumped heavy rain over several days, forcing tens of thousands into evacuation centers.

In the central province of Leyte -

US suspect faces terror charge

NEW YORK: A 62-year-old man accused of shooting 10 people on the New York subway was taken into custody Wednesday and faces a federal terror charge, following a day-long manhunt in a city set on edge by the attack. Frank James—who is suspected of detonating two smoke canisters on the train as it pulled into a Brooklyn station, before firing into

the worst affected by Megi - devastating landslides smashed farming and fishing communities, wiping out houses and transforming the landscape. The disaster-prone region is regularly ravaged by storms - including a direct hit from Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 - with scientists warning they are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer because of climate change.

Emergency personnel in Abuyog municipality have retrieved dozens of bodies from the coastal village of Pilar, which was destroyed by a landslide on Tuesday. At least 42 people died in landslides that hit three villages in the municipality, police said. Another person drowned. Most of those deaths were in Pilar, with at

Continued on Page 6

the crowd was stopped by officers on a Manhattan street and arrested without incident.

"My fellow New Yorkers: we got him," Mayor Eric Adams told a news conference. "There was nowhere left for him to run," added New York Police Department commissioner Keechant Sewell, whose officers made the arrest acting on a tip. Announcing the charges against James, US District Attorney Breon Peace said he could face a life sentence if convicted of violating a federal prohibition on "terrorist and other violent attacks against mass transportation systems."

Continued on Page 6



ABUYOG: An aerial view shows residents walking past destroyed houses in the village of Pilar, Abuyog town, Leyte province on April 14, 2022, day after a landslide struck the village due to heavy rains at the height of tropical Storm Megi. — AFP



NEW YORK: Frank R James, 62, is led away from the 9th Precinct into Federal Custody in New York City after he was arrested on the Lower East Side in Manhattan by two patrol officers. — AFP

Local



Assembly crush Cabinet 4-0 in Ramadan football friendly



KUWAIT: A team comprising of National Assembly members beat a team consisting of Cabinet members 4-0 in a friendly football match held during Al-Shuhumi Ramadan tournament on Wednesday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Initiatives launched to help owners of damaged Souq Mubarakiya stores

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Different companies and businesses took the initiative to help the stores that were damaged in the Souq Mubarakiya blaze two weeks ago. Some stores offered the damaged stores to sell their products in their own stores, and even removed their original products to provide them space. Meanwhile,

some online businesses offered them their platform to sell their products free of charge.

Marshoud Al-Marshoud, CEO of one of those companies, offered to display damaged stores' perfumes and products at their store. "The next day of the blaze, we posted on Twitter our initiative for the damaged stores to sell their products such as perfumes, bukhoor and others at our store in Souq Mubarakiya, which wasn't affected by the blaze, till the end of Ramadan. We even removed our products from the store to avoid affecting their sales," Marshoud told Kuwait Times.

"Since the initiative was posted, only three stores are displaying their products at our store," he said. "We have space for more products. We also don't mind extending the offer for them even after the end of Ramadan. We don't know when the damaged shops will be restored, but we hope it will happen soon. People in Kuwait like to help others, and I

know many other businesses also offered help for the damaged shops."

Nawafa Al-Arbash, CEO of a jewelry company, also offered the damaged stores to display their products at their gifts store that is located at Al-Raya shopping mall. "We received many messages thanking our initiative, but none of the damaged shops came to display their products at our store yet," he said. "Maybe they feel embarrassed, or they have other stores or other solutions for selling their products. I guess that nowadays most businesses are offering selling online, so maybe they managed to work it out. But my offer is still available till Souq Mubarakiya is rebuilt, and it can take about 30 products or more."

Online platforms also participated in this initiative. An app and website selling flowers, gifts and confections also announced their initiative through Twitter to reach the damaged stores. "We offered

the chance to them to sell their products for conducting their businesses. The interaction of people with my Tweet was impressive and showed that people reacted emotionally and that they want to help, especially during Ramadan. They helped by spreading the word around," said Sleman Al-Tarrah, the company's CEO. "This initiative is part of our corporate social responsibility. We always do charitable activities around the world. Our culture is built on that. If we did something it will come back. We are doing that from our heart."

"We are very picky in selecting the businesses on our platform. They must meet our criteria. In our initiative, we welcome any of the damaged businesses in Mubarakiya if they are licensed to come onboard and place their products. They can sell their products without commission for the cause. We offer them open-ended contract with zero fees. But until now none of these businesses applied," Tarrah also said.



Local



KUWAIT: Children celebrate gergean. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait celebrates gergean despite higher prices

‘Gergean’ came from sound of beating drums to celebrate the occasion

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As the holy month of Ramadan began, many Kuwaitis and residents prepared for the festival of gergean after two years of restrictions imposed by the government to curb the spread of COVID-19. Gergean is marked annually in the middle of Ramadan, where children wear traditional clothes and tour neighborhoods while carrying candy bags and singing.

Kuwaiti historian Khaled Al-Rasheed said that the gergean is a heritage festival celebrated by the people of the Gulf, where the celebration's name changes from country to country, noting that the name "gergean" in the Kuwaiti dialect came from the sound of drums that children used to beat to celebrate this occasion. He added that it is usually celebrated on the nights of the 13th, 14th, and 15th of the month, adding that in the past, children used to gather in groups with a leader to roam the neighborhoods asking for sweets.

Rasheed pointed out that many years ago, children used to go with a small drum or a wooden box and hit it with a stick to make a rhythmic sound while singing the gergean's songs in front of neighbors' houses. After the singing, the owner of the house would distribute candy and sometimes money from a large basket made of palm fronds or fabric. The song's lyric is kind of a prayer, wishing the family and children living in that house good health and protection from God.

High prices

Kuwait Times toured some co-ops and sweet stores to get an insight about the prices and ask the opinions of

customers at the gergean's market. Mohammed Al-Haggan told Kuwait Times that some kinds of gergean have almost doubled in price, noting that a bag of gergean weighing two kilograms rose from KD 2,990 to 3,450. For Um Abdulrahman, the price of gergean depends on the quality of sweets and the shape of the packaging. "The packaging is the reason behind high prices in the markets, but we have to celebrate it since it is a Kuwaiti traditional habit and we are keen to revive it and to bring joy and happiness to the hearts of children," she said.



From a tradition to a 'luxury event'

She told Kuwait Times that due to COVID-19, people did not participate in such celebration but now after getting back to normal with no masks required, people are eager to celebrate. "This makes the demand higher than the previous year, and the prices of sweets raised to the roof," she said.

In the meantime, Fatima Al-Masaeed said "I bought yesterday a ready-made gergean basket from a famous shop for KD 40. The basket has 35 small boxes. I could get a cheaper one, but the quality of chocolate is fancier

than the others." "The basket's price ranges between KD 15 and 50, which contains up to 40 small bags of mixed sweets. The separate small boxes of sweets range between 1,250 and 3,500 per piece," she added.

Hafid Omar affirmed that gergean has become overrated and it is all about showing off. "I got gergean for my children because they are jealous of their friends. I bought yesterday sweet bags containing small-sized chocolate, jelly, gums, and chips. It cost KD 2 per bag," he explained.

Smart buying

For some people, gergean is an opportunity for family and friends to gather while making their children feel loved. Amal Bassem told Kuwait Times that gergean is a nice occasion to be celebrated and smart buying is the answer to the expensive prices in the market.

She said that she prepares gergean by herself, where she goes to wholesale shops and buys 20 bags for KD 1. "If you act smart and have a lot of children attending, then wholesale stores are the best place. They have different kinds and colors of packaging. Then I buy the chocolate, sweets, and nuts from the co-op offers," she said.

As for Um Mohammad, gergean sweets can be bought online. "I support the small business market. I bought gergean from an Instagram account that sells 20 bags of mixed candy for KD 25. I prefer scrolling through social media stores than driving from one market to another to search for the right one to buy." She affirmed that not only the prices of sweets have risen, but also the prices of traditional clothes that the kids wear at gergean where the prices are between KD 5 and 25 depending on the



design and fabric. "Gergean is a great tradition to celebrate with my sons and grandchildren," Um Mohammad added. We organize a night full of activities, sweet bags distribution, and valuable prizes." She pointed out that she had prepared the event to bring joy and pleasure to children and adults in the house.

Lulwa Al-Hamid stressed meanwhile the importance of organizing a simple family celebration of gergean, saying that spending the night with the family is all she needed, adding that gergean is one of the most important traditions that remain in the memory of children, especially as it enhances social bonding.

"Gergean is a great historical traditional celebration. But nowadays unfortunately, it has become a phenomenon of luxury event with the luxurious packaging of sweets, money, and clothes," she said. "It's become a nice photo on social media stories."

Four people hurt in Fahaheel Expressway crash

KUWAIT: Rescue men freed four injured people who were trapped in two vehicles following a traffic accident near Shuaiba on Fahaheel Expressway. The injured were taken by paramedics to the hospital, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. An investigation was opened to reveal the circumstances behind the accident.

Meanwhile, firemen put out a blaze in a Salmiya building which left no injuries, Kuwait Fire Force said. Salmiya and Bidaa fire stations' men rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call, as they first evacuated the building before they extinguished the flames. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire, KFF added.



KUWAIT: A fireman battles the blaze in Salmiya.



KUWAIT: The two vehicles involved in the crash.

Malaysian PM lauds cooperation with Kuwait

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Ismail Sabri lauded on Thursday the relations with the State of Kuwait on various levels, commending the joint cooperation between the two countries on international matters. This praise came during the Prime Minister's breaking-fast banquet held in honor of

the diplomatic corps operating in Malaysia. Kuwait's Ambassador to Malaysia Dr Hamad Burhama said in a statement by the embassy that he had met Prime Minister Sabri during the event with the latter conveying greetings to the Kuwaiti people and leadership. — KUNA



KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwait's Ambassador to Malaysia Dr Hamad Burhama with Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri. — KUNA

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News in brief

Civil Service Commission sets
Eid holiday from May 1 to May 5

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission announced that Eid Al-Fitr holiday in state departments will be from Sunday, May 1, 2022 to Thursday, May 5, 2022, while work resumes on Sunday May 8, 2022.

Kuwait reduces customs
fees to stop price increases

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry will reduce custom and storage fees in order to help prevent price increases. Acting Undersecretary Mohammad Al-Enezi said. He added that the ministry would bear the cost for any future increases in prices of main commodities.

Kuwait expresses sorrow over
South Africa floods victims

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait, through the Foreign Ministry, expressed on Thursday its sorrow over the floods, which swept the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa, leading to casualties as well as destruction of infrastructure, buildings, and private properties. The Foreign Ministry offered its condolences to the leadership and people of South Africa, wishing peace for those who passed away and swift recovery for the wounded.

Kuwait oil price up
\$4.44 to \$107.18 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwait oil went up by \$4.44 to \$107.18 per barrel on Wednesday as opposed to \$102.74 the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday. The Brent crude went up in the international markets by \$4.14 to \$108.78 per barrel, the same with the West Texas Intermediate, which rose by \$3.65 to \$104.25 pb.

Indian embassy
marks Ambedkar
birth anniversary

KUWAIT: Embassy of India, Kuwait, celebrated the birth anniversary of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the architect of the constitution of India on Wednesday. In his inaugural remarks, Indian Ambassador Sibi George spoke about the pivotal role played by Dr Ambedkar as the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution in enactment of a unique constitution which laid the framework for peaceful governance, development and progress of India, which is the largest democracy in the world.

"The role he played in giving us our constitution makes him an eternal hero in the history of India and in its emergence as the most vibrant democracy in the world," the ambassador said in his remarks.

"Today, we celebrate the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar, who is remembered as the architect of the Constitution of India. Today is also Mahavir Jayanti. Today is also Maundy Thursday. In fact, this week is a special period of celebrations with various festivals of Vishu, Baisakhi, Vaisakhadi, Poila Boishakh, Maha Bisubha Sankranti, Puthandu. Greetings of each of these festivals to all," the ambassador said.

Pledging to rededicate to the cause of the nation, the ambassador read out the preamble of Indian constitution. On the occasion, the ambassador, officers and family members of the embassy and members of the Indian community in Kuwait paid floral tributes at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of Nation and Dr Ambedkar.

The ambassador also inaugurated an exhibition displaying the journey of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the making of the constitution. A reading session by the readers of the embassy's Indian Readers Network (IRN) was also held where the members of the network read some of the excerpts from the prominent books authored by Dr Ambedkar. The event witnessed enthusiastic response with people from different walks life in Kuwait participating virtually as well as physically.

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz
winners receive their prizes

KUWAIT: Zaineb Mustansir's husband receives the prize from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



KUWAIT: Komal Muhammad Abbas receives her prize from Kuwait Times Deputy Managing Editor Islam Al-Sharaa.



KUWAIT: Farida Fakhruddin Patharwala's father receives the prize from Kuwait Times Deputy Managing Editor Islam Al-Sharaa.

KUWAIT: Winners of questions number 5, 6 and 7 of the Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz - Zaineb Mustansir, Komal Muhammad Abbas, and Farida Fakhruddin Patharwala respectively - received their awards at Kuwait Times head office this week. The winners received KD 50 in cash each

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

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

Diwaniyas, the beating heart of
Kuwaiti society: Tunisian Ambassador

Envoy talks Kuwaiti-Tunisian relations, Ramadan dishes in interview

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: In an interview with Kuwait Times, Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Hashemi Ajili, who has been in Kuwait since 2020, speaks about the relationship between his country and Kuwait, and his views on Kuwaiti culture and Ramadan tradition in both countries. Some excerpts:

Kuwait Times: Diplomats like to visit diwaniyas in Kuwait for cultural and social exchanges. Describe your experience.

Ambassador Ajili: Diwaniyas are the beating heart of the Kuwaiti society. I had the honor of visiting many of them and getting the chance to meet prominent Kuwaiti figures. The diwaniya is a central part of Kuwaiti culture to promote open dialogue on issues related to cultural and social affairs in Arab countries. I was impressed by the spontaneity of exchanging views, news and a variety of topics in the social, cultural and art fields.

KT: Is there any similarity in traditions between Kuwait and Tunisia?

Ambassador Ajili: Kuwaiti and Tunisian societies are very similar. Kuwaiti culture is based on Arab culture and traditions. As well as being attached to its roots, it is open to other cultures and civilizations. This is what both countries share, where also language and religious ideas match.

KT: What are the most popular Tunisian dishes during Ramadan?

Ambassador Ajili: Tunisian cuisine is one of the richest in the world, where it is known for its richness in the unique combination of dishes and a wonderful mix of local natural ingredients like wheat, barley, meat, fish, olive oil, spices and harissa. Couscous is the most famous national dish of Tunisia. It is prepared and cooked differently from one city to another and depending on the occasion, whether it is for Ramadan, holidays, weddings or parties. We also have many other delicious and nutritious dishes such as tajines, gravies, soups, pasta, salads, and desserts, which are savored by locals and tourists. On Ramadan iftar tables, you will be offered Tunisian briq and salad, along with the main dish, sweets and dates.

KT: How do you see the developments in Kuwaiti-Tunisian relations?

Ambassador Ajili: Tunisia and Kuwait have deep-rooted and distinguished historical relations. It is worth mentioning that the Tunisian politician Abdelaziz Al-Thaalbi visited Kuwait in 1924 and 1928 to connect with Kuwait on the political and cultural levels and discuss regional affairs. Tunisia was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kuwait on June 19, 1961. After four years of Kuwait's independence, leader Habib Bourguiba went on a historical presidential visit in March 1965.

Kuwait has played a leading role in Tunisia's development since the sixties through several grants and loans, as well as investments. Tunisian President Kais Saied showed great sorrow on the death of the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who visited Tunisia for the last time in March 2019.

President Saied is looking forward to visiting Kuwait on the invitation of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The leaderships of the two countries are keen to support cooperation in the political, cultural and economic fields and are eager to expand their trade and



Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Hashemi Ajili reads Kuwait Times.

economic exchanges and joint investment projects to rise to the aspirations of the two brotherly peoples toward establishing an effective and solid partnership.

KT: After two years in Kuwait, how do you see the bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding between the two countries?

Ambassador Ajili: Kuwait has signed several bilateral agreements for joint cooperation in political, economic, cultural and educational fields. Currently, several understandings are underway to be signed soon, in addition to evaluating and updating some other documents in response to current changes.

KT: What are the characteristics of Tunisian diplomacy?

Ambassador Ajili: In its foreign policy, Tunisia is keen to be a peace-loving country linked to international legitimacy, and works to strengthen the causes of tolerance and solidarity between countries and peoples and to promote justice and democracy in international relations. These principles can be summed up in support of the Palestinian cause, adherence to international legitimacy and giving priority to negotiation and peaceful means as a way to resolve differences and support human rights.

Tunisia is preparing for 2022 to host two important global events - the 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD8), which Tunisia will host on August 27-28, 2022, while Tunisia's southern island of Djerba will host the 18th Francophonie Summit on November 19-20, 2022.

KT: Tunisia is a unique touristic country. Why should Kuwaitis visit Tunisia?

Ambassador Ajili: Tunisia is a tourist destination par excellence. It is known for its warm cli-



Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Hashemi Ajili.

mate, festive atmosphere, unique blend of geography and history, and friendly citizens, which attracts about 10 million tourists annually. Tunisia witnessed during the various historical eras that it passed through more than 8,000 years ago several civilizations such as Capsian, Amazigh, Carthaginian, as well as Romanian, Vandal, Islamic and others.

On a geographical area estimated at 164,000 km2, Tunisia includes various tourist scenes, beginning with its picturesque nature, which combines the desert and oases in the south and coasts and coastline along 1,300 km, as well as a series of mountains, forests, nature reserves and 60 islands, in addition to archaeological sites, museums and mosques. In this context, we affirm the embassy's keenness to work to encourage Kuwaiti brothers and residents to visit Tunisia.



Popular dishes from the Tunisian cuisine.



Tunisian sweets.



Wheel of fortune turns for Sri Lanka's political soothsayers

Lebanon to demolish blast-hit grain silos



KYIV: (L-R) President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda, President of Poland Andrzej Duda, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Latvia Egils Levits and President of Estonia Alar Karis hold a press conference following their talks in Kyiv, on April 13, 2022. —AFP

Ukraine's orphans face trafficking threat

Greater danger 'of children being targeted, children being left behind and abandoned'

PARIS: Left in care homes and now threatened by war, thousands of already vulnerable Ukrainian refugees are at risk of being trafficked as they are uprooted by fighting across the country. Some have come under Russian fire in their care homes. Others fled amid the sound of explosions and gunfire. Many remain unaccounted for, lost in the chaos of Ukraine's sprawling and often disorganised social service system.

"There was a big problem of forced labour in the orphanages before the war (and) trafficking for the sex industry," said Eric Rosenthal, director of Disability Rights International (DRI) in Washington. Now there is an even greater danger "of children being targeted, children being left behind, children being abandoned".

There are more than 100,000 children in orphanages, boarding schools, or homes for the dis-



BUCHA, Ukraine: Workers exhume bodies from a mass grave in Bucha, north-west of Kyiv, on April 14, 2022. French gendarmes and forensic doctors have arrived in Ukraine to help investigate the discovery of scores of bodies in civilian clothing scattered in Bucha and other towns around Kyiv after Russia's withdrawal from the region. Ukraine says it has discovered 1,222 bodies in Bucha and other towns. —AFP

Narrow escape

In late March, as war reached the city of Nizhyn northeast of Kyiv, Marieta knew she had to act quickly.

She ran a care home for children whose families were too poor to care for them or were struggling with substance abuse. While some families came to collect their kids, seven of them between the ages of five and 14 were left behind. "The children could hear the gunfire and explosions. It was terrifying for them," she told AFP, declining to give her last name.

The kids were loaded onto a bus with the curtains drawn, ferried to a centre near the Slovak border nearly 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) away. "Luckily, the children didn't see the destroyed houses and dead people," Marieta said. "Three days after we left, the Russians moved in on Nizhyn. If

we'd left it any longer, we'd have been trapped."

Elsewhere, in Vorzel, northwest of Kyiv, a care home for infants under the age of four came under shelling the day after the Russians invaded. "Fortunately, children and staff were not inside," said Halyna Postoliuk, country director for Hope and Homes for Children Ukraine.

It wasn't until March 9 that it was deemed safe enough to evacuate the 55 infants and 26 staff from the centre-first to Kyiv, then to western Ukraine after a humanitarian corridor was eventually agreed.

Fears are now mounting that those lucky enough to escape death in Ukraine could be preyed on by traffickers, a long-running threat for children in the country's sprawling and often dysfunctional care network established under the Soviet Union. It's a threat heightened by the conflict. —AFP

were waiting in a "cordial" atmosphere. "We have exchanges. We discuss our problems," he told AFP. The minister was optimistic that there would be an accord in Doha so that the national talks can go ahead. "I cannot say who will sign it but the dialogue will go ahead," he added.

Long wait

During long hours in their hotel rooms, the rival groups wait to see a plan to get discussions started that is being drawn up by Qatar's mediation envoy Mutlaq bin Majed Al Qahtani, a veteran of several tough assignments including getting the United States and Taliban to talk in Doha. The opposition, already overloaded with more than 50 groups, varies between outright rebels based in isolated camps to unarmed political activists. Personal and political rivalries have made Qahtani's job more difficult.

"The differences between the movements—military and more classical political—mean that it is difficult to reconcile the different views," said Benjamin Auge, an Africa specialist with the French Institute of International Relations. But all refuse to speak directly with the government. And many representatives told AFP they would guarantee their safety if they return to N'Djamena for the national dialogue. They are also demanding that Deby promise

that he will not stand in the new elections.

Qahtani has sought to reduce the number of participants while preparing a summary of their disparate demands. There is no indication when a report will be ready. The government and opposition say they will wait. But the African Union, United Nations and other states in Africa are anxiously looking for progress. "Chad is a key country that touches zones and countries already in a situation of fragility," said Auge, highlighting internal conflict and battles against militants in neighbouring Nigeria, Libya and Sudan. France, the former colonial power, and the United States are closely watching events.

Robert Menendez, chair of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has criticised the US administration's refusal to label Deby's takeover as a coup. Menendez said in a letter to the administration that Deby's "failure" to rule himself out of the elections—as has occurred during transitions elsewhere in Africa—could "severely damage efforts to transition to democracy and civilian rule not only in Chad but also in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Sudan".

The Chadian groups in Doha face an uncertain wait. "The national dialogue could be pushed back," said Auge. "For the moment, the Chad authorities are sticking to the date so that they do not poison the talks in Doha, that are already difficult." —AFP

Britain to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda

LONDON: Britain will send migrants and asylum-seekers who cross the Channel thousands of miles away to Rwanda under a controversial deal announced Thursday as the government tries to clamp down on record numbers of people making the perilous journey. "From today... anyone entering the UK illegally as well as those who have arrived illegally since January 1 may now be relocated to Rwanda," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a speech near Dover in southeastern England.

"Rwanda will have the capacity to resettle tens of thousands of people in the years ahead," Johnson said. He called the East African nation with a sketchy human rights record "one of the safest countries in the world, globally recognised for its record of welcoming and integrating migrants."

Johnson was elected partly on promises to curb illegal immigration but has instead seen record numbers making the risky Channel crossing. He also announced that Britain's border agency would hand responsibility for patrolling the Channel for migrant boats to the navy.

"The Royal Navy will take over operational command from Border Force in the Channel with the aim that no boat makes it to the UK undetected," Johnson said, announcing extra funds for boats, aircraft and surveillance equipment to help detain people-smugglers at sea. "This will send a clear message to those piloting the boats. If you risk other people's lives in the Channel, you risk spending your own life in prison," he said.

More than 28,000 people arrived in Britain having crossed the Channel from France in small boats in 2021. Around 90 percent of those were male and three-quarters were men aged between 18 and 39. The Rwanda plan swiftly drew the ire of opposition politicians who accused Johnson of trying to distract from his being fined for breaking coronavirus lockdown rules, while rights groups slammed the project as "inhuman". Ghana and Rwanda had previously been mentioned as possible locations for the UK to outsource the processing of migrants, but Ghana in January denied involvement.

Instead, Kigali on Thursday announcing that it had signed a multi-million-dollar deal to do the job, during a visit by British Home Secretary Priti Patel. "Rwanda welcomes this partnership with the United Kingdom to host asylum seekers and migrants, and offer them legal pathways to residence" in the East African nation, Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta said in a statement. The deal with Rwanda will be funded by the UK to the tune of up to 120 million pounds (\$157 million, 144 million euros), with migrants "integrated into communities across the country," it said.

Refugee Action's Tim Naor Hilton accused the government of "offshoring its responsibilities onto Europe's former colonies instead of doing our fair share to help some of the most vulnerable people on the planet". —AFP



Getting them out is no easy task

abled in Ukraine, the highest number in all of Europe, according to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. Many are considered so-called social orphans—their parents or other relatives are alive but unable to care for them in the country, one of Europe's poorest.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, at least 8,000 minors in care have been taken abroad or relocated within Ukraine, according to official data. About 31,000 have been returned to their parents, and officials estimate that at least 2,500 others are trapped in active fighting zones and need to be evacuated. Getting them out is no easy task.

Chad rivals bide time in Qatar

DOHA, Qatar: In the month since Chadian rebels and envoys of the military government started peace talks in Qatar, the two sides have prayed together most days but refused to face each other across the negotiating table. With more than 250 opposition and government officials staying in two luxury hotels, the Gulf state is picking up a mounting bill for its mediation in the Central African nation.

The transitional military council's foreign minister Mahamat Zene Cherif has been seen in a Doha mosque next to members of the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), which Chad's long-time leader Idriss Deby Itno was killed in battle against one year ago. "There is no personal issue. This is about the management of the country," said FACT spokesman Issa Ahmet, who takes part in the prayers, Deby's army general son, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, seized power promising to hold a national dialogue in May and elections by the end of 2022.

The Doha talks began on March 13 to prepare for the dialogue, but many diplomats increasingly doubt the deadlines will be met. Cherif said the rival sides

International

Jerusalem's Christian churches resist hardline Zionist settlers

Govt promised that they will try their best to deal with this issue

JERUSALEM: Churches in Jerusalem are up in arms against Jewish "radicals" who are settling in the Christian Quarter and threatening a fragile religious balance in the ancient Holy City. "We have a major problem here," said Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilus III in Jerusalem's Old City, which is split into historic Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian quarters.

"Jerusalem also has her Christian character, and that is what is threatened," he told AFP, as Christian worshippers readied for Easter celebrations.

The patriarch charged that hardline Zionist settlers, known for a push to take over properties of Palestinian families, are also waging a campaign for control of Christian-owned lands. "Those radicals are driven by their ideology," Theophilus III said. "Their ideology is the syndrome of messianism, when they claim 'we want to redeem the Holy Land from the profanes'."

The nationalist settler group Ateret Cohanim has worked to "Judaize" east Jerusalem—a Palestinian sector illegally annexed by Zionist entity according to the UN—by purchasing real estate through front companies and then moving Zionist settlers in.

Since 2005, the group and the Orthodox church have been engaged in a complex legal wrangle over ownership of an Old City hostel at the Jaffa Gate

entrance to the Christian Quarter.

The dispute took a fresh turn on March 27, when settlers took over part of the Petra Hotel by "breaking and entering," according to the Greek Orthodox Church. Theophilus III said the Zionist government "promised us that they will try their best to deal with this issue, and put pressure on those radical groups to get out". But, after more than two weeks, the settlers are still there, he said. "It seems that the state doesn't have the power or the will to (put pressure) on those people," he added.

'Big, big drama'

Hagit Ofra, of the Zionist entity anti-settler group Peace Now, said the dispute is "a big, big drama, because it's such a strategic place at the entrance to the Christian Quarter, a huge compound where they can bring hundreds of settlers."

Ofra warned that "if they succeed, this is changing the whole character of the Old City—and of course of the Christian Quarter." About 300 Jewish settlers already live in the Christian Quarter.

The churches have voiced alarm about the trend, as well as acts of vandalism and anti-Christian aggression, arguing the problem extends beyond the ancient heart of Jerusalem.

On the outskirts of the Old City, on the Mount

Dispute is 'a big, big drama'



JERUSALEM: Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilus III (C) arrives for a meeting with other religious leaders at the Petra Hotel at the Jaffa Gate area in Jerusalem's old city. Churches in Jerusalem are up in arms against Jewish "radicals" who are settling in the Christian Quarter and threatening a fragile religious balance in the ancient Holy City. —AFP

of Olives where several prominent churches stand, Zionist entity plans to expand a park that will encroach on land belonging to Christian institutions.

The three communities concerned—Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Franciscan—sent a strongly

worded letter to the authorities in February. "In recent years, we cannot help but feel that various entities are seeking to minimise, not to say eliminate, any non-Jewish characteristics of the Holy City by attempting to alter the status quo on the holy mountain," they wrote. —AFP

Brazil indigenous influencers take their fight online

BRASILIA, Brazil: Clutching an iPhone in each hand, and sporting a feather headdress and traditional indigenous garb, Brazilian influencer Samela Awia, a member of the Amazon rainforest's Satere-Mawe people, checks out her latest video, then posts it online.

"Good stuff," says the 25-year-old after uploading the video, a recap of news from a tent city near the seat of government in Brasilia, where she and thousands of other indigenous Brazilians have been camped out since last week protesting far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's policies.

"Hi, this is Samela, coming to you from the indigenous camp," she tells her 54,000 followers in the mini-report, decked out in a coconut shell-and-crochet bustier, colorful beads and blue flower armbands. "Come with me, I'll show you what's going on," says the self-described artisan and digital activist from Manaus, the city known as the "capital of the Amazon."

The indigenous camp, an annual event, has focused this year on mobilizing public opinion against a series of Bolsonaro initiatives that critics say would be disastrous for native peoples and the environment, including bills that would sharply limit the creation of new indigenous reservations and open existing ones to mining.

But in addition to the camp, young and tech-savvy indigenous influencers are increasingly taking their cause online. "Indigenous leaders



BRASILIA: Digital indigenous activists Tukuma Pataxo, of the Pataxo tribe, and Samela Awia (L), of the Satere Mawe Amazonian tribe, check their social media posts on their mobile phones at the Terra Livre Indigenous Camp in Brasilia on April 7, 2022. —AFP

before us had other tools, other weapons to fight. Our generation has a new form of resistance, the internet and social networks, and it's making a big difference," Awia told AFP.

Brazil is home to around 900,000 indigenous people. They make up 0.5 percent of the population, but play an outside role in protecting the environment: Experts say creating and safeguarding indigenous reservations is one of the best ways to preserve the world's forests, key resources in the race to curb climate change.

Victims of mass killings and horrific abuses

throughout the nation's history, indigenous Brazilians still often face violence, discrimination and rights violations today. Indigenous influencers see part of their role as combatting the prejudice their people face.

Tukuma Pataxo, 22, recently posted a video taking on a question he says he gets constantly: "Aren't you too modern to be indigenous?" "Are we supposed to be stuck in time?" he asks in the accompanying message, hitting out at the derogatory phrase sometimes applied to people like him: "iPhone Indians." —AFP

Bad weather and thick mud had complicated retrieval efforts in Pilar, where the ground was unstable. Searchers were also combing the coastline after some bodies were swept kilometers away by ocean currents. "This will not end soon, it could go on for days," Traya warned. Many of those who died had hiked to higher ground to avoid flash floods, villagers told AFP. "It sounded like a helicopter," said Pilar councillor Anaclata Canuto, 44, describing the noise made by the landslide.

Canuto, her husband and their two children survived, but they lost at least nine relatives. Pilar fisherman Santiago Dahonog, 38, said he rushed into the sea with two siblings and a nephew as the landslide hurtled towards them. "We got out of the house, ran to the water and started swimming," he told AFP. "I was the only survivor." —AFP

Russia's land border with NATO members.

"Naturally, we will have to reinforce these borders," he said. "In this case, it would not be possible to talk any more about the Baltic non-nuclear status. The balance has to be restored," he said, indicating that Russia would be entitled to deploy nuclear weapons in the region. The former president said Russia would "seriously reinforce its group of ground forces and air defenses and deploy significant naval forces in the Gulf of Finland."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, asked about the comments by journalists, said that "this has been talked about many times" and President Vladimir Putin has issued an order on "reinforcing our western flank" due to NATO's growing military potential. Asked if this reinforcement would include nuclear weapons, Peskov said: "I can't say... There will be a whole list of measures, necessary steps. This will be covered at a separate meeting by the president."

Moscow's military actions in Ukraine have sparked a dramatic U-turn in public and political opinion in both Finland and Sweden over long-held policies of military non-alignment. Finland said this week it will decide whether to apply for NATO membership within weeks and Sweden is also discussing membership.—AFP

Philippines landslides...

Continued from Page 1

least 28 bodies brought by boat to a sandy lot near the municipal government building after roads leading to the settlement were cut off by landslides.

More than 100 remained missing, and Abuyog Mayor Lemuel Traya told AFP there was little hope of finding anyone else alive. An aerial photo showed a wide stretch of mud and earth that had swept down a mountain to the sea, crushing everything in its path. The wreckage of houses and debris was scattered along the shore.

Ukraine war raises risks for Mideast...

Continued from Page 1

Oil-exporting economies are expected to grow 5.4 percent on the back of the recovery from the pandemic, the expected increase in oil output and high oil prices. But oil importers are expected to expand by a much lower 4.0 percent, the report said, warning that 11 out of 17 MENA economies may not recover to pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year. "When the price of energy and food rises, it hurts the poorest and the most vulnerable," Lederman said.

Nuclear arms

Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev warned Thursday that Russia would deploy nuclear weapons close to the Baltic States and Scandinavia if Finland or Sweden decide to join NATO. Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council and president from 2008 to 2012, wrote on Telegram that if the countries joined, this would more than double

US suspect faces terror....

Continued from Page 1

Michael J Driscoll, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York office, also characterized the shooting as "a terrorist attack on mass transit." No one was killed in Tuesday's attack, which left 13 others injured in the scramble to get out of the station, or by smoke inhalation. The motive of the attack remains unknown. James has nine prior arrests in New York, from 1992 to 1998, including possession of burglary tools and a criminal sex act, and was also arrested three times in nearby New Jersey for trespass, larceny and disorderly conduct, according to NYPD Chief of

Detectives James Essig.

Police recovered a Glock 17 nine-millimeter handgun, three additional ammunition magazines and a hatchet from the scene of the attack, as well as James' credit card and keys to a van he had rented. Officials said James bought the gun legally in Ohio. He will be arraigned in a Brooklyn courthouse Thursday.

James had posted several videos of himself on YouTube delivering long, sometimes aggressive political tirades, as well as criticizing New York's mayor. His page was taken down following the attack for violating YouTube's guidelines. But James' sister, Catherine James Robinson, told The New York Times that she was "surprised" to see him named as a suspect, adding: "I don't think he would do anything like that." She said she had had little contact with her brother for years, according to the newspaper. —AFP

Loving Praiseworthy...

Continued from Page 1

Moreover, you should not forget the legitimate needs of your fellow human-beings in this life, as misers do. Among the aspects of showing gratitude to Almighty Allah is to share with others the blessings and bounties He has conferred upon you.

(10) Sincerely show gratitude towards the Provider, Allah. The Benefactor, Allah, always showers upon us countless blessings, bounties, and gifts, yet many people tend to neglect thanking Him and expressing their gratefulness to Him for what they enjoy. The more we thank Allah, the Provider, and acknowledge His blessings, bounties, and mercy - among others - the more we feel the love of Him, and the more He continue to give us.

The Lord of Majesty and Generosity, Allah, says what can be translated as: "And (remember) when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase (My favors) upon you. But if you rebel (against My commandments and deny My favors), then, indeed, My punishment is severe.'"

(Ibrahim 14: 7) That means that if we are grateful, we will surely appreciate Allah's favors, benefit wisely from them, and share them with our fellow human-beings and other creatures in befitting ways.

Abdullah bin Umar (Prophet's Companion) said what can be translated as: "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) took me by the shoulder and said, "Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a wayfarer." And Ibn Umar used to say, "In the evening do not expect (to live until) the morning, and in the morning do not expect (to live until) the evening. Benefit from your health before sickness (afflicts you), and benefit from your life before your death." (Al-Bukhari # 6, 416)

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.

International

Wheel of fortune turns for Sri Lanka's political soothsayers

'The leaders know that they have done a lot of wrong'

COLOMBO: Generations of Sri Lankan leaders have sought guidance from seers and astrologers, and now one has dared tell the ruling Rajapaksa family that their time in office is up. As politicians find their homes besieged by large and resentful crowds, incensed over months of fuel shortages and lengthy blackouts, spiritual advisers have also found themselves under pressure.

Images of soothsayers standing alongside top administration figures have been shared on social media by activists calling on them to urge President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to stand down. One of the most prominent among them has already broken ranks with the government.

The long-time personal astrologer of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa—the president's older brother—this week said the economic crisis signalled the downfall of a clan that has dominated Sri Lanka's affairs for much of the past two decades. "This is the end of the entire Rajapaksa family," Sumanadasa Abeygunawardena told AFP.

The fortune-teller's reputation took a hit in 2015 after he suggested Mahinda call an early election that the leader lost—but his latest prediction is more emphatic. "Even a grade two child knows today that the Rajapaksas are doomed," he said.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa—Mahinda's younger brother—and Sri Lanka's army chief are also known to have had a long association with a fortune-teller in the historic Buddhist centre of Anuradhapura.

Local media have reported the president makes regular pilgrimages to meet with Gnana Akka, and claimed she had a considerable role in shaping the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

A group of activists clashed with police this month as they attempted to storm a shrine belonging to the seer,

who fled after officers tipped her off to the crowd's impending arrival. Gnana Akka's influence also extended to several other top politicians, said newspaper columnist Kusal Perera, who quipped that the prophet's powers had apparently not granted her advance warning of the protest. "How can Gnana Akka protect the president when she is unable to protect herself?" he said.

Magic ritual

Astrology is widely practised in Sri Lanka, and people commonly consult seers before building new homes, entering into contracts or scheduling weddings. Political addresses to the nation and the inauguration of new parliament sessions are also usually held at auspicious times.

Former military commanders have even reported that timings of military actions in Sri Lanka's long civil war were decided by astrologers, who were also consulted to coin codenames for operations. The Rajapaksa brothers are only the latest in a long tradition of Sri Lankan leaders balancing otherworldly advice with that of technocrats and

civil servants.

Former president Ranasinghe Premadasa used a magic ritual to ward off his impending impeachment in 1991, according to a tell-all book by Vijaya Paliyaguruge, who at the time was the parliament's sergeant-at-arms, the officer maintaining order.

A sorcerer was tasked with juicing limes and spreading the liquids on the seats of lawmakers to ensure their support of the leader. Premadasa survived the attempt to topple him but his reliance on the occult did not protect him from his assassination two years later in a suicide bomb attack by a member of the Tamil Tigers separatist movement.



COLOMBO: Astrologer Dayasena Athukorale shows the ola leaf horoscope of an unidentified client at his home in Makola, near Sri Lanka's capital Colombo. Generations of Sri Lankan leaders have sought guidance from seers and astrologers. —AFP

The political elite's consultation of shamans and seers is not a phenomenon unique to Sri Lanka. The diminutive mystic "ET"—a moniker apparently inspired by her resemblance to the eponymous Steven Spielberg character—advised members of Myanmar's military, who were rumoured to have relocated the country's capital in 2005 based on astrological guidance. Former US First Lady Nancy Reagan was also known to consult an astrologer to plan her husband's schedule while he

served in the White House. But even with Sri Lanka seething over mismanagement of the economic crisis and allegations of graft, human rights activist and former newspaper editor Victor Ivan said the government was unlikely to abandon its faith in supernatural guidance. "The leaders know that they have done a lot of wrong," he told AFP. "Shamans and sorcerers provide them a way of redemption—that is why these people are held in such veneration by our politicians." —AFP



'Way of redemption'

N Korea's tests stir nuclear debate in South

SEOUL: After firing its largest-ever missile, North Korea is preparing to conduct a nuclear test, officials and analysts say, reviving a longstanding debate south of the border: should Seoul have nukes too? Pyongyang has conducted a blitz of sanctions-busting weapons tests this year, including launching an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) at full range for the first time since 2017.

It was a dramatic return to long-range testing after a years-long pause while leader Kim Jong Un embarked on a round of failed diplomacy with then-US president Donald Trump in 2018. Renewed North Korean sabre-rattling, coupled with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has shifted the public mood in South Korea—with growing demand for their own deterrent.

"Discussions on South Korea possibly pursuing its own nuclear capability have been circulating," said Soo Kim of the RAND Corporation. "The nuclear option is likely to remain on the discussion table for Seoul's decision-makers. But this, of course, will have implications and reach beyond the Korean Peninsula."

The discussion on whether South Korea should pursue nuclear armaments extends beyond official circles, with a majority of citizens also appearing to support such a move. Seventy-one percent of South Koreans now favour the country getting nuclear weapons, according to a research paper published in February by the US-based Carnegie Endowment and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Nuclear test expected

North Korea has tested nuclear weapons six times since 2006 and touted the success of its last and most powerful one in 2017 — a hydrogen



File picture shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (C) walking near what a state media report says was a new type inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) before its test launch at an undisclosed location in North Korea. —AFP

bomb with an estimated yield of 250 kilotons. As North Korea's ICBMs are still in development there is a "high risk of failure" each time, said Cha Du-hyeogn, a researcher at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies. Last month, a North Korean missile exploded in the skies above Pyongyang. "That cramps Pyongyang's style," said Cha, adding a nuclear test is less risky. Another test is likely soon, South Korean officials and the top US envoy on North Korea say, as part of the celebrations for the 110th anniversary of the birth of founding leader Kim Il Sung on Friday.

South Korean nukes

Satellite imagery shows signs of new activity at

a tunnel at the Punggye-ri testing site, which North Korea said was demolished in 2018 ahead of a Trump-Kim summit. The Vienna-based Open Nuclear Network says it has spotted signs of excavation and increased activity, indicating North Korea may be preparing it for a nuclear weapon test.

Seoul ran a covert nuclear programme in the 1970s, ending it up in return for security guarantees from the United States. America stations 28,500 troops in South Korea to protect against its nuclear-armed neighbour, and has recently ramped up military displays, sending an aircraft carrier close by this week for the first time since 2017. —AFP

Grave injustice: Not even the dead rest easy in Karachi

KARACHI: In the teeming metropolis of Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, graveyards are filling up and the dead are running out of space to rest. But for the right price to the right person, a plot can be "found" for the body of a loved one by shady crews who demolish old graves to make room for the new.

In the coastal megacity—a crush of 20 million people—the Pakistan Employees Cooperative Housing Society (PECHS) cemetery has been officially full for five years. The necropolis is choc-full. Tombs big and small are slotted like Tetris into every nook-some pitted deep in the ground, others raised high on petal-strewn plinths.

Still, new tombs appear all the time, erected on smashed or scooped-out graves by men charging outsized fees. AFP witnessed one team hacking at stonework and furtively carrying away baskets of dirt until they had carved out a fresh opening in the cramped earth.

"There's no space in the whole of Karachi—none of the graveyards has space for fresh burials," said digger Khalil Ahmed. "We have to destroy old graves if we want to create new ones."

The government burial fee in this district is

7,900 rupees (\$44) but two locals reported paying 55,000 and 175,000 to lay a loved one to rest in the PECHS graveyard last year. Ahmed said the fees are split between 40 men and teens who, when not working, spend their time lolling on day beds in the shade.

Gravedigger mafia

Ahmed and his colleagues are part of what politicians and the media call the "gravedigger mafia"—a typically flamboyant term in the parlance of Pakistan social affairs. Officials rail against the "milk mafia" watering their wares, the "sugar mafia" driving up prices and the "land mafia" annexing space.

But the freelance gravediggers are profiting on Pakistan's changing population dynamic. Pakistan is the world's fifth most-populous nation with 220 million citizens and more than four million added every year. As the population grows, so does the migration of people from the countryside to the cities, looking for work to escape rural poverty.

Muhammad Aslam has witnessed the gravedigger mafia flourish as Karachi's population boomed. The 72-year-old said the PECHS graveyard was a "deserted place" when he moved next door in 1953 but "space shrank fast" as burial prices rose for 14 family members interred over the years.

In 1967 Aslam's family paid 50 rupees to bury his grandfather but a relative buried at the hands of the mafia in 2020 cost 33,000. "The basic issue is that infrastructure is insufficient," said Ali



KARACHI: Gravediggers make a new grave at the Korangi graveyard in Karachi. In the teeming metropolis of Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city, graveyards are filling up and the dead are running out of space to rest. —AFP

Hassan Sajid, a spokesman for the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC).

The KMC manages 39 of around 250 graveyards citywide—including PECHS Six are closed, while the rest are "almost full". "In some parts of the city the infrastructure is the same that existed when Pakistan was founded," Sajid admitted.

He openly acknowledged the existence of gravedigger mafias conducting burials at closed sites—and claimed efforts to evict them are underway. The gangs are also reported to be flourishing in the cities of Rawalpindi, Peshawar and Lahore. —AFP

S Lankans abandon holiday celebrations for protests

COLOMBO: Life usually stops in Sri Lanka's capital during April's holiday period, but with an economic crisis derailing traditional home celebrations, Colombo's city centre is instead teeming with frustrated crowds. Sri Lankans ritually boil milk on the first day of the island nation's New Year, but the commodity is one of many in short supply — along with the liquid gas and kerosene used to heat stoves in many Colombo households, and rice to serve family members.

Demonstrators this year brought the custom out of their homes and heated clay pots over makeshift bonfires outside the capital's Presidential Secretariat, highlighting the plight of households now forced to cook with firewood.

The seafort park by the neoclassical city has since the weekend hosted a recurring protest vigil, demanding the government's resignation over Sri Lanka's worst financial crisis in memory. "The economic situation is unbearable for many people," Hemakumara Perera, who joined the protest from a small town south of the capital, told AFP.

Perera, his wife and two children camped at the site overnight to "show solidarity" with fellow Sri Lankans suffering through what is usually a joyous family celebration. "We support their call for the president and the prime minister to step down," he said.

Other New Year customs have been abandoned, such as the buying of new garments to symbolise fresh beginnings. "We are not in a mood to wear new clothes and celebrate when we know how people are suffering," said Lakshika Gunawardena, who joined the protest carrying her five-month-old baby.

'We can't go'

Sri Lanka's New Year is usually a private affair, with families sharing meals at home and giving sweets to neighbours as commercial activity comes to a standstill. The crowds now thronging public spaces are an unusual sight for this time of year — as is the silence from the country's besieged leaders.

The government skipped its usual handout photographs of top politicians celebrating the occasion with their families. And there was no sign of a text message holiday greeting from Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, sent to every mobile phone in the country in previous years.

Both he and younger brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa — Sri Lanka's president — have been accused of mismanaging the economy and blindly leading the country into its present predicament. The country is now in default of its \$51 billion foreign debt ahead of negotiations for an International Monetary Fund bailout, and authorities have begged Sri Lankans abroad to send money home to help alleviate the crisis.

The president has not returned to his office since the protest began on the weekend, and a bolstered security presence is keeping watch over the encampment. But interactions between police and the crowd were jovial and even festive, with demonstrators chatting to officers and sharing traditional New Year food and sweets.

"The demonstrators won't go until the government goes," said a traffic constable standing watch outside the building while sheltering from the scorching morning sun. "And we can't go until both leave," he added. —AFP

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2022

Marzouq Al-Kharafi elected new HEISCO Chairman, Bader Al-Kharafi Vice Chairman

General Assembly approves all items on agenda and reports of BoD, auditors

KUWAIT: Heavy Engineering Industries and Shipbuilding Company (HEISCO) elected its new board of directors at its Annual General Assembly meeting on Wednesday. Marzouq Nasser Al-Kharafi was elected as the Chairman of the Board of Directors and Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi was elected as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors. The General Assembly approved all items on the agenda including the reports of the board of directors and auditors.

HEISCO is a major engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contracting company based in Kuwait with a diversified range of business in oil and gas, petrochemicals, power, pressure equipment manufacturing, shipbuilding & repair, dredging & marine construction, civil construction, maintenance and other industrial services including heavy industry projects.

Established in 1974 to initially meet the demands of the shipping and mar-



Marzouq Nasser Al-Kharafi

itime industry in the Northern Arabian Gulf, HEISCO expanded its operations to meet the challenges of emerging markets. Today, HEISCO has become one of



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

the leading industrial companies in Kuwait having made significant contribution to the development of the country's commercial and industrial infra-

structure. The company has successfully executed several infrastructure projects in almost every segment of the economy. HEISCO's reputation for standards of excellence in quality, performance and customer service grew as the company expanded its footprint and diversified its operations.

The company's highly experienced and dedicated engineers undertake all engineering activities from concept to commissioning with a very high-level of professionalism.

Today, HEISCO's activities and operations cover a wide-range of fields including shipyard, oil & gas, construction, industrial maintenance, fabrication services, trading, testing & calibration, quality control & testing, scaffolding services and galvanizing plant. It also undertakes onshore and offshore operations through its subsidiary Gulf Dredging & General Contracting Co K.S.C. (closed) and carries out environ-

mental services and industrial inspections through Kuwait International Company for Environmental Services and Industrial Inspection W.L.L., another subsidiary company. It also undertakes specialized manpower supply for various organizations through its subsidiary HEISCO for Technical Specialized Manpower Supply Co W.L.L.

HEISCO's commitment to its clients is proven by its quality management system certification to ISO 9001:2015 and occupational health & safety management system certification to ISO 45001:2018 and the environmental management system certification to ISO 14001:2015 standards. HEISCO is one of the approved contractors of Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) for civil construction - Category 1, and electrical works - Category 2.

HEISCO has a branch in Iraq to expand its services and take advantage of the emerging markets in the country.

Zain's API platform transforms into 'Dizlee'

Dizlee a game changer for Zain's digital partners and customers

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and North Africa, announced the rebranding and transformation of its dynamic and ultra-successful API platform into 'Dizlee'. The newly-formed Zain operating entity and brand represents the evolution of the Group API program into a powerful digital monetization ecosystem provider offering direct operator billing, messaging, digital authentication and more.

The new Dizlee brand and silver visual identity conjure up associations with innovative solutions, rich media content, greater choices for customers and global partnerships on one dynamic platform, creating entertainment value for all.

Dizlee becomes the primary and preferred digital service aggregator for all Zain operations across the Middle East and Africa as well as for Omantel, the leading operator in Oman.

The unveiling of the Dizlee brand coincided with the signing of partnership agreements with Garena, game developer and publisher of the highly popular mobile battle royale game Free Fire; and LG U+, a renowned South Korean mobile network operator. Garena and LG U+ join 15 other global partners including Apple, Google, Digital Virgo, Docomo Digital, and many more to the Dizlee ecosystem.

Malek Hammoud, Zain Group Chief Investment and Digital Transformation Officer said, "Dizlee is a game changer for our digital partners and customers. As Zain continues to innovate and progress across multiple lines of new business to provide enhanced mobile experiences for its customers, the introduction of Dizlee unleashes the potential of new global partnerships with digital content providers from across the globe."

Hammoud added, "The Dizlee ecosystem and vision to be a leading and powerful digital monetization ecosystem provider supports our aspirations



KUWAIT: Malek Hammoud with Zain and LG U+ executives during the launch of Dizlee.

- A powerful digital monetization ecosystem provider
- Dizlee ecosystem to fast-track the development of entertaining digital partnerships with ISPs, OTTs, content creators, and other mobile operators from across the globe
- Providing partners cost-efficient access to Zain's 50 million customers
- Renowned content giants Garena and LGU+ join Dizlee platform

to become a digital lifestyle operator that seeks new revenue streams in alignment with our forward-looking 4Sight strategy."

Hyeon Sik Hwang, CEO of LG U+ said "We are

delighted to be working with Middle East telecommunications industry leader Zain and give access to LG UPlus's rich and diverse digital experience. LG U+ will work closely with Zain, as we believe in col-

laborating across industries as the way forward for converged connectivity."

Hans Saleh, Head of Garena Middle East and North Africa, said: "We strive to continue providing our Free Fire players with high-quality content and immersive experiences. We have seen encouraging growth in the digital entertainment industry over the past few years, and are pleased to be working alongside top names in the Middle East and North Africa region to develop the industry further. We are pleased to be collaborating with Dizlee and hope this partnership will serve even more customers from Zain and Garena."

By exposing its APIs through the Dizlee platform, Zain removes a significant barrier to the development of profitable digital partnerships from across the globe, enhancing the time-to-market rollout of appealing entertainment and gaming services to our customers.

Zain is the only mobile operator in the MENA region to offer a Group-wide centralized platform with a unique selling proposition and one-stop shop model for partners (internet service providers, OTT players, global digital content brands and other mobile network operators) planning to enter the Middle East and connect to seven countries and 50 million customers.

Highlights of Zain's API since creation include:

- Launched in June 2018 in partnership with Google Cloud and developed by FOO
- 20 leading global OTT and solutions providers currently offering 41 appealing digital innovations in mobile media, entertainment, content, digital authentication and financial solutions
- Over 132 million payment transactions, generating over \$125 million in gross revenues (exponential growth of over 100 percent year-on-year for the past three years)

ECB holds tight as inflation tide rises

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank on Thursday stood still in the face of record inflation, keeping its stimulus plans and rates unchanged, as the war in Ukraine cast a pall over the eurozone economy.

Meeting for the second time since the outbreak of the conflict, the bank's 25-member governing council stuck to a plan that "should" see its bond-buying scheme come to an end in the third quarter.

An interest rate hike would follow "some time" after the stimulus program comes to an end, and any increases "will be gradual". The decision leaves the ECB further out of step with many of its peers. Central banks such as the Bank of England, US Federal Reserve and the Bank of Canada have already triggered their first interest rate rises in response to soaring inflation. Calls for the ECB to follow suit as soon as possible from within the governing council have grown stronger as price rises in the eurozone have taken off. Year-on-year inflation hit 7.5 percent in March, an all-time high for the currency bloc and well above the bank's own two-percent target.

The surge owes a great deal to the take off in prices for energy, commodities and food as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, the high cost of oil and gas, as well as added confusion in supply chains threaten to deliver a blow to

the economy. Thursday's meeting probably saw "a lively debate", said Holger Schmieding, an economist at Berenberg Bank, but it was still too soon for the ECB to reach a "major decision". Attention now turns to ECB President Christine Lagarde's press conference at 1230 GMT for clues as to how the institution intends to plot its way forward through uncertainty.

Among the things observers will be listening for is "a further hint that the ECB may raise rates later this year", Schmieding said, with more "hawkish" governing council members pushing for a hike sooner rather than later. Central bankers use interest rate rises as a tool to try and tame inflation, but pulling the trigger too soon risks hurting economic growth.

Minutes from the last ECB meeting revealed that many members of the governing council wanted "immediate further steps" despite the darkening economic picture.

Joachim Nagel, the head of Germany's traditionally conservative central bank, has previously cautioned against "acting too late". Any hike would be the ECB's first in over a decade and would lift rates from their current historic low levels.

The Frankfurt-based institution even set a negative deposit rate of minus 0.5 percent, meaning banks pay to park excess cash at the ECB.

Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at ING bank, said he saw the ECB's rates exiting negative territory "at the latest around the turn of the year".

The ECB's prediction that inflation would even out at 5.1 percent over the course of 2022 was "already outdated", Brzeski said. The persistence of



FRANKFURT: In this file photo taken on December 22, 2021 Counterfeit expert at the Counterfeit Analysis Center of the European Central Bank (ECB), Eric Languillat inspects a twenty Euro.— AFP

high energy costs and the potential for new sanctions that could further limit supplies from Russia could drive the monthly figure into "double-digit" territory.

Soaring energy prices would also saddle businesses and consumers with higher bills and "weigh on economic activity in the coming months", Brzeski said.

Over recent years, the ECB has hoovered up billions of euros in government and corporate bonds each month to stoke the economy and keep credit flowing in the 19-nation currency club. While the stimulus is being phased out, the advent of a fresh crisis has some speculating about the possibility of the ECB designing a new tool to contain the impact of the war.— AFP

Sweden's inflation hits 30-year high

STOCKHOLM: Swedish inflation hit a three-decade high in March as global energy prices soared, official figures showed Thursday. The consumer price index with fixed interest rate (CPIF) accelerated sharply last month in the Scandinavian country, reaching 6.1 percent compared to a year ago after rising by 4.5 percent in February. Prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages rose, "but mainly it was rising electricity and fuel prices that had a major impact," Caroline Neander, statistician at Statistics Sweden, said in a statement.

Sweden has not seen inflation like this since December 1991, and excluding energy costs inflation was still at 4.1 percent, according to the national statistics agency.

Prices were already soaring in major economies when Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent shockwaves through the global energy, food and commodity markets. Despite the acceleration in inflation, Sweden's central bank, the Riksbank, has so far refrained from significantly changing its interest rate path for the next three years, judging the price surge to be mainly temporary.

The main guiding interest rate, the repo rate, is currently at zero and is expected to remain at zero until the second half of 2024 to support the recovery of the economy, according to the Riksbank's latest communication in February. After falling sharply against the euro in the first quarter, the Swedish krona has started to recover and is currently trading at around 9.7 kronor per euro.— AFP

Business

IMF chief says crises slowing economic growth worldwide

We are facing a crisis on top of a crisis: Georgieva

WASHINGTON: The war in Ukraine has undercut the global recovery, slowing expected economic growth in most countries in the world, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Thursday.

And beyond the humanitarian tragedy and economic crises, the war has exposed fractures in the international system at a time when global cooperation is the only solution, she said. The war hit as the world was struggling to recover from the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused an acceleration of inflation that endangers the gains of the past two years.

"To put it simply: we are facing a crisis on top of a crisis," Georgieva said in a speech ahead of the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank. "The economic consequences from the war spread fast and far, to neighbors and beyond, hitting hardest the world's most vulnerable people," she said.

Families already were struggling with higher energy and food prices and "the war has made this much worse." The IMF is due to release its updated economic forecasts on Tuesday, which Georgieva said will further downgrade the estimate for global growth that was cut to 4.4 percent in January.

"Since then, the outlook has deteriorated substantially, largely because of the war and its repercussions," she said, and 143 countries will suffer downgrades.

While most will still have positive growth, the future is "extraordinarily uncertain" and she warned of a steep divide between rich and poor countries.

'Clear and present danger'

After a decade of low inflation, prices worldwide have surged amid strong demand for goods as economies began to return to normal, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February and the sanctions imposed on Moscow pushed fuel and food prices up sharply. Ukraine and Russia are major grain producers, and Russia also is a key source of energy for Europe. Inflation, which has hit a four-decade high the United States, "has become a clear and present danger,"



WASHINGTON: The war in Ukraine has undercut the global recovery, slowing expected economic growth in most countries in the world, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Thursday.

Georgieva said in the speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noting the trend will likely last longer than expected.

"This is a massive setback for the global recovery," she said. It also complicates policymaking: major central banks are raising interest rates to contain prices, but that increases borrowing costs for emerging markets and developing nations, which face high debt burdens.

"This is the most universally complex policy environment of our lifetime," she said.

'Fragmentation'

Ending the war and the pandemic are top priorities, but their risks can be offset only through international cooperation, said Georgieva, who lamented the growing "fragmentation of the world economy into geopolitical blocs." Those fractures impair the ability to address the current crises and future challenges, but also could cause a "tectonic shift" that would reshape global supply chains.

"The threat to our collective prosperity from a breakdown in global cooperation cannot be overstated," she said. "In today's more shock-prone world, the challenges we face are just as indivisible. Our efforts to solve them must be indivisible as well." —AFP

Bankrupt Sri Lanka looks to expand airline fleet

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's loss-making national carrier announced plans Thursday to lease up to 21 aircraft, just two days after the government announced a default on its \$51 billion foreign debt. The island nation is in the grip of its most painful economic downturn since independence in 1948, with severe shortages of essential goods and regular blackouts causing widespread misery.

Huge protests have called for the resignation of the government, which has begged Sri Lankans abroad to send cash home to help pay for essential imports.

Despite the ongoing crisis, state-owned Sri Lankan Airlines has unveiled plans to expand its fleet from 24 to 35 in the next three years and replace some of its ageing jets.

"Sri Lankan Airlines has issued four requests for proposal to lease up to 21 aircraft to support its long-term business strategy," it said in a brief statement. The announcement came after the government suspended repayment of all its foreign borrowings, ahead of negotiations for a debt restructure with the International Monetary Fund next week. The national carrier did not say how it planned to finance the leases, with its balance sheet showing a \$1.7 billion debt and a carried forward loss of \$1.56 billion in March 2021.

The IMF has also repeatedly urged Sri Lanka to privatize the airline, saying it was a white elephant the country cannot afford. The airline was profitable before the government cancelled a management agreement with Emirates of Dubai in 2008, following a personal dispute with current Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. The carrier had refused to bump fare-paying passengers and give their seats to members of Rajapaksa's family, who were returning from a holiday in London.



COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's loss-making national carrier announced plans Thursday to lease up to 21 aircraft.

Rajapaksa removed the Emirates-appointed chief executive of Sri Lankan Airlines and made his brother-in-law Nishantha Wickremasinghe head of the company.

An earlier plan to lease eight Airbus A350 jets during Rajapaksa's tenure is subject to an ongoing criminal investigation. The airline's then-chief executive Kapila Chandrasena and his wife were arrested two years ago after an international investigation found they received at least \$2 million in kickbacks over the order.

Meanwhile, S&P Global Ratings said Wednesday it could take months for Sri Lanka to restructure its foreign debt, a day after the country announced it would default on the \$51 billion it has borrowed.

It said it would likely assign Sri Lanka a "selective default" foreign currency rating after getting confirmation it had missed payment on interest coupons due on April 18. S&P said it expected Sri Lanka would miss these payments and in the meantime it lowered Sri Lanka's foreign currency sovereign rating to "CC", which means highly vulnerable to default.

Sri Lanka announced Tuesday a default on its foreign debt as the island nation grapples with its worst economic crisis in memory and escalating protests demanding the government's resignation. —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 14 APRIL 2022

(965) 22 675 140
Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.
alsafatinvest.com
research@alsafatinvest.com
alsafatinvestment
al-safat-investment-company

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,055	1,051	1,064	1,048	16	21,347,271	-4	-0.38%	5.42%	1,030	1,055	22.7	2.20	2.9%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	326	320	330	309	21	25,735,942	-4.762	-1.47%	14.70%	316	325	27.0	1.57	2.1%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	252	267	269	251	18	14,780,883	15	5.95%	22.48%	260	269	NM	1.16	1.5%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	300	311	312	298	14	19,868,487	11	3.67%	23.90%	308	312	23.5	1.41	1.6%	1.03
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	999	995	1,000	976	24	45,808,850	-12	-1.19%	19.59%	995	1,000	39.0	4.35	1.2%	1.39
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	929	917	929	913	16	2,197,814	1	0.11%	16.08%	915	927	67.7	5.29	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	424	418	431	407	24	2,528,796	-5	-1.18%	90.87%	405	419	13.3	1.77	10.8%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	197	193	199	191	8	23,344,958	-3	-1.53%	35.92%	190	195	NM	2.39	2.4%	0.60
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	134	123	135	123	12	23,995,144	-10	-7.52%	4.24%	123	129	NM	0.75	6.9%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	166	171	174	166	8	46,736,968	5	3.01%	-4.47%	166	174	26.4	1.24	1.6%	0.96
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	887	867	887	860	27	950,025	-12	-1.37%	9.33%	850	876	19.2	1.98	1.6%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	277	272	279	271	8	11,924,781	-6	-2.16%	-3.89%	272	284	5.4	0.98	4.4%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,357	1,496	1,540	1,357	183	2,449,161	124	9.04%	71.76%	1,490	1,513	52.8	1.52	4.0%	0.96
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	987	1,003	1,006	978	28	2,115,330	20	2.03%	17.72%	995	1,010	28.5	2.36	5.3%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	385	381	385	379	6	2,138,297	-1	-0.26%	9.80%	379	388	NM	1.03	4.0%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,192	1,227	1,260	1,181	79	25,898,192	49	4.16%	29.84%	1,222	1,250	2.8	1.33	1.5%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	616	630	632	611	21	15,723,744	16	2.61%	5.88%	626	634	14.4	2.29	3.7%	1.33
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,297	3,437	3,439	3,275	164	2,087,433	147	4.47%	6.61%	3,350	3,440	7.5	3.75	11.6%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	219	216	219	215	4	3,317,035	-3	-1.37%	-0.92%	212	217	NM	0.69	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,730	1,800	1,849	1,689	160	1,870,199	63	3.63%	39.53%	1,770	1,810	NM	17.16	1.8%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	323	319	328	312	16	95,908,460	-4.184	-1.29%	14.75%	314	325	24.1	2.71	3.4%	1.16
821	Warba Bank	Banking	278	277	279	275	4	11,276,220	-1	-0.36%	1.09%	275	280	21.1	2.74	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	579	575	580	573	7	2,359,846	-4	-0.69%	-2.38%	570	579	17.9	1.62	2.7%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	410	427	428	401	27	16,134,344	20	4.91%	2.30%	410	428	NM	1.79	2.3%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	223	223	225	222	3	4,658,370	-1	-0.45%	-2.19%	222	225	18.9	3.95	4.0%	0.58
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,681	2,606	2,681	2,509	172	1,020,689	-54	-2.03%	29.01%	2,600	2,700	33.4	9.27	2.5%	0.69

* As of end of week closing

Kuwait in dire need of financial and economic sustainability project

Kuwait's labor force down to 2.476 million in 2021 from 2.662 million workers in 2020

KUWAIT: The current National Assembly elected on December 5th 2020 is a product of the prevailing state of intense wrath as a result of the poor performance and corruption of the preceding public administration. Instead of reading those results and forming a government that identifies with those results, the new Cabinet formation returned which is weaker than its predecessor.

Since December 14th 2020, three governments were formed at an average of 160 days per government with the last one lasting only 99 days. The executive and legislative authorities were barely reunited for one year and five months. When united, in a few cases, either at a high unbearable public financial cost or in sharp confrontations that, until the end of the government's life, resulted in the resignation of two ministers and a prime minister. Even after the resignation of the current government, precious time has passed and the country is in a state of complete administrative vacuum. After the experience of the past year and five months, it has become difficult for any observer or analyst to adopt an acceptable logic to predict the probable outcome of things, and the unknown are the fiercest enemies of planning and construction.

World events are highly intense and they might become worse whether at the political level, i.e. the Russian war on Ukraine and its possible repercussions or at the economic level, promising for the first time in more than forty years the possibility of a return to stagflation. The regional conflicts and civil wars extend from Yemen to North Africa, some of which are unrest cases in neighboring countries, besides the continuation of proxy wars within it. Kuwait in particular is living in an era of almost complete absence of its public administration at a time when we need its best minds to deal with external dangers, and most importantly, to confront its internal problems. Things will worsen if the administrative paralysis continues and will get even worse if the same formation pattern of previous governments is copied, i.e. repeated.

Kuwait faces several challenges the most important of which are the financial, economic, and educational and none of them will succeed unless the beginning is a harsh confrontation of corruption, and perhaps the latest US State Department report explains how soft Kuwait is at confronting corruption. Unless the new administration sets an example in its integrity, it will be unable to market any reform project. The disaster of buying the chair will continue to waste public money and reform will not be achieved by treating appearances but rather by reforming the foundations.

Credit rating agencies indicate the possibility of downgrading Kuwait's sovereign rating unless its government succeeds in passing a new public debt law or allowing it to draw from the Future Generations' Reserves as reported by Standard & Poor's last week. The foregoing means nothing more than treating appearances and deepening structural disorders. It is certainly good for the country to obtain the best credit rating but if it means is the country entering the borrowing trap, or if the Future Generations' Reserves face the public reserve fate, then the result will be an economic, political and social disaster, with the alternative being a financial and economic sustainability project.

Opportunities are diminishing and hope in the ability of the repeated public administration in Kuwait to navigate safely within the prevailing geopolitical and economic risks in the world and the region is fading, coupled with increasingly complex and massive crises at the local level. Cloning governments of tribalism and quotas in the next government formation will only produce more despair and anger in a beautiful country that until recently was an example to follow. But despair and anger are a scourge with their repercussions are visible models around us.

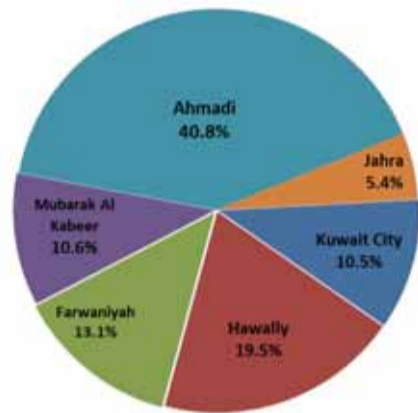
Real estate market

The latest released data by the Ministry of Justice -Real Estate Registration and Authentications Department- indicates an increased real estate market activity during March 2022 versus February 2022 (after excluding the crafts activity and the coastal strip system). Total value of traded contracts and agencies was recorded at KD 371.9 million in March, a 20.5 percent increase against KD 308.6 million in February 2022, and a 3.1 percent increase when compared with KD 360.7 million in March 2021.

Trading during March 2022 was distributed between KD 357.7 million in contracts and KD 14.2 million in agencies. Number of real estate deals during the month reached 686, of which 645 are contracts and 41 are agencies. The highest share in real estate deals went to Ahmadi governorate with 280 deals representing 40.8 percent of the total number of real estate deals. Hawally governorate came second with 134 deals and representing 19.5 percent of total deals. The lowest share went to Jahra governorate with 37 deals, representing 5.4 percent of the total.

The value of private housing activity reached KD 235.9 million, 45.1 percent higher versus KD 162.5 million in February 2022. Its share of total real estate activity rose to 63.4 percent versus

Deals Distribution According to Kuwait's Governorates



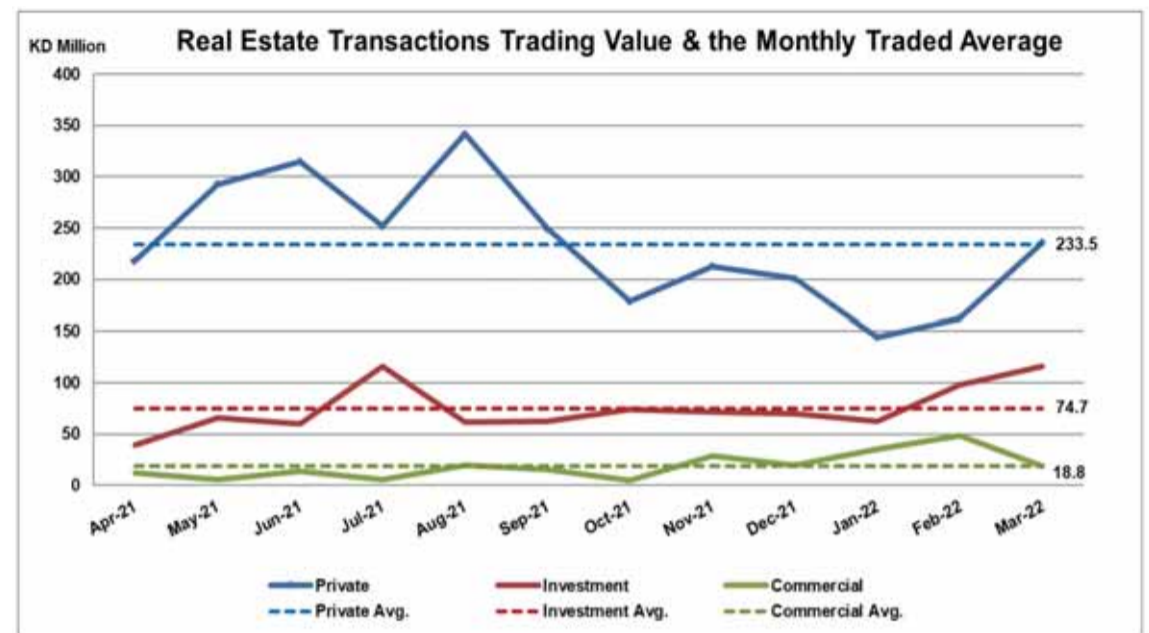
52.7 percent in February 2022. The 12-monthly average of private housing activity stood at KD 233.5 million. This means that March's trading value is 1 percent higher than the average. The number of deals for this activity increased to 552 deals versus 457 deals in February 2022. Accordingly, the value of private residential deals averaged KD 427 thousand compared to KD 356 thousand in February 2022, indicating a 20.1 percent increase.

Total value of the investment activity reached KD 115.8 million, increasing by 18.1 percent when compared to KD 98 million in February. Its contribution to overall real estate trading activity dropped to 31.1 percent versus 31.8 percent. The trailing-12-months trading average of investment activity scored KD 74.7 million. This means that the average trading value during March 2022 was 55 percent higher than the 12 months' average. In addition, the number of its deals rose to 127 compared with 96 deals in February. Therefore, the average value per deal for investment activity scored KD 911 thousand versus KD 1.02 million in February 2022, i.e. a -10.7 percent decrease.

Commercial activity trading value declined to KD 18.4 million, or by -61.6 percent compared with KD 48 million in February 2022. Its share out of total real estate trading value decreased to 5 percent compared with 15.6 percent. The Average value of commercial activity trading in the past 12 months scored KD 18.8 million. This means that trading value in March was -2.2 percent lower than the 12 months' average. Its deals totaled to 6 compared with 6 deals for February 2022. The average value per deal for March 2022 reached KD 3.07 million versus a KD 8 million average for February 2022, a -61.6 percent decrease. Moreover, a single deal went to the warehousing activity totaling KD 1.85 million during March 2022.



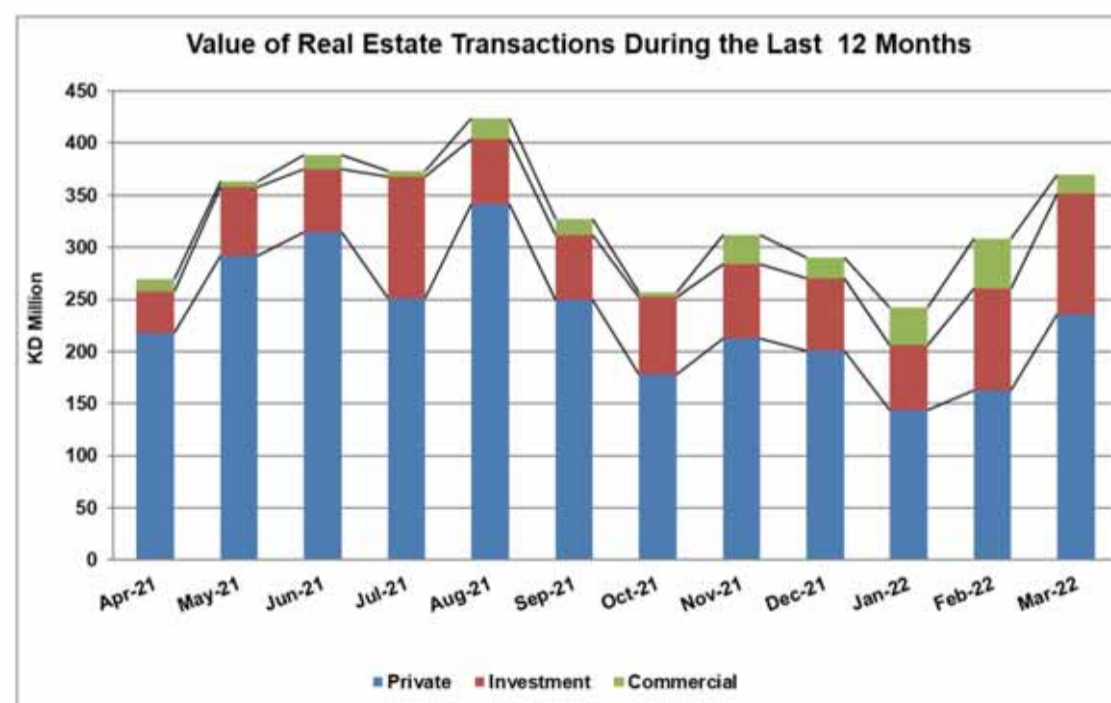
Real estate sector remains resilient



substitute nearly 24 percent of total labor force in Kuwait as of the end of 2021 (25.1 percent of the total labor force in the end of 2020).

The average monthly wage of Kuwaiti male workers in the public sector was KD 1874 (KD 1871 in the end of 2020). The Kuwaiti female wage average was KD 1312 (KD 1302 in the end of 2020), a difference of 42.9 percent in favor of male's wages. The monthly salary average of non-Kuwaiti males in the public sector scored KD 780 (KD 757 in the end of 2020). For non-Kuwaiti females the average wage was KD 696 (KD 681 in the end of 2020), with a 12 percent difference in favor of males. The gender gap is more equitable in the case of non-Kuwaitis. The average monthly wage for Kuwaitis of both genders in the public sector is KD 1,539 (KD 1533 in the end of 2020). The same average for non-Kuwaitis is KD 738 (KD 719 in the end of 2020), with a 108.6 percent difference in favor of Kuwaitis.

The monthly average wage of Kuwaiti males in the private sector was about KD 1529 (KD 1474 in the end of 2020), which is less than 18.4 percent of males in the public sector. This average for Kuwaiti females in the private sector was KD 974 (KD 938 in the end of 2020), which is 25.8 percent less than that of their female colleagues in the public sector. Undoubtedly, the government support will reduce the gap between the private and the public sector. The monthly average wage of non-Kuwaiti males in the private sector was about KD 305 (KD 289 in the end of 2020). This equals 39.1 percent of the average salaries of their colleagues in the public sector.



When comparing total March 2022 trading with March 2021, we note that real estate market liquidity rose from KD 360.7 million to KD 371.9 million, i.e. a 3.1 percent increase as mentioned previously. The rise is the result of a 104 percent increase in the investment activity, against a decrease of -17.3 percent in the private housing activity and a decline by -2.4 percent in the commercial activity.

Labor force: Figures, wages and labor sector 2021

The latest statistics on the labor force statistics in Kuwait issued by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) as of the end of 2021 sorted according to its number, gender, nationality, wages and age groups, etc. indicate that the size of labor force in Kuwait was 1.882 million workers excluding the number of household workers (1.993 million workers in the end of 2020). If we add the household labor-family sector-which was about 594 thousand workers, the total number will be 2.476 million workers (2.662 million workers in the end of 2020). Household workers con-

stitute nearly 24 percent of total labor force in Kuwait as of the end of 2021 (25.1 percent of the total labor force in the end of 2020).

The number of Kuwaiti employees in the government sector according to the same source was 358 thousand workers (334 thousand workers in the end of 2020). The number of Kuwait employees in the private sector is 72 thousand workers (73 thousand workers in the end of 2020). This indicates that the Kuwaiti workforce is distributed between 83.2 percent in the public sector and 16.8 percent in the private sector. About 44.8 percent of Kuwaitis working in the public sector are university graduates, 4.5 percent are have post-graduate degrees, 13.9 percent obtain diplomas above high school but below university degrees, and nearly 21.1 percent are holders of high school certificates or equivalent. This entails that about 84.3 percent of government employees are holders of high school certificates and above. That being said, productivity in the public sector remained weak either due to overcrowding and the unorganized working environment, or due to the poor educational level or even because of the incompatibility between education outcomes and labor market requirements or even because of the spread of fake degrees.

Labor force-B: Household workers or family sector 2021

Approximately a quarter of total expatriate workers in Kuwait are household workers, totaling at 594 thousand in the end of 2021 (669 thousand workers in the end of 2020). The numbers are divided almost equally between males 296 thousand and females 298 thousand. Male workers from India take the lead with 196 thousand (222 thousand workers in the end of 2020), while the Philippines take the lead in female workers by 135 thousand (142 thousand workers in the end of 2020). India leads total number of household workers of both genders by 47.1 percent out of the total, followed by the Philippines by 22.8 percent of the total. Generally, four nationalities namely India, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka capture 95 percent of total household workers out of 10 nationalities. The 6 other nationalities form the rest by 2 percent for the highest and 0.2 percent for the lowest. Three African countries are among the countries exporting household labor led by Ethiopia at 1.8 percent, then Benin and Sudan at 0.3 percent and 0.2 percent respectively.

Merging the numbers of household workers with other expats categories according to nationality, Indians will total 717 thousand workers (819 thousand workers in the end of 2020) or 28.9 percent of total labor force including Kuwaiti employees and 35 percent of total foreign labor force, taking the lead in both cases. The Egyptian labor force comes second by a total labor of nearly 451 thousand workers (482 thousand workers in the end of 2020), forming 18.2 percent of total labor force and 22 percent of total expat labor force. The Kuwaiti workforce comes third at 430 thousand (407 thousand workers in the end of 2020) forming 17.4 percent of the total labor force, that percentage will rise if the numbers in the tables include the military. Bangladesh comes fourth with a total of 236 thousand workers (253 thousand workers in the end of 2020), forming 9.5 percent of total labor force and 11.5 percent of total expat workers. The Philippines occupies the fifth position in total employment by 200 thousand workers (213 thousand workers in the end of 2020), forming 8.1 percent of total labor force and 9.8 percent of total expat work force.

Weekly performance of Boursa Kuwait

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was mixed, where the traded value and the traded volume declined, while the number of transactions and the general index (AlShall Index) increased. AlShall Index (value weighted) closed at 736.6 points as of last Thursday, showing a rise by 3.2 points or by 0.4 percent compared with its level last week. While it remained higher by 113.8 points or by 18.3 percent compared with the end of 2021.

Business

New PM Sharif orders 'Pakistan speed' to fix stagnant economy

Sharif not happy with the pace of infrastructure development

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Thursday the country's economy had stagnated under his predecessor Imran Khan, setting the tone for possibly months of bitterness before an election that must be held by October next year.

Sharif, sworn in Monday after Khan was ousted by a no-confidence vote in parliament, is still finalizing his cabinet but has called for "Pakistan speed" to hurry along development projects and fix the economy. On Thursday the 70-year-old notorious workaholic visited a metro bus project in Rawalpindi and complained about the pace of infrastructure development.

"Almost all sectors of economy remained stagnant under IK," he later tweeted, referring to his predecessor by his initials. His early-morning visit came after Khan on Wednesday night held a huge rally in Peshawar. Khan—along with most of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers—quit the national assembly after losing Sunday's no-confidence vote, saying he would take his fight to the people to press for an early election.

On Wednesday, Khan said he would stage twice-weekly rallies across the country until a new poll date was set. "Young people, get ready, I will take to the streets with you. I will go out in every city, and I will continue to go out until they are forced to hold election."

Citigroup sets aside \$1.9bn due to war

NEW YORK: Citigroup said Thursday it set aside \$1.9 billion in reserves due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which was one factor driving a drop in the bank's quarterly earnings. The reserve build was "related to Citi's exposures in Russia and the broader impact of the conflict in Ukraine on the macroeconomic environment," Citigroup said.

The bank reported a 46 percent decline in first-quarter profits to \$4.3 billion, while revenues dipped two percent to \$19.2 billion. Citigroup's earnings were also dragged lower by increased expenses, while its banking operations had a mixed performance. Chief Executive Jane Fraser cited a difficult geopolitical and macro environment as a factor in weaker investment banking results, while pointing to trade loans and cross-border transactions as areas of strength.

Citi also scored higher net interest income, benefiting from the Federal Reserve's shift in monetary policy. Citigroup's report comes a day after JPMorgan Chase also reported lower profits. Bankers have said the US economy remains on solid footing, while warning of increased recession risk due to the Ukraine invasion, rising inflation and uncertainty connected to the shift in Fed interest rate policy.—AFP



Kalyan Jewellers celebrates Eid with 'Staycation' offer

KUWAIT: With the onset of the festive season, Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewellery companies, has announced the launch of a "one-of-its-kind" offer to make this year's Eid celebrations more delightful and special for the brand's patrons. As part of this exciting festive offer, customers making purchases of KD 250 and above will stand a chance to win a luxury stay at the iconic Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel. This staycation experience will be an all-inclusive package offered to the customers, at no additional cost. The unique offer is valid across all Kalyan Jewellers' showrooms in Kuwait until 8th May 2022.

Talking about the offer, Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director, Kalyan Jewellers said, "We are delighted to announce the launch of our special Eid Offer, wherein customers can enjoy a luxurious staycation at some of the most iconic resorts in the country. At Kalyan Jewellers, we have been consistently working towards offering a personalized and unique shopping experience to customers, while ensuring maximum benefits on jewellery purchases. Marking the festive celebrations, we believe our patrons will be elated and make us part of their #KalyanSparkle moments this festive season."

Customers can also avail the benefits of the Gold Rate Protection Offer by paying 20 percent advance of the total intended purchase amount and booking their jewellery at the current market price of gold. This unique offer enables customers to lock-in the price of gold and protect themselves from future price hikes and fluctuations.

The jewelry retailed at Kalyan Jewellers go through multiple purity tests and patrons also receive the Kalyan Jewellers 4-Level Assurance Certificate which guarantees purity, free lifetime maintenance of ornaments, detailed product information and transparent exchange and buy-back policies. The certification is part of the brand's commitment towards offering the very best to its loyalists.

'Pakistan speed'

Sharif, younger brother of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, set out his stall on Tuesday by ordering the government to adopt a six-day work-week, instead of the previous five, and bringing forward office opening hours to 8 am from 10 am.

His "Pakistan speed" policy is an extension of a similar program he introduced as chief minister of Punjab, the country's most populous province, where he was credited with launching a series of high-profile-and vote-catching-projects. The government would take unspecified "emergency measures" to stabilize the economy, Sharif's office said later, focusing on steps to improve the condition of ordinary people. Sharif inherits crippling national debt, galloping inflation and a feeble rupee—although analysts say Khan also took over a broken economy in 2018 that was further battered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Khan's ouster heralds the return of two dynastic parties that have dominated Pakistan politics for decades. Sharif's centrist Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) joined forces with the centre-left Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) — fiefdom of the Bhutto family—to press the no-confidence vote.

Khan tried everything to stay in power after losing his majority in parliament through defections by his own lawmakers and a coalition partner—including dis-



LAHORE: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (second right) and leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) and coalition partners of the newly formed government Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui (left) leave after a meeting in Karachi on April 13, 2022. — AFP

solving the assembly and calling a fresh election.

But the Supreme Court deemed all his actions illegal and ordered them to reconvene and vote. The cricketer-turned-politician insists he has been the victim of a "regime change" conspiracy involving Washington and his opponents, and vowed to take his fight to the streets in the hope of forcing an early election.

On Wednesday night Khan told thousands of supporters that the new government was "imported", saying Pakistan needed to forge an independent global path. He has said Washington wanted him removed because he refused to take sides in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and also because of his close links to China. Washington, Moscow and Beijing have all congratulated Sharif since he took over. —AFP



JOAL-FADIOUTH, Senegal: Oyster farmer Seynabou Diop, from the Diamagune Association of Joal-Fadiouth, gathers oysters in Joal-Fadiouth. — AFP photos

Senegal eyes economic boom in oyster farming

JOAL-FADIOUTH, Senegal: The mangrove swamp near Joal-Fadiouth, a fishing village in southern Senegal, teems with oysters. But hunting for shellfish treasure among gnarly tree roots in brackish water is a lot of work. Thousands of people—the vast majority of them women—make a living from oysters in Senegal, usually at a small and informal level.

But experts say the tropical West African state has huge prospects for ramping up oyster output to far greater levels. "Oyster production is falling short of its potential," said Boubacar Banda Diop, in charge of the oyster sector at Senegal's fisheries ministry.

The possible harvest, in terms of protein and money, could be high, say champions of the oyster.

About 40 percent of Senegal's population of 17 million people live below the poverty line, according to a World Bank metric. In a nation where fish is a traditional staple, the country also suffers from overfishing and food insecurity. In 2017, farmers plucked about 15,600 tonnes of oysters from Senegal's mangroves, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). They also gathered about 400 tonnes from oyster beds. By comparison, the world's largest oyster producer China harvests about 3.5 million tons per year, according to the French research institute Ifremer.

'Enormous' prospects

Senegal's government has a development plan for the oyster industry, while the FAO and the European Union are putting forward ideas for techniques and breeding programs to enhance production.

A small business in the Somone lagoon south of Dakar has already begun to apply some of the project's recommendations. "We have doubled our production capacity compared to last year, going from three to six tons per year," the head of the business,

Khadim Tine, told AFP. But such successes are rare—and the hurdles for those who want to make the jump from artisanal to industrial-scale farming are daunting. Mamadou Bakhoum, the head of an association of villages in southern Senegal, said high water salinity caused by climate change meant there were fewer oysters than before. But, he said, "if people get serious about it, the potential for developing oyster farming is enormous."

Environmental factors

Increasing the productivity of oyster farming while protecting Senegal's mangroves poses another environmental challenge. The habitat features plants and shrubs growing in shallow semi-salty water, protecting against coastal erosion and nurturing a complex and invaluable ecosystem. Mangroves are already under increasing threat in Senegal, as elsewhere.

Abdou Karim Sall, president of the Joal-Fadiouth Marine Protected Area, aims to help farmers cultivate oysters without spoiling the mangroves.

Wooden trestles are placed in the swamp with wires hanging between supports just above the waterline. Spats—strings of oyster larvae that grow into the shellfish—then begin to develop on the wires. Sall said the method protects the mangrove but also allows the women farmers to produce more oysters and earn more money. Local NGOs in Joal-Fadiouth have helped several women oyster farmers to start using the technique.

Selling oysters fresh—as opposed to cooked, as is usual in Senegal—could also boost returns for farmers. Industry figures say that a dozen fresh Senegalese oysters sell for the equivalent of between seven and nine euros (\$7.70-8.20). That's a price that puts fresh oysters way out of reach for many in the country — wealthy tourists would be the target market for an expanded industry. To meet it would be cold storage, transport infrastructure and sanitation standards. Expanding the oyster business to an industrial scale requires systems to monitor water quality, as oyster farms are prone to contamination.

For water quality alone, a budget of about 305,000 euros (\$335,000) would be needed for the first decade, according to Diop's ministry—a big ask in a developing country. — AFP



JOAL-FADIOUTH, Senegal: The oyster farmer Ousmane Fall (left) and his assistant change the mesh size of the bags to reduce their density so that they can grow oysters homogeneously with the seasons, in the oyster park in Somone Lagoon. — AFP

Australia's jobless rate hits 48-year low

SYDNEY: Australia posted its lowest jobless rate in 48 years Thursday, setting the record by a sliver of a percentage point as the country rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many employers say they are struggling to find workers as the economy powers ahead on a diet of low interest rates, large public stimulus measures and a high savings rate.

The unemployment rate in March was unchanged from the previous month at a seasonally adjusted 4.0 percent, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported. But that number is rounded up.

When crunching the numbers more precisely, the March jobless rate comes in at 3.954 percent, the lowest since 1974 — squeezing just a few hundredths of a percentage point below the rate set in February 2022 and other lows from 2008. By a hair's breadth, it is therefore the lowest unemployment rate since Labor's Gough Whitlam was still prime minister of Australia and US President Richard Nixon was toppled by the Watergate scandal.

The jobless queue shrank by 12,000 people in March, the Australian statistics bureau said, while the economy created an extra 18,000 jobs. The news was welcomed by Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative government, which is trailing in opinion polls ahead of May 21 elections.



MELBOURNE: People queuing at a government welfare centre in Melbourne. The unemployment rate in March was unchanged from the previous month at 4%, says the Australian Bureau of Statistics. — AFP

"Our economic plan is working—an economic plan that has helped steer Australia through the biggest economic shock since the great depression," Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said. Opposition Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese's economic credentials have been questioned since he forgot the unemployment rate this week when talking to reporters. John Bayssari, co-owner of Edes Restaurant and Bar, which has two outlets in Sydney's business district, said the job market was "extremely tight". "We would be looking at another shop if it was not for the labor market," he said.

'Extraordinary' pay demands

"It is definitely challenging," said Matt Jenkins, human relations manager for Sydney restaurant group Applejack Hospitality. "We are dealing with a lack of candidates but also a lack of skilled candidates," he told AFP. "Coupled with that, we've got rising salaries, people asking for extraordinary amounts of money."

Australia's labor market has been propelled by a "very strong" economic rebound from COVID-19 restrictions, with many people having built up savings during the pandemic, said Shane Oliver, chief economist at financial services company AMP. Government stimulus, low interest rates, and the absence of backpackers and foreign workers had helped to lower the unemployment rate, Oliver said.

Economist Kristen Sobock of the Australian National University said while a lack of overseas labour was feeding into the country's low employment rate, the key factors were record-low interest rates and the magnitude of government fiscal stimulus handed out during the pandemic. "Now as we kind of emerge into living with this virus, there's a lot of pent up demand—people are trying to spend all of these extra savings on things that they have wanted to buy for a long time," she said. — AFP



Employees processing caviar at Thai Sturgeon Farm in the coastal province of Hua Hin.



Alexey Tyutin (left), co-owner of the Thai Sturgeon Farm, and fellow investor and restaurateur Bill Marinelli looking at sturgeon fish in a tank at the facility in the coastal province of Hua Hin.

THAI.. CAVIAR? FARM PRODUCES DELICACY IN TROPICAL CLIMATE

At his upmarket Bangkok restaurant, Michelin-starred chef Thitid "Ton" Tassanakajohn spoons black caviar onto a plate, adding the newly affordable Thailand-made delicacy to his reinterpreted traditional family recipes. The luxury food, better associated with chilly northern nations, is breaking into the Southeast Asian country's fine-dining scene, with the 37-year-old celebrity cook able to economically serve the roe thanks to an innovative farm outside the capital. Using high-tech harvesting methods, a Thai-Russian partnership is offering a more ethical and affordable product, sparing the endangered fish that provide the delicacy from their usual fate of death.

"The price is... more affordable, I would say, compared to the ones that we imported," Ton explained, as he sprinkled caviar over Thai dip "Lhon Pu" at his restaurant Lahnyai Nusara. Using caviar also helps challenge perceptions that Thai cuisine must always be spicy with strong flavors, he added. "I think it's opened many doors for many chefs to use it as well," he said.

Cool fish

Roughly 200 kilometers away at the popular seaside resort town of Hua Hin, it



Photo shows caviar from Thai Sturgeon Farm at the Lahnyai Nusara restaurant in Bangkok.

is time to harvest "black gold" at the Thai Sturgeon Farm, which supplies local distributor Caviar House. Hundreds of the giant fish swim in tanks kept at a balmy 21 degrees Celsius (70 Fahrenheit) — a world away from the chilly Caspian Sea where the species live in the wild. "No one else has this kind of farm in a tropical climate," the farm's co-owner Alexey Tyutin told AFP. The fish-considered living dinosaurs-can survive for up to 100 years and are typically up to four meters long.

Traditionally caviar producers kill the female fish to extract the eggs, but Tyutin's farm "milks" the sturgeon. Using the fish for as long as possible helps make the venture sustainable and profitable, the 55-year-old said. During harvesting, fish are moved to the "winter room", initially set at six degrees Celsius and increased to 15, before their eggs are extracted. "Let's say if the fish weighs 25 kilograms, we usually expect about 2.6 to 2.7 kilograms of caviar," Tyutin said, adding that the farm estimates it may produce up to two tons this year. Breeding sturgeons in a simulated environment requires vast amounts of energy-despite the use of solar panels, the monthly electricity bill is almost \$9,000.

"We are chilling down the water because the water temperature outside is 31 degrees. These fish can't tolerate it and they will die immediately," Tyutin said. But Thailand's tropical climate has given the business a competitive advantage as the higher water temperature helps sturgeons mature at six years old compared to 11 in Russia.

Thai pride

While Caviar House is only selling domestically at the moment-with a tin of



This photo shows chef Thitid "Ton" Tassanakajohn making a dish using caviar from Thai Sturgeon Farm at the Lahnyai Nusara restaurant in Bangkok.— AFP photos

the delicacy retailing for between \$230 and \$832 — they hope to expand to exporting in the future. Recent European Union sanctions against Moscow over the Ukraine invasion have targeted caviar, but the restrictions are largely symbolic as Russia is only a small exporter. Instead, competition comes from China, which has become the market giant, producing 84 percent of the world's sturgeons, accord-

ing to a European Commission report.

The industry suffered during the pandemic with high-end restaurants, airlines and cruise ships battered by travel curbs, although some fine-dining establishments adapted by decreasing portions and incorporating them into takeaway meals. But the international caviar market is expected to record a compound annual growth rate of seven percent between 2020 and 2025, according to a 2021 report by Technavio Research.

France, Germany, China, Spain, the United States, Japan and Russia are major markets but demand is fast growing in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Well-heeled Thai foodies and chefs are recognizing the benefits of caviar, rich in vitamins, minerals, and omega-3 fatty acids. "It took only a few days for Thai chefs to start ordering after we sent samples for them to try," farm co-owner Noppadon Khamsai, 43, told AFP. They say this is a good product and the importance is it's made in Thailand, and they're really proud to be presenting this Thai product.— AFP



General Delegate of the Cannes Film Festival Thierry Fremaux (left) speaks past President of the Cannes Film Festival Pierre Lescure during the presentation of the 75th Cannes Film Festival Official Selection at the UGC Normandie cinema in Paris.— AFP

Hollywood stars and cult directors announced for Cannes

The Cannes Film Festival announced the line-up for its 75th edition on Thursday with a mix of cult arthouse directors and Hollywood glamour heading for the French Riviera in May. Canadian horror maestro David Cronenberg and France's Claire Denis will compete among 18 films nominated for the top prize Palme d'Or, along with Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov who was recently allowed to leave Russia following a controversial travel ban.

Among the films playing out of competition will be a documentary about rock'n'roller Jerry Lee Lewis from Ethan Coen (one half of the Coen brothers), and "Three Thousand Years of Longing" from "Mad Max" creator George Miller, featuring Idris Elba as a djinn. A bevy of stars are expected to hit the red carpet, not least for Cronenberg's sci-fi/horror cross-over "Crimes of the Future" starring Kristen Stewart, Lea Seydoux and Viggo Mortensen.

Denis returns with a thriller set in Central America—"Stars at Noon" featuring Robert Pattinson, while US filmmaker James Gray is competing with "Armageddon Time", a tale based on his New York adolescence featuring Anne Hathaway, Oscar Isaac, Cate Blanchett and Anthony Hopkins.

Elvis and Maverick

Two of the biggest spectacles had already been confirmed for the festival, which runs from May 17 to 28. Tom Cruise will attend the much-delayed world pre-

miere of "Top Gun: Maverick", the sequel to his 1986 blockbuster, playing out of competition. And Tom Hanks will be in town for "Elvis", in which he co-stars as the rock'n'roll star's manager, Colonel Tom Parker, in the latest from Australian director Baz Luhrmann who previously lit up Cannes with "Moulin Rouge!" and "Gatsby".

Women directors have had a strong run at festivals over the past year, winning the top prizes at Venice, Berlin and last year's Cannes-where Julia Ducournau's bold and shocking "Titane" took the Palme. But only three women are nominated for Cannes this year-though there are often last-minute entries. Alongside Denis are US director Kelly Reichardt, who had a sleeper hit with "First Cow" and returns with "Showing Up", and France's Valeria Bruni Tedeschi with "Les Amandiers".

'Sadness and war'

Festival director Thierry Fremaux gave a nod to the difficult global situation, saying the announcement came "after two years of crisis that we won't recover from quickly, and at a time of sadness and war in Europe." A Ukrainian film will play out of competition—"The Natural History of Destruction" from director Sergei Loznitsa about the destruction of German cities by Allied bombers in World War II-which Fremaux said the festival was "particularly happy to welcome this year".

The main competition will also mark the third nomination for Serebrennikov, who was unable to attend last year when his film "Petrov's Flu" was in competition due to an embezzlement conviction that his supporters say was revenge for his anti-authoritarian stance. He relocated to Germany this year after his travel ban was lifted and returns to Cannes with "Tchaikovsky's Wife" about the private life of the famous composer.—AFP

Ukraine refugee children dance in safety in Prague

Six-year-old Eva swings into a backbend with ease, then assesses herself in the large mirror at the end of the dance studio and rewards herself with a contented smile. Two dozen Ukrainian children in the room, including one boy, try to do the same, but only a few manage, while the rest end up sitting and watching in awe. They all attend a free ballet course for Ukrainian refugee children, opened by Prague's National Theatre at the end of March, a month after Russia began its invasion of Ukraine. "My daughter and I went to see the Sleeping Beauty ballet at the state opera... We jumped at the opportunity!" said Eva's mother, Yuliya Petronchak.

She and Eva left the western Ukrainian city of Lviv for Prague on the first day of the invasion to escape "the constant air alarms", while Eva's father stayed at home. More than 4.5 million refugees have left Ukraine since the invasion started on February 24, and around 300,000 have ended up in the Czech Republic. Like many children taking part in the course, Eva has experience from home-she went to the State Choreographic School in Lviv for six months before leaving.

'The cradle of classical dance'

"I have already spotted some talents," said Jana Jodasova, a former dancer at the National Theatre for 20 years who now teaches ballet. At the beginning of the lesson, she helps the little dancers choose leotards and ballet shoes out of three bags provided by the parents of Czech children



Ukrainian children take exercise during ballet lesson organized by the School for children affected by the war in Ukraine.

attending her regular classes. She assesses the fit and sometimes sends a dancer back to the changing room with a different leotard. The properly dressed little ballerinas meanwhile practice pirouettes on their own or test the firmness of the bars on the sides of the dance studio. Jodasova came up with the idea soon after the Russian invasion started as she watched "the horrors" on TV.

"Russia and Ukraine are the cradle of classical dance, most kids over there go to ballet classes at least for some time," the energetic 59-year-old told AFP. "Ballet is one of the things they can't live without." Moments later, she faces a crowd of around a hundred mothers with their children queuing outside the building to register for the free course.



Jana Jodasova, director of the National Theatre Ballet Preparatory School, works with Ukrainian children during ballet lesson organized by the School for children affected by the war in Ukraine.— AFP photos

'Arms and legs'

The new role has forced Jodasova to dig up her long-forgotten command of Russian, forced onto Czechs and other nations under Moscow's communist realm until 1989. "I communicate with the children using my arms and legs and very poor Russian. But I feel we can understand each other," she said. When she struggles, she turns to eight-year-old Alisa Kolesnikova, who was born to Russian parents in Prague and who attends Jodasova's regular course for local children. Alisa, who has attended the ballet school for three years and wants to become a ballerina, relishes the opportunity as she guides the refugee children through the practice. "I really love to show things to the kids, especially the beginners," the ginger-haired, blue-eyed dancer told AFP.

Hoping to return

One of the youngest children at the refugee course, five-year-old Vasilisa Malakutska, is no beginner either. "I first took her to a ballet class when she was four and she didn't feel too well about it, but I think now is the right time," said her mother Ekaterina Malakutska, a marketing expert from Kyiv.

She is contemplating a ballet career for her daughter, just like Yuliya Petronchak is for little Eva. "Either a ballerina or a doctor," university teacher Petronchak told AFP, adding that although Eva was happy at the Prague course, her future was in Ukraine. "The safety of the child is key. But if there are no alarms in western Ukraine... we hope to return. As soon as possible."— AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Photos show art installations using ceramic doves is pictured in an alley in old Damascus, as part of an exhibition titled 'Once Upon a Time Windows', in the Syrian capital. — AFP photos

Damascus art installation turns ceramic doves into war symbol

Hundreds of ceramic doves are suspended over the streets of the Old City of Damascus, part of an art installation that had been set to debut before the start of Syria's war. The life-like figurines crafted by Buthaina al-Ali, a professor at Damascus University's faculty of arts, had been gathering dust in a basement since the outbreak of Syria's conflict in 2011. Eleven years on, the 15,000 ceramic birds are finally airborne, appearing in an exhibition curated by Ali's students on the woes of Syria's war. "I had dreamt of decorating the centre of my city and hanging the

doves in a crowded place for people to see," Ali, 48, told AFP. "But the war changed everything, and I had to postpone my dream all this time." The exhibition in the Old City of Damascus, curated by 16 students from the faculty of arts, is titled: "Once upon a time, a window." The art on display deals with the displacement, hunger and helplessness wrought by the country's bloody civil war. "I finally suggested to my students that they take the doves and hang them in a way they see fit," said Ali, who lost two family members to the conflict.

Storybook scene
The students raised the doves in the courtyard of a traditional Damascene home. The Kozah art gallery in the Old City and adjacent streets were also adorned with the ceramic figurines, some of which are fitted with small LED lights. The doves are the centrepiece of the exhibition, which features other artworks by students. "Sadness is the common factor between all the pieces," Ali said. But for gallery owner Samer Kozah, the exhibition has turned the Old City into a scene from a story book. "It's a story displayed out in the open, allowing those who experience it to move from one tale to another," he told AFP.



The doves have been incorporated into student artworks, including an installation by 24-year-old Hammoud Radwan. His piece, titled "A Continued Disappearance", sees the doves placed beside portraits of the artist's friends who have left Syria in search of a brighter future abroad. "The faces aren't in Syria anymore," Radwan told AFP, pointing to the pictures. "The pigeons fly beside them to express dispersal," he added. Since 2011, the war in Syria has killed almost half a million people and forced nearly half the country's pre-war population from their homes, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

'Pain and exasperation'
In a narrow alley in the Old City, empty plates tied to ceramic pigeons clatter against one another above an empty wooden table. The installation by student artist Pierre Hamati, titled "Syrian Supper", represents the hunger plaguing Syria's population, nearly 60 percent of whom are food insecure. "The (empty) table represents our table, and the plates resemble our empty plates," the 25-year-old told AFP. "The pigeons represent us... our dreams, ambitions and rights which are no longer sacred." In another installation, 300 pigeons appear suspended in mid-flight on their way out of an abandoned house. "They are similar to the homes of some Syrians

who had to flee the ravages of war, said Zeina Taatouh, who created the work. Students Raneem Al-Lahham and Hassan Al-Maghout locked the birds inside cages in their installation. Gulnar Sarikhi, another art student, hung the doves upside down, with a knot tied at their feet. Sarikhi chose the title "Impotence" for her piece, which represents the helplessness of Syria's people. "I could not imagine the doves flying," she said. "I saw them hanging by their legs, embodying the pain and exasperation which we can do nothing about." — AFP

Italian anti-mafia photographer Battaglia dies aged 87

Italian photographer Letizia Battaglia, whose shots of bullet-riddled bodies captured the dark world of the Sicilian Mafia, has died aged 87. Prize-winning Battaglia, who would speed to the scene of murders in the 1980s on her Vespa to bear witness to the violence, blew away the romanticized and sanitized image of Cosa Nostra. Palermo mayor Leoluca Orlando said her death late Wednesday had deprived his city, the Sicilian capital, of "an extraordinary woman" who played "an emblematic part in the process of freeing Palermo from the Mafia's control". Battaglia, an anti-Mafia campaigner who became a local politician in Palermo

and then a regional Sicilian assembly member, started out in the photo department of a local daily newspaper. "You could have five murders in the same day," she said in 2006, when a collection of her photographs of organized crime slayings went on show in a Rome exhibition. "The work was exhausting but you couldn't stand by with your arms folded, with our little Mafia on our little island.

'Bear witness'
"We had to bear witness to this violence and the world had to know." Culture Minister Dario Franceschini mourned Thursday, "A great photographer, a great Italian woman who, with her art and her photographs, engaged in important struggles of denunciation and civil commitment." Battaglia's pictures show a small street in Palermo, the interior of an apartment, the white wall of a pork butcher's shop, a garage ramp, the back of a bus, a car seat. They all have one thing in common: captured in black and white a body lying on the ground near a pool of blood, or a face torn apart by a bullet.

It was the era when the Corleone clan, headed by boss Toto Riina and Bernardo Provenzano, finally caught in 2006 after decades on the run, fought their way to power. So-called "men of honour" (Mafia members), judges regarded as too interfering, local politicians, young drug dealers—the "Palermo war" left hundreds dead in the space of a few years, often gunned down in broad daylight and in public places. Battaglia's pictures are unsparing. Faces of the dead are shown with eyes wide open, surprised by death. Friends and relatives lament, while onlookers crowd round the scene with expressions of curiosity or resignation. In 2006, she said those bloody times may be gone, but the Mafia is not. The Rome exhibition, she said, was "a cry for help, because the consequences for our island of the Mafia are as unbearable as ever". — AFP



In this file photo Italian photographer Letizia Battaglia, 81, poses in front of her pictures during an exhibition of her work at the 14th edition of the Manifesto festival in Toulouse, southwest France.—AFP

Johnny Depp lawyers seek to discredit ex-wife domestic violence claims

Lawyers for actor Johnny Depp sought on Wednesday to discredit a claim by his ex-wife Amber Heard that he threw a mobile telephone at her in May 2016 and hit her in the face. The testimony, by Isaac Baruch, a longtime friend of Depp, came on the second day of the blockbuster defamation case filed by the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star against Heard. Depp, 58, filed the suit after Heard, 35, wrote a column for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse."

The actress never named Depp, whom she met in 2009 on the set of the film "The Rum Diary," but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. Heard, who was married to Depp from 2015 to 2017, countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered

"rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands. Heard has alleged that Depp hit her in the face with a mobile phone on the evening of May 21, 2016, during an argument. Police were called but did not file a report.

Heard asked for a divorce two days later and sought a restraining order against Depp on May 25, appearing in a Los Angeles court with a mark on her face. Baruch, who lived in the same building as Depp and Heard, testified that he saw her in the corridor a day after the alleged phone-throwing incident. Baruch, who has known Depp since 1980 and had his rent and some of his expenses paid by the actor, said he asked Heard if Depp had hit her.

"She goes, 'yeah, he threw a phone at me and hit me,'" Baruch said, adding that he inspected her face. "I'm looking at her forehead, I'm looking at the side of her



US actor Johnny Depp during a break in the trial at the Fairfax County Circuit Court in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP photos

eye, I'm looking at her cheek, I'm looking at her chin, I'm looking at the other side of the face, I'm looking at the whole thing and I don't see anything," he said. "I don't see a cut, a bruise, swelling, redness." Baruch said he gave "her a hug and kissed her" on the side of the face where she was allegedly struck. Baruch said he learned several days later that Heard had asked for a divorce and he saw a picture of her in the news with a mark on her cheek.

He said he had never known Depp to be violent or witnessed any physical violence between the couple. Heard's lawyers told the jury on Tuesday that Depp physically and sexually abused Heard during drug- and alcohol-fueled benders during which he became a "monster." Depp filed the defamation complaint against Heard in the United States after losing a separate libel case in London in November 2020 that he brought against The Sun for calling him a "wife-beater." — AFP



Actor Amber Heard speaks with her legal team as she attends Johnny Depp's defamation trial against her at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse.

Sports

Green grabs early lead at windy Lotte Championship

Melbourne to host 2028 and 2040 Presidents Cup

LOS ANGELES: Australia's Hannah Green mastered blustery conditions to fire a six-under-par 66 and take a one-shot lead after the first round of the LPGA Tour's Lotte Championship in Hawaii on Wednesday. The 25-year-old rattled off eight birdies and two bogeys to edge clear of the pack on a day where strong winds buffeted the Hoakalei Country Club on Oahu island.

"It was quite hard to predict the wind the last few holes," world number 31 Green said. "It was getting pretty gusty. You've got to be pretty patient out there. I felt like I hit the ball really well. I don't know how many greens I hit, but all the shots I hit where I wanted them. It's been a while since I've done that." A group of five players are lurking on Green's shoulder after carding five-under-par 67s.

That includes England's Jodi Ewart Shadoff, South Korea's Kim Hyo-joo, India's Aditi Ashok, Scotland's Gemma Dryburgh, and Alison Lee of the United States. Ashok moved to within one off the lead after a birdie-birdie finish. Dryburgh joined the chasing pack after a spectacular back nine which included five birdies.

The 28-year-old from Aberdeen was untroubled by conditions which she said were part and parcel of learning the game in Scotland. "When we made the turn it got pretty strong," Dryburgh said of the wind. "Just used my Scottish knowledge, I guess." Four players, including Mexico's Gaby Lopez and Australia's Sarah Kemp, are two off the lead on four under. Taiwan's Lee Min and New Zealand's former world number one Lydia Ko

are a further shot back on three under.

Presidents Cup

In another development, Melbourne's famed sandbelt region will host the 2028 Presidents Cup, it was announced Thursday, with a further commitment to return to the city again in 2040. A venue for the biennial matchplay showdown between a United States and non-European International squad has yet to be decided.

It was held in 2019 at Royal Melbourne Golf Club, with the Tiger Woods-led Americans beating Ernie Els' young International team 16-14 in a thrilling comeback. Players across the board praised the course at the time with Woods calling it "the ultimate in golf". Its return in 2028 will mark a fourth time in Melbourne, matching Gainesville, Virginia for most Cups contested in one city. "Since the Presidents Cup was first staged in Melbourne in 1998, Australia and its passionate fan base have played a leading role in the growth of the Presidents Cup," said PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan.

"As the event continues to visit new corners of the globe, we remain committed to a presence in Melbourne and the sandbelt region, a place our players and fans around the world hold in high regard." Australia was the Presidents Cup's first international destination. It has since also visited South Africa (2003), Canada (2007) and South Korea (2015).

"Securing two more Presidents Cups is a real coup for Melbourne, promoting our city to the



HAWAII: Hannah Green of Australia lines up her putt on the ninth hole during the first round of the LOTTE Championship at Kapolei Golf Club on April 13, 2022 in Kapolei, Hawaii. —AFP

world and providing a boost for tourism and jobs," said Victoria state Sports Minister Martin Pakula. The tournament will return in September at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, North Carolina, following

a one-year delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Royal Montreal Golf Club in Quebec, Canada, will hold the 2024 event with the Medinah Country Club in Illinois hosting it in 2026. — AFP



OVERIJSE: US' Magnus Sheffield of Ineos Grenadiers celebrates after winning the men's 'Brabantse Pijl' (Brabant Arrow) one day cycling race, 204.8 km from Leuven to Overijse on April 13, 2022. — AFP

Sheffield wins Brabantse Pijl as Alaphilippe suffers spectacular fall

OVERIJSE: New York teenager Magnus Sheffield broke away for a solo triumph at cycling's Brabantse Pijl one-day classic on Wednesday while world champion Julian Alaphilippe crashed after his own team car caused a domino effect of falls. Sheffield, 19, was part of an eight-rider group who had dropped the rest of the field and he made his move two kilometers from the Overijse finish line.

The Ineos Grenadiers rider had two teammates in the small, pursuing group who refused to chase leaving the rookie to ease over the final 100m and slowly raise his arms in celebration at an unexpected win. "It's unbelievable. When I broke off the front I never expected to win," Sheffield said. "I'm a mentally soft type of person and with this awful weather, I mean it was kind of gritty and cold out there," he said.

Sheffield's winning break followed closely on the heels of Alaphilippe's dramatic fall after the Frenchman's own team car clipped another rider causing a quick succession of other falls. After dusting himself down, Alaphilippe eventually returned to the saddle of his bike. This is a second win for Ineos in less than a week after Poland's Michał Kwiatkowski won the Amstel Gold classic on Sunday. In that race, French AG2R rider Benoit Cosnefroy thought he had won only to be classified second after a photo-finish. He was second again on Wednesday. — AFP

Toulouse aim to banish post-Grand Slam blues

PARIS: Toulouse coach Ugo Mola makes no bones about it: his players made up the backbone of France's Six Nations Grand Slam-winning squad and his team is now paying a heavy price for that success. The European champions saw their bid to defend their title take a nosedive last week when Ulster beat them 26-20 in the first leg of the quarter-finals of the Champions Cup. Pressure will be high when Toulouse make the trip to Belfast for the second leg on Saturday.

"Of the 10 internationals who finished the Grand Slam adventure, seven were affected by direct or indirect post-championship injuries," Mola said. The coach

Fatat Women Basketball team crowned champions

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Fatat Club Women Basketball team was crowned champions of Kuwait Women Basketball League after they defeated Qurain 69-65. The final match was held at the Kuwait Basketball Association hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Complex. Meanwhile Gulf University team took the third position after defeating Salwa Al-Sabah Club 86-56. Members of KBA board Fadhel Al-Dawood, Ahmad Al-Otaibi and Thamer Al-Shanfa along with Deputy Chairwoman of the women committee Henan Al-Zayed handed the prizes to the winning teams.

The final match was highly competitive as Qurain ended the first half at 29-21. Fatat players later secured a draw by the end of the third quarter at 43 points each. The fourth quarter was ended with a score of 49-49 at the end of regulation. The teams played an extra quarter where Fatat scored 10 points to 6 - winning the Basketball



crown for the second time.

Deputy Chairwoman of the women committee Hanan Al-Zayed lauded the unlimited support by KBA and its Chairman Rashid Al-Enezi, and Chairman of the women committee Fadhel Al-

Dawood and all committees. Al-Zayed said the second edition of the women basketball league saw several talented players from various clubs, and revealed a notable improvement at the technical and physical level.

Winless Mumbai slump to fifth IPL defeat

MUMBAI: Five-time Indian Premier League champions Mumbai Indians crashed to their fifth consecutive defeat on Wednesday, losing by 12 runs to Punjab Kings. Chasing 199 to win, even 18-year-old South African teenager Dewald Brevis's 49 off 25 balls, with four boundaries and five sixes, was not enough for Mumbai who had won the toss and chose to field first. Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma hit 28 off 17, with two sixes, to give a perfect start to his team's chase but the middle-order failed to build partnerships.

Sharma fell to Kagiso Rabada's pace and his opening partner Ishan Kishan lost his wicket to rookie Vaibhav Arora's swing for just three runs. Suryakumar Yadav, 43 off 30 balls with four sixes, and Tilak Varma, 36 off 20 balls with two sixes, failed to capitalise on their impressive starts as Mumbai crashed to the bottom of the expanded 10-team IPL tournament. Mumbai's big-hitter Kieron Pollard only scored 10 and was run out to an accurate throw by fellow West Indian Odean Smith.

Smith finished with an impressive 4-30 in his three overs while Rabada took 2-29. "If you're not winning games, you've got to try to find a way you can succeed as a team as a batting group," Sharma said after the defeat. "So we're trying to find different ideas, different thought processes. It doesn't

had already overseen a rocky patch for the club, which lost a string of Top 14 matches in the absence of their internationals including skipper Antoine Dupont and playmaker Romain Ntamack. The pair, along with other stars of France's first Grand Slam in 12 years, has been brought straight back into action at club level.

However, Dupont missed training on Tuesday due to being 'sick' according to the club and France hooker Julien Marchand is out due to a calf injury. "It's true that we didn't have too much of a break in the wake of the Six Nations," admitted Ntamack. "But we wanted to get back playing with our friends at the club as quickly as possible. Physically it's fine, psychologically too, we feel pretty good.

"We'll just try to recuperate as much as possible as soon as we have the opportunity." That chance of a few days off will come after the trip to Belfast. "Honestly, I don't have much choice," Mola said. "It gets to the point where it can't be so unrelenting. I don't want to take risks with their health." Ulster boast



MUMBAI: Workers fix a billboard displaying pictures of Mumbai Indians team members for the Indian Premier League's (IPL) in Mumbai. — AFP

seem to be working at the moment." For Punjab, Shikhar Dhawan smashed 70 off 50 balls with three sixes and five fours. Dhawan's opening partner and skipper Mayank Agarwal finally hit some form and made 52 off 32 balls.

Punjab rookies Jitesh Sharma (30) and M Shahrukh Khan (15) took the team to a par score

after two quick wickets in the middle overs. Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah was the most impressive Mumbai bowler and finished his four-over spell with one wicket for 28 runs. Jayadev Unadkat, 1-44 in four overs, Basil Thampi, 2-47 in four overs, and Tymal Mills, 0-37 in four overs, were wayward and expensive throughout the Punjab innings. — AFP

a positive home record against the five-time European champions, with four wins and two losses in the continental competition.

'Touching distance'

Ulster's Springbok No 8 Duane Vermeulen said a second title (after a first in 1999) was within his side's reach. "We are in touching distance but not there yet," the South African said. "This weekend is another big game for us and hopefully we can turn up and get our double on Toulouse." Toulouse, Vermeulen told BBC, have "a big squad and they have done it in the past - they are defending champions and it is going to be a difficult task for us, but we are happy to be playing at home and in front of our fans".

There will also be a third installment of La Rochelle versus Bordeaux-Begles, the former having come out winners in the Top 14 (16-15) and European first leg (31-13) on consecutive weekends. La Rochelle coach Ronan O'Gara and Bordeaux counterpart Christophe

Urios were sanctioned Thursday after a bad-tempered touchline spat during the league game.

After the pair exchanged insults, Urios aimed a slap at the ex-Ireland international, later dubbing him an "insufferable" trouble maker. The body running professional rugby in France, the LNR, found both coaches guilty of "ill-discipline and agitation", but handed them a reprimand rather than a suspension. O'Gara will still be absent from the dugout, currently into the second and final week of an unrelated touchline ban for having previously criticized refereeing standards in another La Rochelle league match.

Four-time champions Leinster host Irish rivals Connacht and Sale travel to Bristol in Friday's action - with the latter holding just a one point advantage from the first leg. Saturday also sees Harlequins hosting Montpellier, Munster welcoming Exeter and Leicester taking on Clermont, while Easter Sunday features the Parisian derby, Racing 92 clashing with cross-city rivals Stade Francais. — AFP

Sports

Iniesta in relegation mire as Spain legend's Japan move turns sour

TOKYO: Andres Iniesta won pretty much everything with Barcelona and Spain but the legendary midfielder risks seeing out the tail end of his glittering career in the mire of a relegation dogfight. The 37-year-old joined big-spending Vissel Kobe in Japan in 2018 after making more than 600 appearances for Barcelona, where he won the Champions League four times and scooped nine La Liga titles.

But the 2010 World Cup winner is now facing the possibility that he could become embroiled in a relegation battle for the first time in his storied career unless his side can quickly turn their season around. Vissel have made a disastrous start to the J-League campaign and sit one spot off the foot of the table after failing to win in 10 games so far. Iniesta has looked badly off the pace at times and suffered the indignity of being nutmegged in the build-up to an FC Tokyo goal last week as Vissel threw away a 1-0 lead to lose 3-1.

They fired manager Atsushi Miura last month and replaced him with Spanish veteran Miguel Angel Lotina, a man whose CV includes relegations with five different clubs in his home country. "Where we've been coming up short is

that we haven't been making the most of our chances and we haven't been able to see games out defensively either," Iniesta, who lifted 32 major trophies with Barcelona, said earlier this season.

"All we can do is keep looking for a win and keep trying to improve," said the midfielder, who turns 38 next month. It was not supposed to be like this when he moved to the port city of Kobe in 2018 from Barcelona on a three-year deal worth a reported \$30 million a year. In May last year he signed a two-year extension for what will surely be his final contract as a player.

Barcelona link

Vissel are Japan's richest club and are owned by tech billionaire Hiroshi Mikitani, the head of e-commerce giant Rakuten. Iniesta has lined up at Vissel alongside German World Cup-winner Lukas Podolski and former Spain teammate David Villa, and now plays with ex-Barcelona pair Bojan Krkic and Sergi Samper.

But Iniesta has found success hard to come by in Japan, with an Emperor's Cup win in 2019 the only trophy he has managed to add to his massive collec-

tion. Lotina, who took charge for the first time in Vissel's 1-0 defeat to Cerezo Osaka on Sunday, is aware he has a big job on his hands.

"We are getting information from people at the club to find out what has happened to put us in this situation," Lotina said after his new job was unveiled last week. "When this happens it's usually not for one reason, but several reasons." Iniesta and Vissel will hope to spark their dismal season to life when they head to Thailand to play in the group stage of the AFC Champions League, with their first game on Tuesday against Hong Kong's Kitchee.

They will also face the host country's Chiangrai United, but not Shanghai Port, who withdrew this week because of a tough lockdown imposed on the Chinese city to fight a coronavirus surge. Lotina believes Vissel "still have time" to haul their season back from the brink of disaster and it would be a shock if they fail to top their Champions League group. "We haven't had much time and I wasn't able to do everything that I wanted to, but today's game has been very useful for me to see how we can improve from now on," Lotina said after Sunday's defeat. —AFP



TOKYO: Photo shows Vissel Kobe midfielder Andres Iniesta of Spain (right) and FC Tokyo midfielder Takuya Aoki (left) fighting for the ball during the J-League football match between Vissel Kobe and FC Tokyo at Ajinomoto Stadium in Tokyo. —AFP

Colombia football 'Colossus' Freddy Rincon dies at 55

BOGOTA: Colombian former international midfield star Freddy Rincon died on Wednesday aged 55 of injuries he sustained in a traffic accident, doctors said. Rincon suffered a severe head injury following a collision on Monday between the vehicle he was travelling in and a bus in the southwest city of Cali. The former Real Madrid and Napoli ace underwent almost three hours of surgery before being transferred to intensive care, but died on Wednesday.

"Despite all the efforts made by our medical and care team, the patient Freddy Eusebio Rincon Valencia has died today," said the Imbanaco Clinic in Cali, which was treating him. "We ask everyone to honor and praise the life of Freddy Eusebio for all the joys he gave us," clinic director Laureano Quintero said, his voice breaking, after reading the official statement. Colombia's football federation, the FCF, said his death was "a great loss" and "we will miss him and remember him with great affection, appreciation, respect and admiration."

"The Colombian Football Federation deeply regrets the death of Freddy Eusebio Rincon Valencia, and sends a message of support and encouragement to his family, friends and relatives at this difficult time," it said in a statement. Rincon was born in the southwestern port city of Buenaventura and was known as the "Colossus" during his career. He was a star of the Colombia side that played at the World Cup in Italy in 1990 and also featured at two more World Cups.



CALL: This file photo shows the car in which former Colombian footballer Freddy Rincon was in an accident in Cali, Colombia. —AFP



LYON: In this file photo, 1998 Romanian player Julian Filipescu (top) is challenged by Colombia's Freddy Rincon during their France 1998 FIFA World Cup Group G football match. —AFP

'A great idol'

Rincon spent much of his career in Brazil, turning out for Palmeiras and Corinthians, where he won the FIFA Club World Cup in 2000. "It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to a great idol. Our captain in the first world title, Freddy Rincon, passed away in the early hours," Corinthians tweeted with a photo of Rincon. "Eternally in our hearts." World football's governing body FIFA expressed "sincere condolences" to Rincon's "loved ones, former teammates and fans from the clubs he played for."

Rincon was part of a talented Colombian team that qualified for the 1990 World Cup finals, ending their 28-year absence from football's most prestigious tournament. He is particularly remembered for a last-minute goal in their 1-1 draw against powerful West Germany, the eventual World Cup winners. Rincon started his career in the 1980s with Santa Fe and America de Cali before joining Brazilian club Palmeiras. He also had a stint with Napoli and

then joined Real Madrid.

Rincon spent only one season at the Bernabeu and in a 2012 interview with the Spanish daily Marca spoke of the "very marked racism" he had suffered at Real Madrid. He hung up his boots in 2004 after a final season with the Corinthians. The midfielder was previously involved in a serious traffic accident in 2013 in which he suffered several fractures and a head injury. After Monday's fatal accident, local media broadcast a video in which a van is seen crossing an intersection when a bus hits it on the passenger side.

In these images "it seems that the traffic light is red when the van crosses and there could also have been speeding" by the van or the bus, according to the Cali mayor's office. Rincon's companions had said he was at the wheel, according to an initial assessment by the authorities. The mayor's office, however, said on Tuesday that only the attorney general's office "will be in charge of determining the identity of the driver of the vehicle." —AFP

Moroccan players, regardless of their differences," Fouzi Lekjaa said during a federation board meeting. Ziyech had in February ruled himself out of playing for his country again after coach Wahid Halilhodzic omitted the 28-year-old for an Africa Cup of Nations game, reproaching him for indiscipline.

But Lekjaa said Wednesday that "nobody can stop a Moroccan player playing for the national team, whether it's Ziyech, (right back Noussair) Mazraoui or anyone else." He said he would discuss this "personal conviction" with Halilhodzic on the coach's return from holidays later this month. Halilhodzic, a former Nantes and Paris Saint-

Germain player, had said that Ziyech "lacks respect" and could "blow up the team".

Despite leading the team to qualifying for next year's World Cup in Qatar, Halilhodzic has been criticized in Morocco for his strategic choices and rumors have circulated of his possible departure. Lekjaa said Wednesday that the Bosnian-French 69-year-old "is currently the trainer of the national team... but only God knows what the future holds". Morocco qualified for the World Cup last month after strolling through a play-off against the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Qatar it will face Croatia, Belgium and Canada in Group F. —AFP

Sounders frustrate NYCFC to book final

NEW YORK: The Seattle Sounders withstood a furious rally by New York City FC to draw 1-1 and seal a 4-2 aggregate victory to reach the final of the CONCACAF Champions League for the first time in the club's history on Wednesday. Seattle will face Mexico's Pumas UNAM in the final of the tournament, the premier club competition for teams from Central America, North America and the Caribbean. The Sounders, leading 3-1 after last week's home leg, looked to be cruising towards a comfortable win after Peruvian international Raul Ruidiaz fired them into a 1-0 lead on 28 minutes at Red Bull Arena in Harrison, New Jersey.

But Uruguayan midfielder Santiago Rodriguez leveled for New York in the 51st minute to kickstart a frenetic second half, as City chased the two goals needed to level the tie on aggregate. It seemed only a matter of time before City would score as the reigning Major League Soccer champions launched wave after wave of attacks on the Seattle goal. But a combination of poor finishing and superb goalkeeping from Seattle's Swiss stopper Stefan Frei frustrated New York's hopes of turning the semi-final around.

Frei rescued Seattle three times in the space of 10 minutes as New York pressed for a second goal. The Sounders goalkeeper saved a header from Thiago Martins on 63 minutes and then five minutes later tipped over the bar when highly rated Brazilian teenager Talles Magno shot on the turn from close range. Magno then squandered a golden chance to put New York 2-1 ahead on 73 minutes when forward Valentin Castellanos burst into space down the right hand side.

The Argentine striker squared unselfishly for Magno in space, but with the whole goal to aim at, the 19-year-old shot at Frei, who parried away. Frei made another fine save two minutes from time, diving at full stretch to turn a Castellanos header around the post. The Sounders will be looking to end nearly two decades of unbroken dominance of the CONCACAF Champions League by Mexican clubs in the final later this month. The last Major League Soccer club to lift the title were the Los Angeles Galaxy in 2000. —AFP

Qatar 2022 'door open' to Ziyech: Morocco chief

RABAT: Morocco's national team would still welcome Chelsea attacker Hakim Ziyech, the head of its football federation said Wednesday, despite a dispute with the national coach before the kingdom qualified for the 2022 World Cup. "The doors of the national team are open to all

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
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
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MADRID: Atletico Madrid's Argentinean forward Angel Correa (TOP) vies with Manchester City's Brazilian midfielder Fernandinho during the UEFA Champions League quarter final second leg football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Manchester City FC on April 13, 2022. —AFP

City see off Atletico in fiery clash

Man City to face off with Real Madrid

MADRID: Manchester City secured the goalless draw they needed to edge out Atletico Madrid and advance to the Champions League semi-finals on Wednesday but the match was marred by a mass brawl late in the game that continued to rage in the tunnel after full-time.

Police were seen in the tunnel at the Wanda Metropolitano as video footage showed heated arguments breaking out between the players, including Atletico's Stefan Savic and City's Jack Grealish, with staff trying to keep the players apart. "I didn't see it," said Diego Simeone. "I was on the pitch applauding the fans. By the time I went inside there was nobody there." Pep Guardiola was asked about the behavior of Atletico's players. "Nothing to say," he said.

The trouble began on the pitch, as Atletico defender Felipe sparked a huge brawl in the corner after a taking a wild swipe at City's Phil Foden. Felipe

was sent off but not before a crowd of players, substitutes and staff swarmed in. "We knew it was not an easy place to come, it is a hostile environment, it was a difficult night all round and how we defended and controlled ourselves over the two legs was incredible," City defender John Stones told BT Sport.

In the end, Kevin De Bruyne's first-leg strike last week at the Etihad Stadium proved enough for City to claim a 1-0 victory on aggregate in Madrid, although the Belgian had to go off with an injury which, if significant, would be a hammer blow to their hopes of winning the treble. Kyle Walker also hobbled off in the second half. City will now face Real Madrid, with Liverpool up against Villarreal in the other semi-final to complete an all Spanish-English line-up in the last four.

Simeone was widely criticized for Atletico's negative tactics in the first leg and there was only a minor shift here, with the plan still to keep the game

tight ahead of a final push. Atletico came close, spurning a number of late chances, but instead City advance to the semis for a second consecutive year, in sight again of their first Champions League triumph. "If we play like we did in the second half we have no chance," said Guardiola. "We are playing Real Madrid, the kings of this competition. We will have to suffer."

After a rousing ceremony before kick-off that saw the words "Pride, Passion, Feeling" spelt out across the crowd, Atletico made a stirring start, harrying City high up the pitch and snapping at their heels in midfield. Foden was clattered by Felipe, Stefan Savic bulldozed Ilkay Gundogan over and Walker poked a ball out of play, under stress from the Atletico press. But City survived the early, physical onslaught and established control, even if Atletico looked a threat on the break, failing only with their final pass.

Gundogan hits post

City's possession should have told midway through the half when a wonderful Riyad Mahrez pass released Walker, whose cross evaded the sliding Atletico defenders and found Foden at the back post. He teed up Gundogan for what looked a simple finish but the ball cannoned back off the post. In the scramble, Gundogan's headed rebound was blocked by Felipe.

Atletico, though, surged again after the restart, the crowd coming with them. Antoine Griezmann dipped a volley just wide of the post, Ederson lashed a nervy punt downfield and Marcos Llorente barged the ball off Joao Cancelo. Guardiola flapped on the sideline, trying to jolt his team back into life. With 25 minutes left, De Bruyne was replaced by Raheem Sterling and soon after Simeone decided it was time to attack, Angel Correa, Yannick Carrasco and Rodrigo de Paul all coming on. — AFP

Liverpool book Villarreal semis

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool booked a Champions League semi-final showdown against Villarreal as the quadruple chasers survived a late collapse in Wednesday's 3-3 draw against Benfica. Jurgen Klopp's side already had one foot in the last four after winning 3-1 in the quarter-final first leg in Lisbon. They were on cruise control for long spells in the second leg at Anfield, but had to hold their nerve before advancing 6-4 on aggregate after an uncharacteristic meltdown in the closing stages.

Ibrahima Konate put Liverpool ahead before Goncalo Ramos equalized late in the first half. When Roberto Firmino netted twice after the interval, the tie looked all but over. However, Roman Yaremchuk and Darwin Nunez struck for Benfica to briefly give the visitors hope of an astonishing escape act, before Liverpool finally restored order.

The Reds will face Spanish side Villarreal in the semi-finals as they look to reach their 10th Champions League final and claim a seventh title in the competition. Despite Villarreal's impressive wins over Bayern Munich and Juventus in the last two rounds, Liverpool will be firm favorites to make a third Champions League final in the last five seasons. That would put them a step closer to an incredible clean-sweep of all four major trophies in one campaign.

Significantly, Klopp was able to keep Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mane and Virgil Van Dijk fresh as he started with his stars on the bench. Klopp made seven changes from Sunday's 2-2 draw with Premier League leaders Manchester City as he opted to keep his stars fresh for Saturday's FA Cup semi-final against Pep Guardiola's side at Wembley. Inevitably, Liverpool's much-changed line-up took a while to get into their stride after a pre-match minute's silence to mark this Friday's 33rd anniversary of the Hillsborough tragedy.

Ironically, it was a player named after Liverpool's rivals Everton who threatened first for Benfica when the winger curled just wide from long range. But it wasn't long before Liverpool flexed their muscles. Konate had headed the opener in the first leg at Benfica and Liverpool's towering centre-back tormented the Portuguese side with his aerial prowess again in the 21st minute. — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Benfica's Brazilian forward Everton eyes the ball during the UEFA Champions League quarter final second leg football match between Liverpool and Benfica on April 13, 2022. —AFP

Hawks sting Hornets, Pelicans sink Spurs

LOS ANGELES: Trae Young scored 24 points as the Atlanta Hawks thrashed the Charlotte Hornets while the New Orleans Pelicans eliminated San Antonio in the NBA's play-in tournament on Wednesday. A decisive burst of scoring from Young and De'Andre Hunter in the third quarter saw the Hawks take control against an outclassed Charlotte team at Atlanta's State Farm Arena.

Atlanta will now face Cleveland in the final round of the play-in tournament on Friday, where a place in the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs - against top-seeded Miami - will be up for grabs. "We're clicking at the right time and this is the time to be clicking," Young said. After edging into a 60-52 halftime lead, Atlanta effectively sealed victory with a devastating third-quarter performance, outscoring the Hornets 42-24 and racing into a lead that stretched to 26 points at one stage.

Hunter and Young combined for 30 of those points in the third quarter, Hunter scoring 16 and Young adding 14, including three from outside the arc. Hunter finished with 22 points as Atlanta's balanced offense once again shared the scoring around. Six Atlanta players finished in double figures, with Danilo Gallinari claiming 18 points, Clint Capela chipping in with 15 and Kevin Huerter and Bogdan Bogdanovic adding 13 points apiece. "We've got a lot of guys who can play," Young said. "We've dealt with a lot of injuries this year but we've got a lot of guys who can step up and make plays anytime throughout the game."

McCullum spurs Pelicans

New Orleans proved too strong for a youthful San Antonio side in the Western Conference's sud-



ATLANTA: PJ Washington #25 of the Charlotte Hornets dunks during the first half against the Atlanta Hawks at State Farm Arena on April 13, 2022. — AFP

den death elimination game, winning 113-103. CJ McCollum led the scoring with 32 points as the Pelicans punched their ticket to a win-or-go-home against the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday. The winner of that game will advance to a first round playoff series against the top-seeded Phoenix Suns. New Orleans were given a scare by San Antonio down the stretch however after the Spurs gradually chipped away at a 21-point deficit early in the fourth quarter to trail by just six points with around five minutes left.

But eight points in the closing stages from Brandon Ingram, who finished with 27 points, and a big defensive display from Jonas Valanciunas (22 points, 14 rebounds, two blocks) settled the Pelicans' nerves and closed out the win. "I thought we did a pretty good job of showing poise down the stretch," McCollum said. "We had some lapses, but all in all it was a good defensive effort." The defeat could possibly be the last NBA game in the glittering career of San Antonio's veteran coach Gregg Popovich. — AFP