



**11** Boubyan Bank records  
KD 17m in net profits



**15** Barcelona's top-4 finish in  
danger after shock defeat



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	03:54
Shurooq	05:17
Dhuhr	11:47
Asr	15:22
Maghrib	18:17
Isha	19:38



VOLVO

# Crown Prince visits 'Al-Nabat' Traditional Poets Diwaniya

Amir's representative commends poets' efforts in preserving forefathers' legacy



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah performs the traditional Ardha dance. (See Page 2)

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid a visit Monday to 'Al-Nabat' Traditional Poets Diwaniya. His Highness the Crown Prince delivered a speech in which he conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir to the Diwaniya's members.

Sheikh Mishal commended the efforts of poets in preserving the identity of legacy of the forefathers. He wished every success to Kuwait's sons to raise the dear homeland's status under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Crown

Prince was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as well as senior officials of the State.

His Highness the Crown Prince was also received by Minister of State for Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak, Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Sharar and Secretary of the Diwaniya Nassar Al-Khamsan. On this occasion, His Highness the Crown Prince

was given a souvenir. Meanwhile, Khamsan delivered a speech in which he said that the message of the Diwaniyah stems from religious constants, the consolidation of the national spirit, and the feelings of loyalty to the country and the leadership as well as the promotion of noble social morals through Kuwaiti poets' writings.

He added that there are plans to establish an academy for 'Al-Nabat' Traditional poetry to support and embrace the talented poets. At the end, poets Bader Mefreh Al-Mutairi and Juhaiman Sadhan Al-Azmi read out two poems marking the pleasant occasion. — KUNA

## Zionist forces hit Gaza; Jerusalem tensions spike

JERUSALEM: Zionists carried out their first air strike on the Gaza Strip in months early Tuesday, in response to a rocket fired from the Palestinian enclave after a weekend of violence around a Jerusalem holy site. The army also said its special forces had made five arrests overnight in the occupied West Bank, which has seen a string of deadly Zionist raids since an uptick in attacks and demonstrations four weeks ago. Tensions have focused on the highly contested Al-Aqsa mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem's annexed Old City. Palestinian worshippers gathering there for Ramadan prayers have been outraged by

Continued on Page 6



JERUSALEM: A general view shows the Dome of Rock mosque in Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. — AFP

## Russia expels 36 diplomats

MOSCOW: Russia said on Tuesday it was expelling 36 diplomats from two European countries in retaliation for similar measures taken against Moscow's foreign envoys over the Kremlin's military operation in Ukraine. The Russian foreign ministry said it had declared 21 diplomats from Belgium and 15 from the Netherlands "persona non grata", giving them two weeks to leave.

Moscow also summoned Luxembourg's envoy, warning him that Russia may decide to take reciprocal measures for the tiny European state's expulsion of Moscow's ambassador. The expulsions are the latest in a series taken between Moscow and

Continued on Page 6



BUCHA: An aerial picture taken shows coffins being buried during a funeral ceremony at a cemetery in Bucha, Ukraine, amid the Russian invasion. — AFP

## Iraq 'green belt' neglected in climate fight

KARBALA: Envisioned as a lush fortress against worsening desertification and sand storms, the "green belt" of Iraq's Karbala stands as a wilted failure. Sixteen years after its inception, only a fraction of the 76-kilometre crescent-shaped strip of greenery has materialized, though the years proved a deep need for protection against mounting environmental challenges. Eucalyptus, olive groves and date palms first took root in 2006 as part of a plan for tens of thousands of the trees to form a green protective shield around the city in central Iraq.

"We were very happy because the green belt would be an effective bulwark against dust," said Hatif Sabhan Al-Khazali, a native of Karbala - one of Iraq's Shiite holy cities that attracts millions of pilgrims every year.

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KARBALA: Picture shows a view of a palm and olive grove in the 'green belt' area of Iraq's central city of Karbala. — AFP

Ramadan Kareem

## Merits of fasting

By Sharafun-Nisa'a Mohammed Farook

Literal meaning of Fasting: to abstain from and avoid the consumption of a particular thing. Shariah meaning of Fasting: Worshipping Allah by abstaining from ingestion of food, drinks and sexual intercourse, from dawn until sunset. Merits of Fasting: Almighty Allah tells us what can be translated as: "O you who believe! Observing as-Saum (fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may be pious (2:183).

Observing Saum (fasting) for a fixed number of days is obligatory, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number should be made up from other days. And as for those who fast with difficulty, (e.g. an aged person, terminally ill person, etc) they have a choice - either to fast or feed a poor person (for every day they missed). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast, it is better for you, only if you know (2:184).

Ramadan is the month during which the Quran was revealed, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the

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## Local

# Crown Prince commends efforts in preserving forefathers' legacy



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a souvenir during his visit. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers a speech during his visit to 'Al-Nabat' Traditional Poets Diwaniya. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah performs the traditional Ardha dance. — Amiri Diwan photos



A traditional Ardha dance performed during His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers a speech during his visit to Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a souvenir during his visit. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah uses sign language to communicate during his visit to Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf. — Amiri Diwan photos

## Crown Prince visits Kuwait Sports Club for Deaf

KUWAIT: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid a visit Monday to Kuwait Sports Club for the Deaf. His Highness the Crown Prince delivered a speech in which he conveyed

greetings and congratulations of His Highness the Amir to the club's staff on the holy month of Ramadan. "It is an honor for me to represent His Highness the Amir to offer his greetings on this blessed night of Ramadan," His Highness the Crown Prince said. Sheikh Mishal expressed his appreciation to all staff of the club for their good efforts and contributions in all activities at both internal and external levels. He reiterated Kuwait's keenness to provide all support and care to ensure the development and improvement of skills of all members of the club. Sheikh Mishal prayed to Allah Almighty to maintain security, stability and prosperity in Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. His Highness the Crown Prince

was accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as well as senior officials of the State. His Highness the Crown Prince was also received by Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajhi, Director General of Public Authority for Sports Humoud Fleitah and Chairman of the Club Hamad Al-Murri. During the visit, His Highness the Crown Prince was presented with a souvenir marking his visit. — KUNA

## KFH launches walking competition in collaboration with 'V-Thru'

KUWAIT: As part of the "Better health... Better Life" campaign and Ramadan program themed "Increase good deeds in Ramadan", Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched in collaboration with V-Thru application, the walking competition to the public to encourage them to practice sports in general, namely walking. The program was launched at the Avenues Mall in the presence of KFH and V-Thru team in the campaign pavilion to interact with the public and present gifts to the winners and participants. The challenge shall continue till the end of Ramadan. There is a plan to include more areas in the challenge every week so that everybody can participate.

This third recurring partnership falls within the scope of the bank's social responsibility and keenness to encourage youth and sport activities espe-



cially that sports competitions have gained significant momentum at the society level. The partnership aims to shed light on the pioneering experience of the Kuwaiti youth. KFH's support to business pioneers and SMEs reflects its pioneering role in encouraging the Kuwaiti youth and enhancing the concept of business leadership, initiatives, and youth innovations.

The walk challenge, using V-Fit application, allows the participant to earn KD 1/- balance for every 1500 steps. This balance may be used in purchase transactions or for participation in the plantation and greening of Kuwait through "Keep It Green" campaign to achieve a sustainable environment.

This qualitative initiative was highly welcomed and appreciated by the public who praised KFH team's efforts. The bank's strategy aims to create well-established contacts with the public by organizing these distinguished activities and initiatives and merging sports with competitions to present various prizes to the participants e.g., smart fit watches.

The "V-Thru" application is continuously taking steps to establish a fully integrated application to cope with the modern lifestyles including the V-Fit function, food value calculator to encourage health life, Walk-Thru function to receive orders through walking and other continuous developments to make life easy for customers.

## Gulf Bank alleviates debtors' debts during Ramadan

KUWAIT: As part of its commitment towards social sustainability during the holy month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank announced its participation in the campaign "Charity Begins at Home" organized by local organization, Altkafal. The campaign aims to alleviate the distress of debtors, who are burdened with debts and have been unable to pay them due to various economic conditions.

On this occasion, the manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qena'ei, said: "We are keen to consolidate the Gulf Bank's leadership in social sustainability as we strive to achieve sustainability across all levels - socially, environmentally and economically - through a variety of programs that reflect the Bank's strategy and align with Kuwait's humanitarian goals."

She pointed out that helping debtors alleviates the distress of many families, especially those without breadwinners or children. The campaign is especially noteworthy during Ramadan, a holy month that exemplifies spiritual and human values. Gulf Bank was keen to support efforts designed to relieve the anguish of these families, and to help reunify debtors with their families and society, in addition to preserving the cohesion of the family unit.

"For more than 60 years, Gulf Bank has been an integral part of Kuwait's economic and social history. Gulf Bank has always been keen to participate in community events, seizing every opportunity to support disadvantaged groups in society, knowing fully well the impact these efforts have on local families during the holy month," she added.

Qena'ei added that this initiative is part of a larger set of social sustainability programs that Gulf Bank regularly organizes and participates in, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. This year, Gulf Bank employees volunteered to support the Red Crescent's latest effort to distribute electrical appliances to disadvantaged families in Kuwait, and distributed Iftar meals with the Kuwait Food Bank. Gulf Bank also supported the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in covering costs for refugee families' needs, and launched a week of activities at 360 Mall, with multiple sports and health events, competitions, and prizes.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



# Aid plane for Ukrainian refugees leaves Kuwait

## Kuwaiti students distribute food to Syrian refugees in Jordan



Kuwaiti students help distribute food to Syrian refugees in Jordan. —KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Officials pose for a group photo before a plane carrying aid to Ukrainian refugees left Kuwait yesterday.

KUWAIT: A plane carrying 40 tons of food and medical aid to Ukrainian refugees left Kuwait's Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base to Bucharest, Romania on Tuesday, Kuwait Red Crescent Society announced. The aid came as per instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to help the Ukrainian people in their current humanitarian crisis, KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi said.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti students volunteered in distributing food baskets to Syrian refugees in Jordan, in coordination with Kuwait Embassy in Amman. Kuwait Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani said that the participation of the Kuwaiti students in this charitable activity confirms the solidity of the humanitarian approach among all Kuwaitis. He also stressed the

Kuwaiti humanitarian role, affirming the keenness of the Kuwaiti Embassy in the Kingdom to take part in the charitable activities implemented by Kuwaiti officials and civil authorities on various occasions, including the month of Ramadan. A group of students from the Jordanian University of Science and Technology participated in distributing Ramadan baskets to more than 300 Syrian families, benefiting about 1,000 people in refugee camps in the Mafraq Governorate in the north of the country, in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Nama Charity Association.

In the meantime, a Kuwait-based charity and the United Nations (UN) refugee agency UNHCR signed a deal worth \$400,000 in aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan, the second such agreement

between the two sides. The deal agreed between the UN's refugee agency and the local Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri charity aims to meet the "basic needs" of these refugees, including food aid and healthcare assistance, according to the UNHCR's representative to Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian. The more than a decade-long conflict in Syria, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, has worsened the misery of more than six million Syrian refugees across the globe, the UNHCR official emphasized. More than 2,000 Syrian refugee families residing in the Hashemite Kingdom will be the beneficiaries of the aid, the Kuwaiti charity's chief Jamal Al-Nouri said, promising to ratchet up humanitarian endeavors that come to the aid of the impoverished. —KUNA

## Post office employee explains 'parcels sale' video

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: A video has gone viral on social media showing huge plastic bags with parcels for sale, with a caption reading "sale of people's parcels". After visiting a post office, an employee clarified that the video is of parcels that belong to a private postal company and not the public post offices. There are unclaimed parcels at public post offices too, but only a few at each post office. There are 61 post offices in various areas of the six governorates.

At public post offices, a parcel stays for two months without being collected. "If the receiver doesn't collect their parcel within this period, the post office will return it to the sender," Ahmad Al-Sahaf, an employee at Salmiya Post office told Kuwait Times. "In case that the carton is damaged for some reason and the address is not clear or visible, the parcel will be taken to the Beit Al Mal of the Customs Department. After collecting unclaimed parcels from different post offices, they are sold at an auction. This auction only takes place a few times a year as almost all parcels are sent back," he added.

Public post offices provide PO boxes for an annual fee. People can also receive their parcels at the post office in their area. To make it easy for receivers, the post office staff will send them a message or call them to inform them that their parcel has arrived. Depending on the type of postal service, some parcels will only arrive at one post office no matter the receiver's address, such as the Hiteen or Siddiq post offices.

According to Sahaf, the video of the parcel sale is of a private shipping company. "The parcels in the video were stolen by employees from the company, but they were arrested. Also, there are many parcels which receivers refuse to collect. These parcels are sold in bulk," he explained.

Most of these parcels and goods are sold on social media platforms. "There are also many shipments at the airport not collected by businesspeople or companies that ordered them for various reasons. Some goods will be destroyed, such as banned products. Others will be sold in an auction, as returning them is more expensive than the value of the goods," concluded Sahaf.

## Kuwaiti FM meets visiting Bahraini FM

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Naser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met on Monday with Bahraini counterpart Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al-Zayani and his accompanying delegation, on his formal visit to Kuwait. The meeting revolved around issues that concern both nations and its citizens and ways of strengthening these affairs in all fields, as well as discussing domestic and global developments. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Naser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Bahraini counterpart Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al-Zayani. —KUNA



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KUWAIT: Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi.  
— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

# Al-Ghanem Diwan hosts well-wishers on Ramadan



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with former minister Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem said he will remain the representative of people's will and steadfast in the defense of Kuwait's security and stability. Ghanem thanked all those who attended the ghabqa he held at Ali Al-Ghanem Diwan in Abdullah Al-Salem. "I cannot express my feelings and gratitude for the generosity Kuwait's people have afforded me on every occasion," he said.

Ghanem said "the matter is not about who issues invitations, as all had issued invitations, but the matter is in who responds", pointing to the citizens who answered his invitation from the entire spectrum of locations, to a point where the area was closed.

The Diwan of Ali Al-Ghanem Sons was overcrowded with well-wishers on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, led by Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Saqer, National Assembly members, diplomats, athletes and citizens.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with former minister Anas Al-Saleh.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Saleh Al-Fadhlah and Ali Al-Omair.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Minister of Education Ali Al-Mudhaf.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Turkish Ambassador Ayse Koytak.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Khaled Al-Mathkour.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher and former Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah.



Marzouq Al-Ghanem with Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Mousa.



Ali Al-Ghanem attends the reception.



Khaled Al-Ghanem welcomes Abdulaziz Al-Babtain.



A large gathering at the reception.



No surprises as Pakistan's new premier names cabinet

## British PM Johnson to face MPs' fury over 'Partygate'

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KABUL: Medical staff move a wounded youth on a stretcher outside a hospital in Kabul on April 19, 2022, after two bomb blasts rocked a boys' school in a Shiite Hazara neighbourhood killing at least 6 people. —AFP

# Blasts at Shiite school kills 6 in Kabul

## Several bodies were strewn outside the school gate

**KABUL:** At least six people were killed and 24 wounded on Tuesday by two bomb blasts that struck a boys' school in a Shiite Hazara neighbourhood of the Afghan capital, police and hospital staff said. The number of attacks in the country has significantly declined since the Taliban ousted the US-backed Afghan government in August, but the jihadist Islamic State group has claimed several attacks since then.

Several bodies were strewn outside the gate of the Kabul school, alongside patches of blood, burnt books and school bags, according to images posted on social media. "We were leaving school and had just stepped out from the rear gate when the explosion occurred," Ali Jan, a student who was wounded in the first blast, told AFP at a hospital.

The second blast took place as rescuers arrived to ferry victims from the first explosion to hospitals. "When I heard of the blast I called one of my friends who studies at that school," said wounded shopkeeper Murtaza. "His phone was switched off. Then I went to the site... and that's when I was hit in the second blast."

Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran told AFP that the attack outside the Abdul Rahim Shahid school was caused by improvised explosive devices, killing six people. "These are preliminary figures. We are at the site and waiting for more details," he said.

Two hospitals confirmed they were treating a total of 24 people wounded in the blasts. Zadran said a third blast had occurred at an English language centre in the same area, but did not specify whether it was caused

by an explosive. Zadran had earlier tweeted that three blasts had rocked the school. Outside the hospital, Taliban fighters beat back relatives of victims who had gathered, an AFP correspondent reported.

### Back-to-back blasts

The Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood is mainly home to the Hazara community and has been previously targeted by the jihadist Islamic State group—a rival of the Taliban, also a hardline Sunni Islamist movement.

The Hazara community, which makes up between 10 and 20 percent of the country's 38 million people, has long been the target of mass-casualty attacks, some blamed on the Taliban during their 20-year insurgency. Since seizing power the Taliban have regularly carried

out raids on suspected IS hideouts, mainly in the eastern Nangarhar province.

Taliban officials insist their forces have defeated IS, but analysts say the jihadist group is a key security challenge. IS has claimed some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan in recent years. In May last year at least 85 people—mainly girl students—were killed and about 300 wounded when three bombs exploded near their school in Dasht-e-Barchi. No group claimed responsibility, but in October 2020 IS claimed a suicide attack on an educational centre in the same area that killed 24, including students. In May 2020, the group was blamed for a bloody gun attack on a maternity ward of a hospital in the neighbourhood that killed 25 people, including new mothers. —AFP

## Indonesia mini-market collapse kills 5

**JAKARTA:** Rescue workers in Indonesia were searching for survivors Tuesday after a mini-market collapse killed five people and injured nine, in a country where lax construction standards have raised concerns about building safety.

The three-floor building in Borneo island's Banjar district suddenly crumpled on Monday afternoon while it was filled with customers and employees before Muslims broke their daily fast for the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

Emergency services were dispatched to the scene to dig overnight, pulling five bodies from the rubble and freeing nine people, South Kalimantan Police spokesman Mochammad Rifai told AFP. "We had a report that there were in total 14 people, all of

them had been found," he said Tuesday by phone.

"However, we have not closed the search and rescue operation yet in case there are any more victims." Footage from the Search and Rescue Agency showed rescuers extracting two men alive from the debris, before one of them raised his hands to the workers and knelt for a brief prayer.

Rifai said police were sent to the scene to investigate the cause of the collapse, which has not been given. "The mini-market building, as well as a lot of buildings in Banjar, stand on peatland so flooding is usual. But we cannot conclude that is the cause of the accident," he said.

In 2020, at least two people were injured as a five-storey building in Jakarta partly collapsed. Previously, in 2018, a group of teenagers practising for a dance and music show were among seven killed when the building they were in collapsed in Cirebon, east of Jakarta.

The same year, at least 75 people were injured when a mezzanine floor at Indonesia's stock exchange building in Jakarta collapsed into the lobby. —AFP

## Blinken renews US focus on migration with Panama trip

**WASHINGTON:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed Tuesday to Panama on a new diplomatic bid to check migration in Latin America, a rising cause of political headaches despite the global focus on Ukraine. The top US diplomat's two-day trip, his first to Latin America this year, comes weeks before President Joe Biden's administration ends pandemic restrictions that allowed swift expulsions to Mexico.

Blinken and US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas will meet Wednesday in Panama City with counterparts from more than 20 countries in the Western Hemisphere to discuss cooperation on migration.

"We must count on close collaboration with governments throughout the region to truly make progress on managing irregular migration and addressing the protection needs of the most vulnerable people in our hemisphere," said Brian Nichols, the top US diplomat for Latin America.

US authorities apprehended more than 221,000 people on the Mexican border in March, the highest for a single month in more than two decades. The spike comes as people from El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras flee dire poverty, rampant violence and natural disasters aggravated by climate change.

But the United States is far from the only nation experiencing migration strains. Venezuela's economic and political crisis has triggered an exodus of more than six million people, with neighboring Colombia taking the most.

Nichols said the Panama talks, which follow a similar regional meeting in Colombia in October, would seek to boost support to nations that welcome refugees including through multinational institutions. With Latin America rarely seen as a global security hotspot, the international community

spends more than 10 times on each refugee from Syria compared with each Venezuelan migrant, according to a Brookings Institution study.

### Shrinking attention

Attention could drift even further amid the startlingly swift migration from Ukraine, from which more than 4.9 million have fled since Russia invaded on February 24. "There's going to be less and less appetite from the international community to support migrants in the Western Hemisphere while we have a major migration crisis being provoked by Russia," said Jason Marczak, an expert on Latin America at the Atlantic Council.

"We need to avoid that becoming an afterthought for the global community, so it's really important to have Secretary Blinken along with Secretary Mayorkas there in Panama."

Marczak said the Biden administration was seeking a regional plan so that "no one country is overburdened by higher numbers of migrants, and that countries can maximize the opportunities that migrants present."

Ukrainian refugees have received a warmer welcome in much of the West than did mostly Muslim migrants from Syria and Afghanistan. Biden has promised to welcome 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, drawing few protests from former president Donald Trump's Republican Party which has generally made opposition to immigration a core issue.

Biden has promised to look at the root causes of migration and take a more humane approach than Trump. The Biden administration was forced by courts to maintain a Trump policy in which migrants wait in Mexico while their cases are processed, despite criticism from refugee advocates that the arrangement puts vulnerable people in danger.

But the Biden administration on May 23 will end another Trump policy under which the United States cited the COVID-19 crisis to expel migrants summarily without interviewing them. The end of so-called Title 42, half a year before congressional elections, has been a rallying cry for Republican lawmakers who are ordinarily eager to end pandemic restrictions. —AFP

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## International

# British PM Johnson faces MPs' fury over 'Partygate'

## Misleading parliament is a breach of government ministers' code of conduct

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced angry lawmakers on Tuesday for the first time since being fined for breaching his own coronavirus laws by attending a party at his Downing Street office. The embattled Johnson last week became the first modern British leader to be fined for breaking the law, after police ruled he had failed to abide by lockdown curbs in 2020. But he has weathered the initial storm at the unprecedented sanction and doggedly defied calls to resign, despite the possibility that he could face further penalties as police continue to investigate numerous rule-breaching events.

The 57-year-old can expect a bruising few days now the House of Commons is returning from its Easter break, with MPs demanding to know why he repeatedly insisted to them that no rules had been broken. Knowingly misleading parliament is a breach of government ministers' code of conduct, which states they should resign as a result-and opposition lawmakers are adamant he should go.

However, Johnson will reportedly try to sideline the controversy with a "business as usual" mantra this week, which includes a two-day visit to India starting on Thursday. He is set to address MPs at around 4:30 pm (15:30 GMT).

But he raised eyebrows even before taking to his feet in the Commons after choosing to combine his "Partygate" explanations with an update on the West's response to the war in Ukraine and the growing cost-of-living crisis. Critics argue it is another attempt to marginalise and distract from the scandal, but his

spokesman told reporters Tuesday that he was sincere in admitting his mistakes.

"He fully respects the outcome of the (police) investigation," the spokesman said. "Many will feel he fell short and the public had a right to expect better."

### Attention diverted

London's Metropolitan Police is investigating dozens of alleged lockdown breaches by Johnson and his staff in the Downing Street complex where he lives and works. It said last week officers had so far issued more than 50 fines.



Officers issued more than 50 fines

The scandal, the latest in a stream of controversies to hit Johnson since last year, left his position hanging by a thread and MPs from his Conservative Party in a dangerously rebellious mood.

But he boosted his survival chances with what is seen as a firm response to Ukraine, which diverted attention away from the furore when he was most vulnerable. Several Conservative lawmakers who had pub-

licly withdrawn their support for his leadership have reversed course and argued now is not the time for a change of Tory leader.

The cost-of-living crisis is also credited with distracting people from the scandal, while Johnson has made several big policy announcements aimed at his pro-Brexit political base.

They include controversial plans to send migrants and asylum seekers who cross the Channel thousands of miles away to Rwanda. However, commentators doubt he can maintain his party's support if he is repeatedly fined, his Tories fare poorly in local elections next month and further lurid details of parties emerge. In an ominous sign last Wednesday, Simon Wolfson, a justice minister, resigned from the government, citing "the scale, context and nature" of the rule breaches.

### 'Liar'

Several Tories have also renewed calls for him to step down. Johnson will bid to shore up his standing with them when he addresses a meeting of the Conservative parliamentary party on Tuesday evening. However, he could face the further embarrassment of lawmakers voting to refer him to a rarely convened parliament committee which would decide whether he had misled them over "partygate".

Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle is said to be considering whether to allow such a vote, amid pressure from opposition parties. But government minister Brandon Lewis defended Johnson, telling Sky News on



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson

Tuesday that "at every point he has been clear with what he believes to be the truth".

Johnson is undoubtedly hoping voters' anger over "Partygate" has dissipated, but recent polling indicated otherwise. One national survey suggested around two-thirds of people spoke negatively about him, compared to just 16 percent positively, with the word "liar" the most commonly shared response.

"Overall, 'Partygate' dominates views of Boris (Johnson) over Ukraine," said James Johnson, a Conservative pollster who conducted the sample. "Fury has not receded. Many negative comments are by people who liked him previously but have now changed their minds." — AFP



SAINT-PIERRE-EN-AUGE, France: French far-right Rassemblement National (RN) party Member of Parliament and presidential candidate Marine Le Pen (C) poses for photos with members of the public during a campaign visit to Saint-Pierre-en-Auge, northwestern France, on April 18, 2022. — AFP

## Le Pen, Macron prepare for crunch French election duel

PARIS: French leader Emmanuel Macron and the far-right's Marine Le Pen were preparing Tuesday for a crunch presidential election debate, with supporters of the president warning against complacency despite a solid poll lead. Macron will go head-to-head with Le Pen late on Wednesday in their only direct clash ahead of Sunday's second-round vote, an encounter set to be watched by millions of voters.

Some polls are predicting a lead of around 10 points for Macron over Le Pen in the run-off, a repeat of the 2017 election. But undecided voters and abstentions could yet swing the figures. Le Pen has cleared her diary to concentrate on preparing for the debate, hoping to avoid any repeat of the fiasco five years ago, when her ill-prepared performance contributed to her defeat at the hands of Macron.

This year's vote will mark the closest the far right has been to seizing the Elysee presidential palace. Marine

Le Pen's father Jean-Marie was crushed by Jacques Chirac in the 2002 run-off election, and she was easily beaten by Macron in 2017. The one-off live televised debate-scheduled from 1900 GMT-is a political tradition in France since 1974, when Socialist Francois Mitterrand took on centrist Valery Giscard d'Estaing. It only failed to take place in 2002 when Chirac said debate was impossible with "intolerance and hatred" after Jean-Marie Le Pen stunned France by making the run-off.

The stakes in the election are high, with Europe watching to see if Macron wins another five years in office to work as a champion of the EU, which Le Pen has vowed to reform under a far-right presidency.

Opinion polls currently put the centrist Macron at 53 to 56 percent in the run-off against 44 to 47 percent for Le Pen-a much tighter finish than five years ago, when Macron carried the vote with 66 percent.

For Le Pen, the debate represents a final chance to haul back ground in the polls and convince France she has moderated her anti-immigration party into a mainstream force. Macron is likely to seek to portray her as a dangerous extremist who cannot be trusted on foreign policy-especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, given her past comments of admiration toward President Vladimir Putin.—AFP

## Merits of fasting...

Continued from Page 1

guidance and the criterion between right and wrong. So, whoever of you sight the crescent on the first night of the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home) he must observe fast that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, should make up for the same number of days, which one did not observe saum (fast), from other days.

Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. Allah wants his worshippers to complete the same number of days and that you must magnify Allah (i.e. say takbir Allahu Akbar, Allah is the Greatest) on seeing the crescent during the months of Ramadan and Shawwal - for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him (2:185).

Fasting has several magnified benefits and abundant rewards. In order to extol its significance and importance, Allah Almighty has linked Fasting to Himself in a Qudsi hadith reported by Abu Hurairah: the Prophet (PBUH) said, (Allah said) 'Every good deed of Adam's son is for him except fasting; it is for Me, and I shall reward (the fasting person) for it.' Verily, the smell of the mouth of a fasting person is better to Allah than the smell of musk. Wisdom behind the prescription of Fasting

(1) To establish piety by submitting to the commandments of Allah, responding willingly and complying to His rulings. Allah Almighty says: (So that you may gain piety) [Quran 2:183]. (2) To train the soul to be patient and empower the mind over its whims. (3) To inculcate in every individual righteousness and compassion towards the needy and less privileged, as when he feels hunger, his mind would be softened,

making him milder when assisting the less privileged. (4) To ease the body's system of copious tasks and thus ensure a good and healthy bodily function.

**Ruling on Fasting:** Fasting, according to the prescription of Allah, is of two kinds:

(1) Compulsory Fasting  
(A) Obligatory Fasting which from the beginning Allah Almighty decreed it as an obligation i.e.

fasting in the month of Ramadan, as one of the five pillars of faith.

(B) Obligatory Fasting, whose compulsion was due to or caused by the servant of Allah. Examples include, fasting due to pledges or as a result of expiation for one's inequities.

(2) Recommended Fasting: This includes all forms of fasting recommended by Allah Almighty and/or His Messenger. Examples of this type is fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, three days of every lunar month, on the tenth day of Muharram (first month of the Islamic calendar), the first ten days of Dhul Hijjah (the 12th month) and on the Day of Arafah (i.e. the 9th day of Dhul Hijjah).

Conditions for the Obligation of Fasting: (1) Islam: Fasting is not compulsory on unbelievers. (2) Maturity: Fasting is not compulsory for children but they may be ordered or encouraged to fast if they have the ability, so that they may become acquainted with it. (3) Sanity: Fasting is not compulsory on the insane. (4) Ability: Fasting is not compulsory on whosoever is incapacitated to fast.

*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.*

## S Africa ministers to the front as flood effort stutters

DURBAN: South Africa's government Tuesday sought to reassure a worried public about efforts to help the east coast, where millions remained without water more than a week after deadly storms pounded the region.

Following up a declaration late Monday of a national state of disaster, President Cyril Ramaphosa dispatched top ministers to the city of Durban and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, where at least 443 people have died and 40,000 are homeless.

"These floods are the worst floods that we have ever seen in living memory," Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the minister in charge of disaster management, told a news conference.

"The impact of these floods are well beyond the province," she said. Health Minister Joe Phaahla visited the Prince Mshiyeni regional hos-

pital, where for the past week, patients have used buckets to bathe and flush toilets.

"The main challenge there is water," he told AFP. "The main supply from the municipality is cut off." Normally the hospital sees 2,000 patients a day. The minister said workers were repairing cisterns to store water delivered by tankers.

About 100 residents of the devastated Umlazi neighbourhood waited outside the hospital, fearful that their medical records had been lost in the storm. Several hospitals reported that files had been lost or damaged, raising fears among patients with chronic conditions.

Pravin Gordhan, the minister for public enterprises, met with officials at the Port of Durban — the second-largest container port in Africa. During the height of the floods last week, containers were tossed about like building blocks. As the waters subsided, key roads connecting the port to the rest of the country sustained heavy damage.

The problems have created bottlenecks for around 13,000 trucks who daily have to get goods to and from the port, which serves a vast stretch of Africa as far as the Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

## Iraq 'green belt'...

Continued from Page 1

Iraq's host of environmental problems, including drought and desertification, threaten access to water and livelihoods across the country. But nowadays, the southern axis of Karbala's green belt is only about 26 kilometers long while the northern axis of the 100-metre wide strip is even shorter, at 22 kilometers.

Irrigation is sparse. No one pulls out the weeds anymore. Branches of the stunted olive trees sway between date palms - symbolic of Iraq - that struggle to grow. "The construction was stopped," said Nasser Al-Khazali, a former member of the Karbala provincial council. He blamed "lack of interest from the central government and local authorities," saying: "The funding didn't follow." According to him, only nine billion dinars (\$6 million) was spent on the northern axis, out of the

originally planned 16 billion dinars.

"Negligence" is how Hatif Sabhan Al-Khazali explains the fate of the green belt project. It's a frequent refrain - along with "financial mismanagement" - on the lips of many Iraqis and was a driving factor behind near-nationwide protests against graft, crumbling public services and unemployment that shook the country in 2019.

Iraq has consistently been a low scorer on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 157th out of 180 countries for perceived corruption levels in state institutions last year. What was meant to be a buffer against frequent dust storms that envelop the country does little to lessen their impact.

Earlier in April, two such storms blanketed Iraq in less than one week, grounding flights and leaving dozens hospitalised due to respiratory problems. According to the director of Iraq's meteorological office, Amer al-Jabri, sand and dust storms are expected to become even more frequent. — AFP

## Zionist forces hit...

Continued from Page 1

visits by religious Jewish under heavy Zionist police protection - as well as restrictions on their own access. Jews are allowed to visit the site at certain times but prohibited from praying there. The violence, coinciding with the Jewish Passover festival as well as

the Muslim holy month, has sparked fears of a repeat of last year's events, when similar circumstances sparked an 11-day war that leveled parts of Gaza. On Monday, warning sirens sounded after a rocket was fired into southern Zionist entity from

the blockaded enclave, controlled by the Islamist group Hamas, in the first such incident since early January. The Zionist military said that the rocket had been intercepted by the Iron Dome air defense system. Hours later, the Zionist air force said it had hit a Hamas weapons factory in retaliation. Hamas claimed to have used its "anti-aircraft defenses" to counter the raid, which caused no casualties, according to witnesses and security sources in Gaza.

No faction in the crowded enclave of 2.3 million inhabitants immediately claimed responsibility for the rocket. But it comes after weeks of mounting violence, with a total of 23 Palestinians and Arabs in Zionist entity killed, including assailants who targeted Zionists in four deadly attacks. — AFP

## Russia expels...

Continued from Page 1

Western countries in the wake of President Vladimir Putin's decision to launch a military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

The offensive has thrown Russia into international isolation and broken many of its economic ties with the West. The Russian foreign ministry called a decision by the Netherlands to expel 18 Moscow envoys on March 29 "groundless". It called a similar step taken by Belgium "provocative", and the decision by Luxembourg "an unmotivated and unfriendly step".

Moscow launched dozens of air strikes across eastern Ukraine overnight, its defense ministry said.

Tuesday, after Kyiv accused Russian forces of unleashing a major new offensive in the Donbas region. Russia's defense ministry said that "high-precision air-based missiles" had hit 13 Ukrainian

positions in parts of the Donbas while other air strikes "hit 60 military assets", including in towns close to the eastern frontline.

Ukraine's armed forces also confirmed that fighting had increased throughout the east just hours after President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had kicked off the widely anticipated offensive in the Donbas region on Monday. "The Russian occupiers intensified offensive operations along the entire line of contact," the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said in a report published early Tuesday.

Later Tuesday, Russia's defense chief stopped short of confirming any new offensive but said his forces were committed to capturing swathes of eastern Ukraine. "We are gradually implementing our plan to liberate the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics," Sergei Shoigu said referring to eastern Ukraine's two rebel regions, which Moscow has recognized as independent states. "We are taking measures to restore peaceful life," he said in a televised meeting with Russian military commanders. — AFP

## International

# No surprises as Pakistan's new premier names cabinet

## How long the government lasts remains to be seen

**ISLAMABAD, Pakistan:** Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sprang no big surprises in naming his new cabinet Tuesday, doling out key portfolios to officials from the two parties that combined to oust Imran Khan after weeks of political crisis.

The cabinet is drawn mostly from Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), two usually-feuding dynastic groups who combined to force a no-confidence vote that ousted Khan on April 10.

How long the government lasts remains to be seen, however, as most of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmakers have quit parliament and the former cricketer turned politician has taken his fight to the streets to press for an early election—which must be held by October next year.

"It will be an uphill task for the prime minister to pull them together in one direction because some parties have local and regional interests, and some have national interests," analyst Hasan Askari told AFP. "If they handle economic issues, other problems will settle down but if the situation worsens, everyone will blame the PML-N, which is in majority."

Sharif, brother of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, did not name a foreign minister but that role is expected to go to the scion of another political family, 33-year-old Bilawal Zardari Bhutto.

The PPP's Bhutto is the son of former president Asif Ali Zardari and assassinated ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, as well as the grandson of another prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was executed in 1979.

If confirmed, the Oxford-educated Bhutto would be one of the world's youngest foreign ministers and tasked with repairing links with the West that frayed under the leadership of Khan, who accused Washington of conspiring to oust him. Hina Rabbani Khar, Pakistan's first woman foreign minister in the last PPP government, was named deputy.

### 'It will be an uphill task for the new PM'

#### Economy in doldrums

The key finance ministry returns to Miftah Ismail, a PML-N loyalist who served as deputy and briefly minister during the party's last tenure from 2013-2018. He inherits an economy

in the doldrums, with crippling debt, galloping inflation and a feeble rupee.

In meetings leading up to his appointment, Ismail said improving relations with the International Monetary Fund and getting a loan program back on track was a key priority, as was improving tax collection. New Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, meanwhile, will have to tackle rising militancy and the threat of civil unrest from the huge public rallies Khan has called across the country in the months ahead.

He was arrested on drug charges in July 2019



LAHORE: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (2R) and leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) and coalition partners of the newly formed government Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui (L) leave after a meeting in Karachi. —AFP

by the anti-narcotics squad in a case that is still unresolved. Sanaullah is one of at least four new ministers—including premier Sharif-facing criminal investigation or charges from when they last held office, a frequent occurrence in Pakistan politics when there is a change of government.

There were just five women in Sharif's 37-member cabinet, including outspoken Mariyum Aurangzeb returning in charge of information and responsible for selling the government's message in what promises to be a heated lead up to any next election. —AFP

## East Timor votes to pick next president

**DILI:** People across East Timor went to the polls on Tuesday to choose either a Nobel laureate or a former guerrilla fighter—the incumbent president—as their next leader. Frontrunner Jose Ramos-Horta has pledged to break a longstanding deadlock between the two main political parties in Southeast Asia's youngest country should he win the run-off election against President Francisco "Lu-Olo" Guterres.

"If I win ... I will hold a dialogue with political parties, including (Guterres') Fretilin, so they can work together to maintain stability and peace in Timor-Leste," the Nobel peace prize winner told journalists Tuesday, holding aloft a finger stained purple after casting his vote.

Former guerilla leader Guterres, meanwhile, promised "to ensure national stability, and to adhere to the mission as president of the republic, which is inseparable from the constitution". Polling stations closed at 3 pm local time (6 GMT) and electoral staff wearing official green polo shirts started counting the ballots.

The process usually takes several days to be completed, and this year nearly 860,000 of East Timor's 1.3 million citizens are eligible to vote. Both candidates have pledged to respect the election results regardless of the outcome.

The poll is a rematch of a 2007 election won handily by Ramos-Horta, a former revolutionary hero. Ramos-Horta was dominant in the elec-

tion's first round on March 19, winning 46 percent of votes versus President Francisco "Lu-Olo" Guterres' 22 percent, but failed to secure the needed majority. Participation across the nation reached 77 percent as voters chose between 16 candidates. The winner will take office for five years from May 20 — the 20th anniversary of East Timor's independence from Indonesia, which occupied the former Portuguese colony for 24 years.

#### Reset political deadlock

The election is seen as a chance to reset a political deadlock between the National Congress of the Reconstruction of Timor-Leste (CNRT) and Guterres' Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin). Guterres, 67, was elected as the country's leader in 2017 with the support of former rebel Xanana Gusmao, the country's first president and current CNRT leader.

But Gusmao has this time thrown his party's weight behind Ramos-Horta, who won the Nobel peace prize in 1996 for his efforts towards ending the conflict in East Timor and was the main spokesperson of the independence movement.

The 72-year-old, who survived an assassination attempt in 2008, served as the country's first prime minister before his presidential term from 2007 to 2012. He came out of retirement to challenge Guterres after accusing him of violating the constitution.

Guterres has refused to endorse CNRT ministers since 2018, plunging the country into political paralysis. Ramos-Horta has indicated he could dissolve the parliament if elected to

the public for the incident related to Prinn Panitchpakdi," he said.

Jurin acknowledged he fast-tracked 44-year-old Prinn into a leadership role in Thailand's oldest political party, which was founded with a pro-royal and conservative agenda. He also vowed to look into the party's vetting process and said that he would resign from two committees examining gender equality and promoting women's rights.

The statement follows increasing calls from women's rights groups for the party to take Prinn's alleged misconduct seriously. The allegations against Prinn have snowballed since he was accused last week of sexually harassing an 18-year-old student.

Following the woman's statement, he resigned from the Democrat Party. Since then, more women have come forward to accuse Prinn, with three charges of rape and sexual harassment filed Saturday. Lawyer Sittra Biebangkerd, who is representing some of the women, said Monday he was aware of "14 in total right now", without going into further detail.

Among the accusers is Bangkok Council candidate Anna Vidhyaphum, who alleges that Prinn raped her in 2021. Prinn has denied all of the alle-

gations, adding he would contest the accusations in court. He has been released from custody on a \$20,755 bail and is banned from travelling abroad.

Prinn, a former investment banker, was seen as a rising political star after being appointed the Democrat Party's deputy leader in 2019, less than three years after joining it. —AFP

dict could mean a sentence of up to 15 years. Journalists are barred from the proceedings and her lawyers have been banned from speaking to the press. In November, she and 15 other officials, including Myanmar's former president Win Myint, were also charged with alleged electoral fraud during the 2020 elections.

Since the coup, many of her political allies have been arrested, with one chief minister sentenced to 75 years in jail. Others have gone into hiding. Under a previous junta regime, Suu Kyi spent long periods under house arrest in her family mansion in Yangon. —AFP



DILI: East Timor's presidential candidate Jose Ramos-Horta (L) and the country's first president Xanana Gusmao (R) attending an election campaign in Dili. —AFP

end the deadlock. In the 2007 presidential election, Ramos-Horta won by 69 percent while Guterres gained 31 percent of the votes.

#### Living in poverty

The tiny nation is still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on its economy. Speaking to AFP outside a polling station, university student Lizia Bahkita de Araujo, 27, said she hoped whoever won would focus on education.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, students faced a difficult situation because their classes were moved online, and it did not go well because of the bad internet," de Araujo said, adding jobs for the country's young were also a pressing concern. According to the World Bank, 42 percent of the population lives in poverty. —AFP



BANGKOK: Photo shows Prinn Panitchpakdi (C), a former deputy of Thailand's Democrat Party, as he leaves a police station in Bangkok on his way to court to ask for bail. —AFP

gations, adding he would contest the accusations in court. He has been released from custody on a \$20,755 bail and is banned from travelling abroad.

Prinn, a former investment banker, was seen as a rising political star after being appointed the Democrat Party's deputy leader in 2019, less than three years after joining it. —AFP

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## China signs security agreement with Solomon Islands

**BEIJING:** China said Tuesday it has sealed a wide-ranging security pact with the Solomon Islands, an agreement the United States and its regional allies fear could give Beijing a military foothold in the South Pacific.

The confirmation came a day after Washington discouraged a security agreement between the countries, with top US diplomats headed to the South Pacific this week to curb Beijing's inroads. But Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters on Tuesday: "The foreign ministers of China and the Solomon Islands officially signed the framework agreement on security cooperation recently."

He did not say when or where the signing took place. A draft version of the agreement, leaked last month, rattled Western governments with provisions allowing for Chinese security and naval deployments to the crisis-hit Pacific island nation.

According to the draft, armed Chinese police could be deployed at the Solomon Islands' request to maintain "social order". Australia is concerned the agreement could see Beijing establish a military presence less than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) away.

Wang on Tuesday accused Western powers of "deliberately exaggerating tensions" over the pact, and questioned the motives behind US officials' upcoming visit. The security deal represents a "normal exchange and cooperation between two sovereign and independent countries," Wang said.

"Attempts to interfere and obstruct the cooperation of island countries with China are... doomed to fail," he added at a regular press briefing.

#### 'Broad nature'

Solomons Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare's assurances that he does not intend to allow China to build a military base there has done little to alleviate Western concerns. "The broad nature of the security agreement leaves open the door for the deployment of PRC military forces to the Solomon Islands," US State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday.

The signing of the pact "could increase destabilisation within the Solomon Islands and will set a concerning precedent for the wider Pacific Island region," he added. The White House's high-level delegation to the Solomons is expected to discuss its concerns, as well as the reopening of the US embassy in the former British protectorate's capital, Honiara.

Earlier this month, Australian Minister for International Development and the Pacific Zed Seselja travelled to Honiara to ask the prime minister in person not to ink the deal. The United States and its Asian allies have voiced growing concern about China's assertiveness in the Pacific, where it is locked in several territorial disputes with neighbouring countries. The Solomon Islands' switch of diplomatic recognition from self-ruled Taiwan to Beijing in 2019 unlocked huge amounts of Chinese investment, but the issue has been fraught with tensions.

The island nation of 800,000 has been wracked by political and social unrest, and many of its people live in poverty. In November, protesters tried to storm the parliament and went on a deadly three-day rampage, torching much of Honiara's Chinatown.

The unrest was sparked by a range of tensions, including opposition to Sogavare's rule, inter-island rivalries and high unemployment, while anti-China sentiment also played a role. —AFP

## Rising star in Thai politics faces mounting allegations

**BANGKOK:** An up-and-coming Thai politician is facing allegations he sexually abused more than a dozen women, in what is fast becoming the country's most high-profile #MeToo case. According to Thai police, 14 women formally filed complaints against former Democrat Party deputy Prinn Panitchpakdi, whose father was deputy prime minister and later director-general of the World Trade Organization.

The #MeToo movement—which originated in the United States—swept the globe in 2017 but, until now, Thailand had not seen a similar wave of public accusations of sexual assault against a well-known figure.

On Tuesday, Democrat Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister Jurin Laksanawisit formally apologised and promised an investigation. "I feel very sorry and would like to apologise to

## Suu Kyi expects first verdict in corruption case

**YANGON:** Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi is expected to hear the first verdict in one of her corruption trials next week, a source close to the case told AFP Tuesday, where she faces a pos-

# Business

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2022

## NBK announces a net profit of KD 116.6 million for 1Q 2022

Total assets grew by 8.7% y-o-y to reach KD 33.7bn by March-end 2022

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait ("NBK", the "Bank" or the "Group") has announced its financial results for the three-month period ended 31 March 2022. The Bank reported a net profit of KD 116.6 million (\$383.6 million), compared to KD 84.3 million (\$277.4 million) for 1Q 2021, improving by 38.3 percent year-on-year.

Total assets as of end of March 2022 grew by 8.7 percent year-on-year to reach KD 33.7 billion (\$110.9 billion), whereas total loans and advances increased by 12.3 percent year-on-year to KD 20.1 billion (\$66.0 billion), and total shareholders' equity reached KD 3.4 billion (\$11.2 billion), growing by 3.5 percent year-on-year.

during the first quarter of 2022, thanks to the improvement in the pace of consumer spending and the steady increase in oil production that coincided with the noticeable rise in its prices. The hike in oil prices strengthened the fiscal position of the Government which reflected positively on business sentiment and activity. We are expecting an acceleration in the pace of project activities during the year, given the government's commitment to implementing its strategic objectives and increasing the spend on infrastructure development.

"Our performance is supported by prudent risk management and excellent credit quality; and our investments in talent and technology

proactive provisioning policy adopted by the Bank over the past two years," Al-Sager stressed.

In addition, Al-Sager mentioned that the Bank recorded healthy performance across strategic growth areas including Islamic banking and global wealth management. Moreover, the continuous improvement in the operating environment is expected to reflect positively on corporate credit growth. Moreover, fees and commission income growth benefited from the market activity as well as the strong relationships that the Bank established with its customers over the years.

Al-Sager also stated that the Bank contin-



NBK Tower



Isam Jasem Al-Sager

- NBK achieved robust interim profits; and continued to build a solid operating momentum across all business segments
- Our strong performance is supported by prudent risk management and excellent credit quality
- We continued delivering strong performance across strategic growth areas including Islamic banking and wealth management
- Achieved good progress in advancing the Bank's strategic agenda towards digital transformation and executing technological initiatives
- Our investments in technology supports strong revenue growth, improves our efficiency and maximizes returns for our shareholders
- We launched our Sustainable Financing Framework supporting the transformation journey towards a sustainable and low carbon economy

Commenting on the Bank's quarterly financial results, Isam Jasem A Al-Sager, Vice-Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "During the first quarter of 2022, we recorded strong interim profits and continued to build on the operational momentum that we achieved over the past year, delivering another quarter of strong earnings amid continued growth across all of our business lines."

He added that the operating environment in Kuwait continued to witness signs of recovery

supports stronger revenue growth, improved efficiency of our operations and maximized returns for our shareholders," Al-Sager explained.

"The robust volume growth that the Bank achieved has further supported our strong performance delivered in our operating income; reaching KD 236.5 million and growing by 6.8 percent year-on-year. Furthermore, the significant growth in bottom line stems from the improvement in the cost of risk levels; thanks to

used to make good progress in advancing its strategic agenda towards digital transformation as well as executing its technological initiatives, including the launch of "Weyay Bank", with its integrated package of advanced products and services to meet the demands of the Kuwaiti youth.

Al-Sager pointed out that NBK strives to embed ESG practices into its decision making process while developing approaches to assess climate change risk and integrating sustainabili-

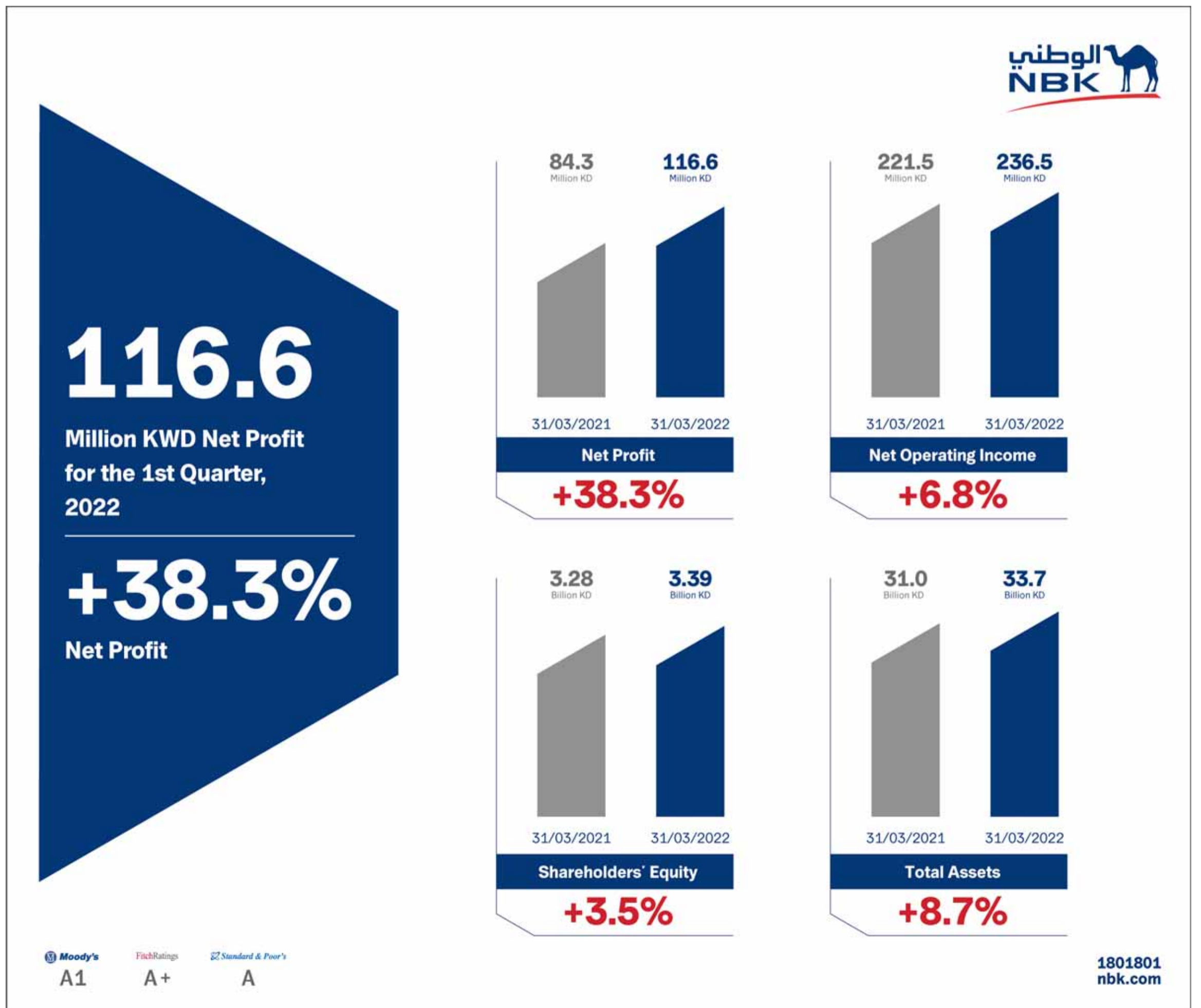
ty into NBK's business plans. During the first quarter of 2022, and as the Bank continues to build a market leading position in sustainable development, NBK launched its Sustainable Financing Framework.

The framework aims to integrate environmental, social and governance practices into all our operations and support the transition to a more sustainable and low carbon economy; while enabling and promoting responsible business practices supporting Kuwait's sustainable growth enshrined in New Kuwait Vision 2035.

Al-Sager stressed that in 2022, the Bank will continue to invest heavily in its employees, and focus on its approach to provide the best products and services that are tailored and in line with the ever-changing customers' needs, while accelerating its commitments aimed at achieving strategic growth towards a sustainable future.

### Highlights of 1Q 2022 results

- Net operating income of KD 236.5 million (\$778.3 million), increasing by 6.8 percent compared to 1Q 2021
- Total assets grew by 8.7 percent year-on-year, to KD 33.7 billion (\$110.9 billion)
- Total loans and advances grew by 12.3 percent year-on-year to KD 20.1 billion (\$66.0 billion)
- Customer deposits increased by 7.4 percent year-on-year to KD 18.3 billion (\$60.3 billion)
- Strong asset quality metrics, with NPL/gross loans ratio at 1.12 percent and an NPL coverage ratio of 302 percent
- Robust Capital Adequacy Ratio of 17.8 percent, comfortably in excess of regulatory requirements





## Business

# IMF slashes global growth forecasts amid Ukraine war

## Slowdown comes amid surging prices, shortages and rising debt levels

WASHINGTON: The "seismic" impact of the war in Ukraine is spreading worldwide, causing the IMF on Tuesday to sharply downgrade its 2022 global growth forecast to 3.6 percent.

That slowdown, 0.8 points lower than its previous estimate released in January, comes amid surging prices, shortages and rising debt levels, the IMF said in its latest World Economic Outlook. The fallout is felt most acutely in the poorest nations, threatening to erase recent gains as they began to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the risks and uncertainty remain high, the organization warned.

"The economic effects of the war are spreading far and wide-like seismic waves that emanate from the epicenter of an earthquake," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said in the report.

Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, devastating the country's infrastructure and ability to produce grain and other goods, while stiff sanctions on Moscow sent fuel prices higher. The conflict also sparked a flood of refugees into neighboring countries. The crisis will be the focus of global finance officials who gather in Washington this week-virtually and in person-for the spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The report shows Ukraine suffering a 35 percent collapse of its economy this year, while Russia's GDP will fall 8.5 percent-more than 11 points below the pre-war expectations. European nations will see much slower growth as the war drives up fuel and food prices, pushing inflation higher and keeping it there for longer than expected, which will harm countries worldwide, especially emerging and developing nations.

The United States and China also will feel the effects of the war and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with US growth expected to slow to 3.7 percent, and China's to 4.4 percent.

## As major economies meet, US looks to turn heat on Russia

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen this week will call on her counterparts in major economies to ramp up the economic pain on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine, a senior official said Monday. The fallout from the war and the impact on the global economy will be key topics of discussion during the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, which began Monday.

Finance officials from the G7 and G20 nations also will meet this week.

"The secretary believes the Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated the need for the world's largest economies to stand together to defend international order and protect peace and prosperity," the Treasury official told reporters. "She will use this week's meetings to work with allies to continue our united efforts to increase economic pressure on Russia while mitigating spillover effects."

The IMF and World Bank have warned of the devastating costs the war is imposing on the global economy, especially through rising prices for energy and food at a time of high inflation.

Western sanctions on Moscow have contributed to the price pressures, which are hitting the poorest countries the hardest. While Yellen is "deeply concerned" about the impacts, "We are firm in our resolve to hold Russia and its leadership account-

## 'We need help': Sierra Leone faces hardship amid war

FREETOWN: Iyesatu Turay, who lives in a sprawling slum of corrugated-iron shacks in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown, says she doesn't have enough food to feed her family.

Life is a struggle for many in the Kroo Bay slum, where pigs mingle with stray dogs in the debris-strewn alleys of the shantytown, which straddles an open sewer. But war in faraway Ukraine has made life harder still. Fuel prices, as well as the prices of basics such as cooking oil and rice, have increased sharply in the West African nation recently.

"We need help," said Turay, a 28-year-old mother of three, who explained that price hikes are hitting at the same time as regular power cuts and a patchy water supply. "We are barely surviving on a single meal every late evening," she told AFP. "No food, water and light." Diamond-rich Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world, still recovering from a brutal 1991-2002 civil war and the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola epidemic.

Warnings that the economic blowback of the war in Ukraine could hit poorer countries have already become a reality in the nation of 7.5 million people, where about 43 percent of the population live below \$1.90 a day, according to the World Bank.

Russia, a major energy producer, is under stringent Western sanctions. Its invasion of Ukraine in February has sent oil prices soaring worldwide, with consumer inflation also rising rapidly.

Musa Sesay, a grocer in Freetown, told AFP all his suppliers had raised their prices. "We are not responsible for the increase in prices, it's a global problem," he said. A 50-kilogram bag of rice which recently cost the equivalent of about 27 euros (\$29) now costs 32 euros (\$35) — an increase of about 20 percent.

### Surging inflation

"This crisis unfolds while the global economy was on a mending path but had not yet fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic," Gourinchas said. That has fueled an acceleration of inflation-expected to hit 5.7 percent in advanced economies this year and 8.7 percent in developing nations-which endangers the gains of the past two years, the Washington-based lender warned.

The price pressures have prompted central banks in many countries to begin to raise interest rates to tamp down inflation, but that will hurt highly-indebted developing nations, especially if the Federal Reserve and others move more aggressively, the report noted. "Even prior to the war, inflation had surged in many economies because of soaring commodity prices and pandemic-induced supply-demand imbalances," Gourinchas said.

Now, shortages caused by the war "will greatly amplify those pressures, notably through increases in the price of energy, metals and food," he said. Supply snarls in some sectors are expected to last into next year, while high inflation will be elevated for "much longer" than previously expected.

The official cautioned that the outlook is highly uncertain, and things could get drastically worse if the war is prolonged and tougher sanctions imposed on Moscow. "Growth could slow significantly more while inflation could turn out higher than expected if, for instance, sanctions aimed at ending the war extend to an even broader volume of Russian energy and other exports," he said.

### Debt distress

Meanwhile, the pandemic is continuing, and lockdowns in China to defeat renewed coronavirus outbreaks are slowing activity, including in manufactur-

able, and have imposed crippling sanctions," the official said.

In a speech at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo vowed to "take apart Russia's war machine, piece by piece, by disrupting their military industrial complex and its supply chains."

"We are continuing our efforts to use sanctions and export controls to deny Russia the critical inputs it needs, targeting key sectors like aerospace, electronics and others related to the defense sector," he said, noting their invasion has taken longer than Moscow expected.

The Treasury official noted Washington also will continue to work to penalize countries that try to evade the sanctions and restrict Russian leader Vladimir Putin's ability to project power, though they did not provide any specifics on the type of sanctions or the targets being considered.

### Boycotting Russia

While Yellen will participate in key meetings this week, especially the opening session of the G20 focused on the fallout from the Russian invasion, she will not attend other sessions if officials from Moscow are included, the Treasury official said. She will make it clear that "the benefits and privileges of the leading economic institutions of the world-which we helped create after (World War II) — are reserved for countries that demonstrate respect for the core principles that underpin peace and security across the world," the Treasury official said.

Russian finance officials are expected to participate remotely in the G20 meeting on Wednesday, which is led by Indonesia this year. Other officials



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on March 31, 2022, signs display the price of gas at a Marathon gas station in Washington, DC. —AFP

ing hubs, which "could cause new bottlenecks in global supply chains." "Through closely integrated global supply chains, production disruptions in one country can very quickly cascade globally," Gourinchas said.

Developing nations face increasing demands on scarce resources, especially since debt loads have risen. Gourinchas added his voice to the call to help countries restructure their debt.

The G20 Common Framework adopted last year, which was meant to offer a path to restructure large

debt loads, "has yet to deliver," Gourinchas said in a blog post. "The absence of an effective and expeditious framework is a fault line in the global financial system." A key hurdle has been the lack of information on the size of debt owed to China, as well as some other lenders, by private companies as well as governments, and the need for private creditors to participate in the debt relief. World Bank President David Malpass, who has been outspoken on the issue, has said 60 percent of low-income countries already face debt distress or are at high risk. —AFP



WASHINGTON, US: In this file photo taken on April 13, 2022, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen speaks at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC. —AFP

from the world's leading economies may boycott the sessions as well, a French source told AFP last week.

US President Joe Biden has proposed ejecting Russia from the G20. Yellen will meet with Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and "will reiterate the Biden administration's firm support for the people of Ukraine as they defend their lives and their country," according to Treasury.

Adeyemo will meet with Ukrainian Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko on Thursday.

Yellen also will call for a coordinated multilateral effort to support Ukraine's short-term funding needs for humanitarian relief and rebuilding. —AFP

## Economists urge G20 set up register to track oligarchs

WASHINGTON: Leading economists Tuesday urged G20 leaders to draw up a world asset register for tracking tax evaders that could pressure Russia over the Ukraine invasion by exposing oligarchs' hidden wealth. Bestselling economists Joseph Stiglitz of the United States and Thomas Piketty of France among others made the call in an open letter published in The Guardian newspaper ahead of Wednesday's G20 finance meeting.

Building on progress in financial information-sharing over recent years, "it's time for a global asset register to target hidden wealth," said the letter. It was signed by members of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation, a think tank.

Western powers have unrolled a series of tough sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin and his allies since he launched his invasion of Ukraine in February. Those targeted include the billionaire owner of Chelsea Football Club, Roman Abramovich. Russian oligarchs are estimated to hold "at least \$1 trillion in wealth abroad, often concealed in offshore companies whose true ownership is hard to determine", the letter said.

"On this wall of opacity, the efforts of the countries that want to sanction these are now stumbling," it added. With populations suffering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, "Russia's invasion of Ukraine has aggravated this already-worrisome context," with rising prices and insecurity, it added. "We now have a unique opportunity to make progress on the implementation of a global asset registry" to cut through the web of front-companies and link all kinds of assets to their true owners. —AFP



FREETOWN, Sierra Leone: A woman buys items from a trader at a market in Freetown as prices for basic commodities has hiked in Sierra Leone since COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. —AFP

### Fuel protests

Fuel prices have also jumped. In late March, Sierra Leone's Petroleum Regulatory Agency (PRA) increased the ceiling prices for petrol and diesel by 34 percent and 40 percent respectively, compared to January. The PRA cited supply issues related to the deteriorating "geopolitical situation in Europe" as the reason behind the move.

Sierra Leone's government says it intervened to cushion the blow to motorists-increased pump prices are lower than the increase in costs for importing fuel. Still, commercial drivers went on strike in Freetown after the price hike and blocked several roads in the city. Police had to fire teargas to clear the streets of protesters.

Four years into the first term of President Julius Maada Bio, it is now unclear whether the 57-year-old will be able to deliver on a campaign promise to

tackle poverty and hunger. "We have no business to do with the war in Ukraine, but our people are suffering here," the president said during a live broadcast with business representatives this month, pledging to make decisions to help "ordinary people".

The latest crisis has come with Sierra Leone already struggling to regulate its power supply, deliver drinking water to many under-served citizens, as well as control inflation. In 2020, the government signed a five-year deal with Karpowership, a Turkish operator of floating power plants, to supply electricity to the country. Yet power cuts are still routine. A senior official at Sierra Leone's energy ministry, who requested anonymity, said maintenance works, payment issues and infrastructure damage caused by "criminals" were all affecting supplies. In a statement on April 5, Sierra Leone's central bank also said inflation was running at 17.6 percent in February. —AFP

## IMF cuts UK growth outlook sharply on inflation surge

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday slashed its growth forecast for the UK this year on surging inflation and rising interest rates. The UK economy was set to grow 3.7 percent this year, down on an IMF estimate of 4.7 percent given in January, one month before Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent global prices rocketing further. "In the United Kingdom, GDP growth for 2022 is revised down one percentage point," the IMF said in its latest World Economic Outlook.

"Consumption is projected to be weaker than expected as inflation erodes real disposable income, while tighter financial conditions are expected to cool investment," it added in reference to Bank of England rate rises. The IMF also sharply downgraded its UK growth estimate for next year — to 1.2 percent from a forecast of 2.3 percent given just prior to the Ukraine war. Britain's annual inflation rate is at the highest level in three decades, largely on sky-high energy prices.

Bidding to cool inflation, the Bank of England is raising interest rates, mirroring the Federal Reserve as the United States suffers its highest inflation in 40 years. Costs are surging worldwide after economies reopened from pandemic lockdowns and on fallout from the war in Ukraine. —AFP

## Business

# Acute fuel shortage ignites protests across Sri Lanka

## Angry motorists burn tires, blocking major road to Colombo

**COLOMBO:** A severe fuel shortage sparked spontaneous protests across Sri Lanka on Tuesday, with tens of thousands of angry motorists burning tires and blocking a major road leading into the capital, police and local officials said. Sri Lanka has run out of dollars to finance vital imports including food, medicine and fuel, sparking weeks of protests calling for the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the country's worst economic crisis since independence in 1948.

The latest demonstrations saw a 115 kilometer (71 miles) highway connecting the central city of Kandy to capital Colombo cut off at multiple stretches as fuel stations across Sri Lanka ran out of petrol and diesel. Main oil retailer Ceylon Petroleum Corporation raised prices by up to 64.2 percent on Tuesday and lifted a rationing system limiting how much fuel individuals could buy that had been implemented last week. Lanka IOC, a petrol retailer which accounts for a third of the local market, had already raised its prices by up to 35 percent on Monday.

The motorists join throngs of protesters in

Colombo who have been calling for Rajapaksa to step down for 11 straight days. Doctors at the country's main children's hospital also began demonstrating on Tuesday over a serious shortage of medicines and equipment.

In a bid to address growing calls for his entire government to resign, Rajapaksa on Monday appointed a new cabinet that excluded two of his brothers and a nephew—who had held key posts in the previous setup—and acknowledged public anger over the ruling family's mismanagement.

But his older brother Mahinda will continue to hold on to the prime minister's seat.

"People are suffering because of the economic crisis and I deeply regret it," the president said in an address to his new cabinet on Monday, conceding Sri Lanka should have begun bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund "much earlier". Sri Lanka is seeking three to four billion dollars from the IMF to overcome its balance-of-payments crisis and boost depleted reserves.

Dozens of Rajapaksa's lawmakers have turned against the administration and on Tuesday took seats on opposition benches in parliament. —AFP



**COLOMBO:** Protesters shout slogans during an ongoing anti-government demonstration near the president's office in Colombo on April 18, 2022, demanding President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation over the country's crippling economic crisis. —AFP



**KUWAIT:** Board of Directors Faisal Bader Al-Sayer, Chairman, Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer, CEO, along with Bengt Shultz, Chief Operating Officer, Mahmoud Abou-Zahr, Senior Business Director, Lexus Sales and Service team members from Lexus during the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

## Al-Sayer opens upgraded Lexus Center at Ahmadi

**KUWAIT:** To offer an even better elevated customer experience, Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons has announced the opening of upgraded and most advanced Lexus Center at Ahmadi. The opening event was attended by Board of Directors Faisal Bader Al-Sayer Chairman, Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO along with Bengt Shultz Chief Operating Officer, Mahmoud Abou-Zahr Senior Business Director Lexus Sales and Service team members from Lexus in the presence of representatives from the press and media.

Faisal Bader Al-Sayer Chairman at Al-Sayer Holding said "We will spare no effort to invest in our facilities that will support Lexus customers at all levels, which will enable us always to beat the expectations and preserve the goodwill of our existing & customers to be for life".

According to Mahmoud Abou-Zahr Senior Business Director Lexus in Kuwait "Development and enhancement is a constant process at Lexus Al-Sayer, we always strive to improve. The idea of developing Ahmadi Center is to further enhance our customer experience and provide them with the most amazing experience they expect from Lexus."

Striking elements of Japanese Omotensahi inspired hospitality include bigger and enhanced customer lounge facility in the service area with transparent glass to check the progress of car service while at the leisure of having a cup of coffee, separate lounges for men and women, an elevated floor for convenient services such as prayer room, wudu areas as well as toilets for men and women.

Some of the new and improved features available at Lexus Center Ahmadi include:

- Meet and greet receptionist for welcoming all customers and offering personalized attention
- Bigger customer lounge with access to showroom as well
- Separate lounge area for men and women
- Mezzanine floor for prayer room, wudoo and toilets
- Dedicated service advisors (now have 3 offices)
- State-of-the-art equipment
- All Lexus cars maintenance are carried out by highly qualified and trained staff, they have been handpicked to meet the elite Lexus advanced, state of the art, advanced technology standards.

The sales showroom for new vehicles is now more spacious to hold more vehicle variety for our customers, it is as per the top and newest Lexus standards. The vehicle display arrangement, the communication messages and interaction points such as the color stand chart with electronic touch screen for better vehicle navigation and configuration.

Lexus Merchandise is now available offering customers wide range of premium lifestyle products and accessories. The redesigned sales offices guarantee the most luxurious ambience maintaining privacy environment for all customers. The entrance and exit offer a distinct atmosphere with a stunning reception area, and the delivery area is also enhanced and developed to provide customer with an amazing experience.

Recently Al-Sayer had won the prestigious Service Hero Award for Lexus through consistently providing the highest levels of Customer Satisfaction thus matching the superior level of Lexus quality standards. This latest endeavor is part of the continuous commitment by Al-Sayer of providing exceptional Lexus Showroom and Service facilities to their distinguished customers.



State-of-the-art Lexus showroom and service facility



## Al-Muzaini Exchange opens 122nd branch

**KUWAIT:** Al-Muzaini Exchange, the leading exchange house in Kuwait, celebrated its 80 years with its latest opening of its 122nd branch in Al-Jazeera Airport, Kuwait on 18th of April 2022 by Hugh Fernandes, the General Manger and Al-Muzaini Management.

Hugh Fernandes said: "Today we are delighted to introduce our latest opening that brings Al-Muzaini near to our customers in Al-Jazeera Airport. We continually invest in our product to ensure a leading excellence of remittances and we know that customer expects fantastic service when it comes to money transfers and foreign exchanges. Our commitment is delivering a great customer experience every time and it is our number one priority. I would also like to congratulate all the winners and thanking them for their trust".



## KIPCO appoints Sunny Bhatia as Group CFO

**KUWAIT:** KIPCO - Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - has announced the appointment of Sunny Bhatia as Group Chief Financial Officer. With more than 30 years of experience spanning across multiple financial services' sectors, Bhatia will play a vital role in KIPCO's long-term growth plans.

Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KIPCO's Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "We are pleased that Sunny is joining KIPCO as the Group CFO. Sunny has a proven track record of leading high-performing finance teams. His well-rounded and business-oriented profile, together with his extensive regional and multinational experience, will add a lot of value to the company."

On his part, Bhatia said: "I am delighted to be joining KIPCO at this



Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah



Sunny Bhatia

exciting time. I look forward to working with Sheikha Dana and her team to accomplish the Board of Director's vision for the company." Prior to joining KIPCO, Bhatia was the CFO of NBK Capital. He also held leadership positions in Global Investment House and the National Bank of Bahrain. He worked with KPMG, Siemens and PricewaterhouseCoopers in various capacities. Bhatia holds a Bachelor of Commerce from Delhi University and is both a Chartered Accountant and Cost and Management Accountant.

## Business

# Boubyan Bank records KD 17 million in net profits for first quarter of 2022

## Profits grew at a rate of 34%, earning per share amounts to 4.17 fils

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced KD 26 million in operating profits for the first quarter of this year as the bank recorded KD 17 million in net profits at a growth rate of 34 percent compared with last year, while the earning per share amounts to 4.17 fils.

Boubyan Bank's Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer, Adel Al-Majed stated: "Thanks to Almighty Allah, our Q1 profits were good, which is a good start to the year 2022 as we hope it would be a good year for everyone. Of course, we had to allocate additional precautionary provisions to support the bank's financial position, and to bolster our ability to face any future repercussions of the regional and international developments."

### Positive results

Al-Majed highlighted the most significant numbers recorded by the bank during Q1, as the bank's assets grew to KD 7.5 billion at a growth rate of 10 percent compared with last year, while the bank's financing portfolio grew by 15 percent to reach KD 5.7 billion, and operating income grew by 10 percent to KD 50 million, thus increasing the bank's market share of local financing to 11.3 percent.

### International testimonial

Al-Majed stated: "Last week was outstanding as the bank received an international testimonial to its achievements over the past years when Moody's Credit Rating Agency upgraded many ratings of the bank, the most important of which are Long Term Deposit Rating, Baseline Credit Assessment, and the bank's Long Term Counterparty Risk Rating." "Our achievements over the past years were the fruit of exceptional efforts by our teams across various levels as well as the result of our successful strategy towards achieving stable business growth and profitability, coupled with the bank's resilience in dealing with market developments, and keeping pace with banking developments, especially in the area of digital and electronic services," he added.

Al-Majed pointed out that this reflected the strength of Boubyan Bank's franchise, and the growth of its retail



Adel Al-Majed

- A good start to 2022 and we are looking forward to continuing our full digital transformation strategy
- Moody's upgrade of the bank's ratings is an international testimonial to our achievements over the past years

and corporate services along with the accelerating growth of the financing portfolio. He also added that this highlighted the strategic and financial importance of the bank whether for the bank's group or the local financial system in general.

### New achievements with the beginning of a new year

Al-Majed also stated: "Over the past two years, the bank confirmed the strength and success of the strategy it has been adopting since many years, which highlighted the strength of the bank and kept the bank in the lead despite the fierce competition."

He went on to add: "We managed to maintain consistent customer service levels this year, which was evidenced by earning the award for the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for the twelfth consecutive year since 2010 by Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index." Moreover, Global Finance named Boubyan the Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait in 2022 for the seventh year in a row owing to the growth of its various financial indicators and the growth of its market shares. Additionally, Boubyan Bank was named the World's Best Islamic SME Bank by Global Finance, thus adding a new achievement as we start a new year.

### Q1 developments

During Q1 of this year, and as a part of the bank's growth plans for its branches' network across all corners of Kuwait to serve its customers, the bank inaugurated its new branch at Al-Surra neighborhood. This

each in damages to five labour unions who joined the case as plaintiffs. State prosecutor Celine Ducournau also sought in vain to question Deliveroo's American founder and CEO Will Shu over a "fraud" that gave "all the benefits to the employer... without any of the inconveniences." Over 100 Deliveroo riders were plaintiffs in the case prosecutors opened in 2015 but which got fresh impetus in 2020, when France's URSSAF agency in charge of employer social security collections demanded millions of euros in back payments.

Several riders told the court they had sought jobs that offered "flexibility" in terms of scheduling, only to find intense pressure to work at peak meal times, strict oversight of their routes and days off, and penalties if orders weren't delivered fast enough. Deliveroo France had already been convicted of undeclared labor in a civil case in February 2000, when a labour court sided with a rider seeking to be recognized as an employee and not a contractor. URSSAF is seeking to recover some 9.7 million euros from Deliveroo, and a court had already ordered in 2020 the seizure of three million euros in Deliveroo's account while the case was ongoing. A Deliveroo spokesman said after the verdict that the company was "considering" an appeal. — AFP

## French court fines Deliveroo for 'undeclared labor'

PARIS: A Paris court on Tuesday handed the food delivery group Deliveroo a fine of 375,000 euros (\$405,000) after finding it guilty of "undeclared labour" by using freelance delivery riders who should have been considered employees. It was the latest move by courts to recognize the rights of "gig economy" workers who are often classified as independent contractors by start-ups and other firms, and thus ineligible for health insurance and other benefits. The court ordered the maximum fine sought by prosecutors and also handed suspended one-year prison sentences to two former French executives at the Britain-based Deliveroo.

A third executive got a suspended four-month sentence and a 10,000 euro fine for complicity in the system, and Deliveroo was ordered to pay 50,000 euros



## Fawzi Al-Qattan wins KD 10,000 prize in ABK's Alfouz draw

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Fawzi Jassim Al-Qattan as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The winner was announced on 18 April 2022. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD 100 only.

ABK encourages everyone to open Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances in winning in the upcoming draw which will happen on Monday, 25 April 2022. The higher the deposits are, the higher the chances to win.

## German consumer goods group Henkel to exit Russia

BERLIN: German consumer goods group Henkel, which includes beauty brand Schwarzkopf and Pritt adhesive, said Tuesday it would join a string of other companies in leaving the Russian market. Henkel has "decided to exit its business activities in Russia", where it employs 2,500 people, the company said in a statement. The financial impact on the Dusseldorf-based group "cannot be quantified at this time", it added.

Henkel announced at the beginning of March that it would stop investments in Russia, while continuing to supply the market with "essential goods" across its range of household and personal hygiene products. Before the outbreak of the war, around five percent of Henkel's revenues came from the Russian market. — AFP

branch was added to the bank's network which is distributed across various areas of Kuwait, and which comes as a part of the bank's expansion plans to remain closer to its customers, especially at areas that witness significant population growth.

Boubyan Bank also announced joining the Digital Cooperation Organization "DCO" as an observer, thus completing the number of observers at the organization. This contributes to the fulfillment of DCO's mission that aims to facilitate the means of international cooperation in the area of digital inclusion, and enable everyone to contribute to the digital economy.

Boubyan Bank is the first Kuwaiti entity to join DCO, a multilateral international organization that aims at digital prosperity. The bank joined as an observer as the organization currently accelerates its efforts to expand its collaboration to the private sector internationally in order to fulfill its mission towards digital prosperity for everyone. Corporate-wise, Boubyan Bank highlighted the importance of its strategic partnership with DDGI over the past years, which culminated, during Q1 of this year, in a group of services being offered for the first time in the Kuwaiti market for corporate murabaha finance. This comes in line with the bank's strategy to transform all corporate transactions at the bank into digital services.

DDGI is known for the services it offers to Islamic banks and companies through its various platforms. As per the latest partnership, Boubyan Bank will be the first bank in Kuwait which can enter into a fully-automated Islamic murabaha transaction process from the begin-

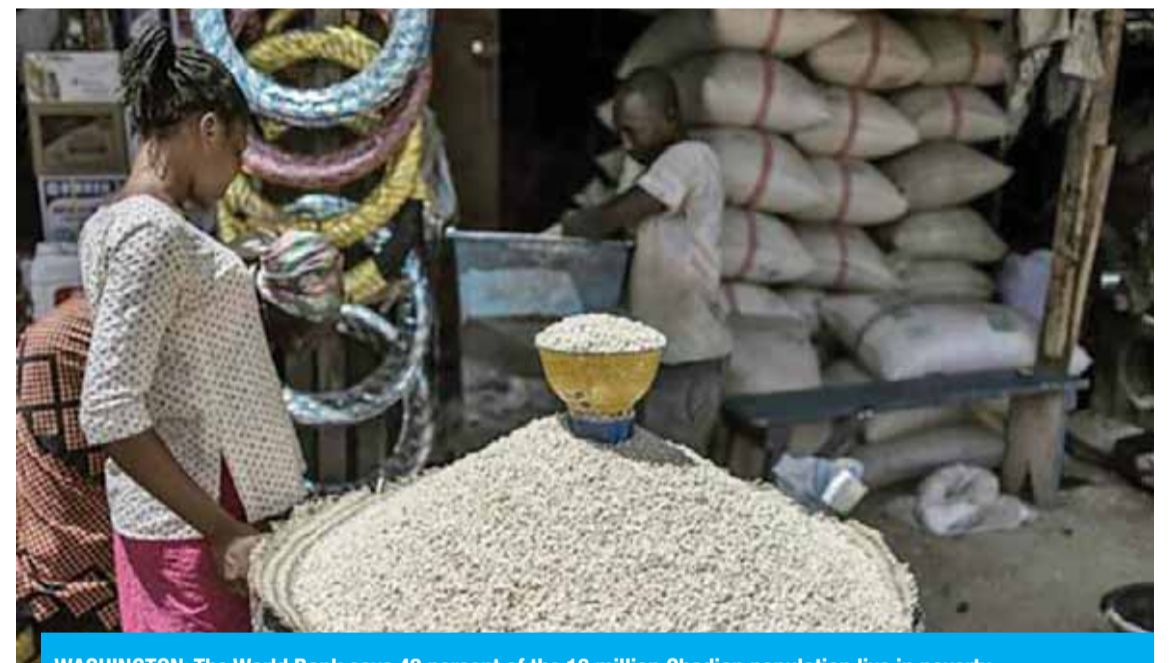
ning and until the settlement of the transaction. This is actually incorporated in our Sharia compliant commodity-trading platforms through a highly-secure network. With this step, Boubyan becomes the first bank in Kuwait, which is integrated with DDGI's international commodities platform. This offers better customer service and earns more confidence from customers, with less user involvement that ultimately leads to fast and accurate customer service.

### Boubyan Bank Visa prepaid cards

To keep up with local and international events, Boubyan Bank announced the launch of two editions of Visa World Cup and Boubyan Visa Prepaid Cards. This gives our customers a unique experience to mark Kuwait's celebrations and to be ready for the World Cup, which is due to be held by the end of the year in Qatar. Both cards were announced at the same time, thereby confirming Boubyan Bank's excellence in offering products and services to its customers, while highlighting the continued efforts of Boubyan Bank to always stay in touch with customers of all segments, allowing them to enjoy an exceptional banking experience and outstanding digital payment services.

### The bank's human resources

During Q1 of this year, Boubyan Bank concluded its "Fikra Innovation Challenge" for employees. The challenge's goal was to support and encourage employees to bring innovative ideas for new products and services that highlight their creative skills and to improve the same in a manner that reflects positively on the level of products and services of the bank as well as customer service. Ever since announcing the Fikra Innovation Challenge, over 200 innovative ideas were presented, which a strong indicator of how enthusiastic employees were about the challenge over various levels, where each level presented idea holders with challenges to improve their ideas and translate the best 6 ideas to products and services into actual implementation so that they may represent new additions to Boubyan Bank's offerings.



WASHINGTON: The World Bank says 42 percent of the 16 million Chadian population live in poverty.

## Economic woes top Chadian fears on junta's anniversary

N'DJAMENA, Chad: A year ago, the West African state of Chad was stunned when its 30-year leader, Idriss Deby Itno died from wounds after leading an operation against rebels. But for many Chadians, the big worry today seems less the country's political future under Deby's 38-year-old son, General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, than how they can meet day-to-day needs.

Alain, 18, spends his day in the fierce sun, selling sachets of water near the Ardebdjoul market in the Chadian capital N'Djamena. At the end of the day, he makes barely 2,000 CFA francs — \$3.25, or around three euros. "This year is particularly difficult—I can't sell my goods," he admitted, asking not to be fully named.

"Deby senior ran things better than his son," Alain said, lowering his voice to a whisper. The younger Deby was proclaimed head of a military junta and transitional president on April 20, 2021, the same day that the 68-year-old president's dramatic death was announced. Chad is the world's third poorest country, according to the benchmark of the UN's Human Development Index. The United Nations says 5.5 million Chadians need "emergency humanitarian aid".

The World Bank says 42 percent of the 16 million population live in poverty. And now they are facing record prices for staples such as oil and bread, with the war in Ukraine adding to the pain. The roads need repair, power keeps failing and crude oil production, a mainstay of the country's economy, is falling. The International Crisis Group think tank reported last year that Chad spends 30-40 percent of its national budget on defense, a figure that the authorities denied. The UN's cultural body UNESCO says education accounted for 2.37 percent of Chad's GDP in 2019.

### Soaring prices

Moussa Nouerma, a 29-year-old cigarette seller from southern Chad, worked his way through the market with a tray of wares on his head, sweat beading on his face. "I don't make any money, but I have to do it to survive," he shrugged. Nouerma said his big concern was frequent power cuts and the rising cost of food.

"A year ago, a plate (of plain rice) cost 250 francs—today it's 300 francs," he said. "We are feeling the cost

of living more under Deby junior." On the dusty, windswept streets of the capital, little seems to have changed over the year. Campaign posters for the late president, who died nine days after elections, are still stuck on the walls. Children beg for money at traffic lights. Along the aisles of N'Djamena's main market in the Ambassatna area, beggars line up holding out their bowls. Lea, 30, halted at a stall to buy vegetables but was taken back by the prices.

"We can't even fill our baskets this year—prices at the market have tripled," she said. "The state should intervene to regulate." A man on a moped who gave his first name as Patrick agreed. "Prices have soared during Ramadan—everything is expensive," he said.

Demonstrations have been organized over recent months in the capital to protest against the increasing cost of living. "Social issues are a problem for the authorities," said political science researcher Kelma Manatouma. "They can cause trouble." — AFP

## WB planning new \$170bn crisis fund

WASHINGTON: The World Bank is seeking to create a \$170 billion emergency fund to help the poorest nations being buffeted by multiple crises, the bank's President David Malpass said Monday. The "crisis response envelope" will continue the work begun during the COVID-19 pandemic, and help countries deal with surging inflation, which was made worse by the Russian invasion of Ukraine as well as the "severe financial stress" caused by high debt levels, he said.

"This is a continued massive crisis response," Malpass told reporters. High debt and inflation "are two big problems facing global growth," he said. "I'm deeply concerned about developing countries. They're facing sudden price increases for energy, fertilizer and food."

The Washington-based development lender last week downgraded its forecast for global growth this year, and the IMF is expected to do the same when it releases its updated forecasts on Tuesday.—AFP



A visitor attends an exhibition entitled the Repatriated Boukan Glazed Brick Collection from Switzerland, at Iran's National Museum in Tehran. — AFP photos



Pictures show Boukan glazed bricks repatriated from Switzerland.



Pictures show antiquities repatriated from Switzerland.

## Iran fights to recover stolen antiquities

Decorated glazed bricks almost 3,000 years old are on display at Iran's National Museum after a four-decade search disrupted by war and an international legal battle. Lions and winged cows with human heads, horses and bulls with a goat's horn, kneeling men and women and other mythological figures decorate the work, created by the Mannaeans who lived in northwestern Iran in the first millennium BC. The 51 square bricks are painted with a glazed coating on a black, brown, light blue, yellow or white background. Their discovery and repatriation "is a series of incredible adventures," Youssef Hassanzadeh, an archaeologist with the museum, told AFP.

It is also the latest example of Middle Eastern and African countries recovering stolen antiquities which have ended up in Western countries. According to Hassanzadeh, the story began after the 1979 Islamic revolution when a farmer, Mirza Ali, discovered painted ceramic bricks while cultivating his field. They had been used to decorate a temple near his village in West Azerbaijan province. "People were looting and selling glazed bricks, taking advantage of the absence of government control," said Hassanzadeh, who organized the exhibition at the museum, where visitors peer at the bricks through glass cabinets.

### 'A unique collection'

A few years later in 1985, during war with Iraq, Iranian authorities sent a group of archaeologists, protected by soldiers, to the village. They started to dig and seized some bricks but it was too late for

the others. Smugglers had already shipped some of them overseas, where a number entered private collections and museums, the archaeologist said.

The story took a new turn when the British Museum learned that an Iranian family had offered to sell a set of glazed

bricks in Chiasso, on the Italian-Swiss border. In 1991, the museum sent its curator John Curtis to purchase the collection. But Curtis realized the bricks came from the West Azerbaijan site "and advised the British Museum and other European museums not to buy it, because it is a unique collection which

must not be divided and must be returned to its country of origin," Hassanzadeh said.

The Iranian owner of the collection had a different view. He was not prepared to return the artifacts from Switzerland. "In 2008, the Swiss police seized the

pressure from Iranian diplomats. "Finally on December 20, 2020, the collection returned to us," said Jebrael Nokandeh, curator of the National Museum which is exhibiting the bricks until Tuesday.

A separate drawn-out legal saga concluded in October, 2019 when the

Iran's cultural adviser in Paris last year to say "that he had a collection of Iranian antiquities."

Those 29 pieces, from the Bronze Age to the Islamic period, are now also on display at the museum, while the quest to recover other stolen and lost artifacts



Visitors attend an exhibition entitled the Repatriated Boukan Glazed Brick Collection from Switzerland.

objects. The case went to court. French archaeologist Remy Bouchardat, who led excavations in Iran, confirmed the collection's "identity," the Tehran-based museum said in a statement.

Legal proceedings dragged on for more than a decade, with a lawsuit filed by the National Museum in 2015, and



A picture shows Boukan glazed bricks repatriated from Switzerland on display.

National Museum opened an exhibition of around 300 cuneiform clay tablets returned from the United States. Other artifacts have also come back, but with far fewer complications. Nokandeh, who is also an archaeologist, said a descendant of a Frenchman who lived in Iran during World War II approached

from the country's rich history continues. "We are in talks with the United States as well as with Australia to return objects," Nokandeh said. — AFP



Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch is pictured during an interview in Prinzendorf. — AFP

## Austrian 'enfant terrible' of art Hermann Nitsch dies aged 83

Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch, famous for his paintings and performances using animal blood and carcasses, has died at age 83, his family said Tuesday. Nitsch died at a hospital in Lower Austria province on Monday, his

niece told AFP. "Hermann Nitsch died peacefully at the age of 83 after a serious illness," a statement from the family said.

Nitsch was part of the "Actionists", a radical 1960s avant-garde movement known for skinning animal carcasses, tying up human bodies and using blood, mud and urine in their works. "Austria mourns the loss of a fascinating painter and an impressive person," Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen posted on Twitter, adding Nitsch "redefined" the country's art scene.

The Austrian enfant terrible was best known for his long-running Orgies Mysteries Theatre, a performance-based show representing slaughters and religious sacrifices. "In my conceptions of being, there is everything, life, death, ill-

ness, pain, aggression... Through my work, I want to show all of this," Nitsch said in 2011 in response to criticism that dogged him throughout his career.

Nitsch's more recent shows included an exhibition in Sicily, Italy, in 2015, which featured dead animals on crucifixes, and led to animal rights groups to accuse him of blasphemy and inciting violence. His wife Rita Nitsch told AFP at the time "that this kind of small ruckus is always part of (his work)... But quality has triumphed over the polemic." Nitsch has two museums devoted to his work in Austria and one in Italy. — AFP

## Kendall and Hailey's makeup artist reveals skincare secrets

Kendall Jenner and Hailey Bieber's makeup artist says "healthy, hydrated skin" is vital. Mary Phillips - who has also worked with the likes of Jennifer Lopez and Bella Hadid - believes "following a skin regime and doing routine skin maintenance is always beneficial" to getting that glow. She told British Vogue: "To me, a modern complexion is fresh and flawless-looking skin that is lightly matte on the T-zone but still glowing at the high points of the face. It starts with healthy, hydrated skin. "Following a skincare regimen and doing routine skin maintenance is always beneficial - knowing what works best for your skin and using the right products and tools for application is also key. "The products I use to enhance my

own complexion are primer, foundation, concealer, powder, bronzer, blush and highlighter." Mary - who has worked with fashion brands like Coach and Vogue - noted that despite the diversity of her clients taste, they all make one similar request.

She said: "My clients request all different types of makeup looks and although their requests vary, the one consistent request is fresh, hydrated and natural-looking skin." Mary also urged people to adopt a primer to their routine to "enhance" the look and longevity of your face. She said: "Primer helps enhance the look of the make-up you apply, and ensures it lasts all day. I love an overall flawless, smooth complexion and to achieve that, start with base products: primer, foundation and concealer. A primer that can ensure this smooth base has staying power is key and it's quick and easy to apply. "I've been using Hourglass's new Vanish Airbrush Primer and it works wonders. It's a translucent gel that helps to absorb oil, blur imperfections, minimize the look of pores, and smooth fine lines. It's multipurpose - it doesn't just ensure make-up lasts, but it also helps to create a seamless finish."

— Bang Showbiz



Kendall Jenner and Hailey Bieber



A woman walks past by a graffiti made by the artist Vladimir Ovchinnikov in Borovsk.



Artist Vladimir Ovchinnikov walks in Borovsk.

## 'Painted over': Russian village artist finds peace art unwelcome

Retired engineer Vladimir Ovchinnikov has spent decades painting murals in his small town south of Moscow but finds some of his art is not welcome after Russia's conflict with Ukraine. "They've painted over it," Ovchinnikov, 84, said during a recent stop at an abandoned shop in a village field near Borovsk, his town of about 10,000 people two hours' drive from the Russian capital.

Ovchinnikov had painted a blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag on one side of the building, but it had been covered over in white paint. Moving briskly, he pulled out a black pencil and began to draw a dove over the whitewash, until another local man approached and threatened to call the police. But Ovchinnikov insisted he had no fears about continuing his efforts.

"At my age, I'm not afraid of anything," he said in an interview at his home. "If there are any complaints against me, no one will suffer." Since Russia sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, authorities have moved against any signs of opposition to what



84-year-old artist Vladimir Ovchinnikov gestures during an interview for AFP in his house in the city of Borovsk, some 100kms south-west of Moscow. — AFP photos

Moscow calls a "special military operation" in the pro-Western country. Thousands of protesters have been detained, independent media have been shut down and several people have been convicted and fined under a law that makes it a crime to "discredit" the Russian armed forces.

### 'Friendship destroyed'

Ovchinnikov is one of them. The silver-haired and bearded pensioner was fined 35,000 rubles (about \$430, 400 euros) after he drew a little girl wearing the colors of the Ukrainian flag with three bombs hanging over her head on a building in Borovsk. It too was whitewashed and

Ovchinnikov painted a dove in its place. He received more than 150 donations to help pay the fine.

Ovchinnikov is well known for his art in and around Borovsk, and one of his drawings dedicated to the town's liberation from Nazi troops in 1942 adorns the walls of the town's conscription office. One of his recent murals of two women holding hands with ribbons matching the colors of the Russian and Ukrainian flags in their hair has so far been left untouched.

"This friendship has been destroyed, we can only be nostalgic," Ovchinnikov said, adding that the drawing was a copy of a Soviet-era poster. His art has long had a political edge. In 2003, Ovchinnikov came across a book with the names of victims of Soviet repression in the Kaluga region where Borovsk is located—listing who were either shot or sent to the Gulag. "It made my hair stand on end," he said. He launched campaigns to have many of the victims rehabilitated—a legal process where they are posthumously acquitted of any crimes—but faced numerous rejections.

### Father sent to camps

In 2015 and 2016, Ovchinnikov painted the portraits of victims of repression on the walls of Borovsk, each time seeing the drawings removed or vandalized. Their stories hit close to home—his father Alexander was sentenced in 1937 to 10 years in a labor camp for promoting "monarchist and Trotskyist" views. He served time in the notorious Kolyma camps in Russia's Far East before resettling in Borovsk in 1956. Ovchinnikov worries that Russian society is being torn apart by a new "schism" and fears the country could head "in a very bad direction".

He said he would continue his work, believing in the power of art to promote peace. "It says it right to your face. Bombs are falling on a child. Everything is clear," Ovchinnikov said. "I draw to show how I understand things... and maybe to have an influence on others," he said. "It's for those who aren't interested in politics... who know nothing and just sit in front of the television." — AFP



Harrison Birtwistle

## British composer Harrison Birtwistle dead at 87

Harrison Birtwistle, one of Britain's foremost contemporary composers known for his experimental approach to writing classical music, has died at the age of 87, his publisher announced on Monday. Birtwistle, who was born in Accrington in northern England in 1934, crafted critically acclaimed operas such as "Gawain" and "The Mask Of Orpheus" and the famed orchestra composition "The Triumph of Time".

During a decades-spanning career that continued well into his 80s, his works—which ranged from chamber pieces to grand operas—were played in the world's leading venues by the some of the greatest symphony orchestras. He died at home in Mere, southwest England, his publisher Boosey & Hawkes said in a statement posted on their website. No cause of death was given.

Birtwistle, who was knighted in 1988 and made a Companion of Honor in 2001, made his start by studying clarinet and composition at the Royal Manchester College of Music. He later sold his instruments to focus on composition, travelling to Princeton University in the United States as a Harkness Fellow where he completed the opera "Punch And Judy".

Premiering at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1968, the work — together with instrumental pieces "Verses for Ensembles" and "The Triumph of Time"—firmly cemented Birtwistle as a leading voice in British music. He became musical director of the newly established Royal National Theatre in London in 1975, holding the position until 1983. Described in one obituary as "elusive and curmudgeonly", he was widely acknowledged as groundbreaking for his uncompromising style, often serving up a cacophony of sound in his pieces that left some audiences and critics divided. The Royal Philharmonic Society was among the organizations and individuals to pay tribute to him Monday, saying his music "shook the earth". The London Symphony Orchestra called him "one of the greatest British composers", while The Daily Telegraph described him as an "avant-garde composer who became the grand old man of British classical music". —AFP

## New Kendrick Lamar music expected May 13

Kendrick Lamar on Monday seemingly announced his fifth studio album will come out next month, the Pulitzer Prize-winning rapper's first full-length project since 2017's acclaimed "DAMN." The superstar cryptically tweeted a link to his announcement in response to another user's missive that "Kendrick Lamar is officially retired."

Lamar, 34, linked to his website that's a blank page with two folders, one of which opened to a fax-esque statement saying that an album entitled "Mr. Morale and the Big Steppers" would come out May 13. The prolific artist has turned to verse to tackle race relations and his own internal searching set to music that incorporates jazz and spoken word.



Kendrick Lamar

In honoring him with a Pulitzer, the award's board said Lamar's "DAMN." was "unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African American life." Following that historic prize he curated and contributed a number of songs to the soundtrack for the film "Black Panther," including his Grammy and Oscar-nominated collaboration with SZA, "All The Stars."

He has featured on songs since then, including on his cousin Baby Keem's latest album. There have been a number of false alarms of new music from the decorated artist—but Monday's announcement seemed to be the most concrete indication of the rapper's plans yet. "All factual information for this release will come directly from this source only," read the statement he linked to. — AFP



In this file photo from (left) Gem, Noel Gallagher, Andy Bell and Liam Gallagher, members of the British rock band "Oasis" posing for a photocall in Hong Kong.— AFP

## Guitar that broke Oasis up for auction in Paris

A Paris auction house will next month sell a guitar smashed backstage at an Oasis concert in an incident that triggered the break-up of the British supergroup and a long-running fraternal feud between star frontmen, Liam and Noel Gallagher. Later repaired, the red Gibson's destruction at the French capital's Rock en Seine festival in 2009 was "a cult moment" in music history, said Jonathan Berg, a guitar expert and cofounder of the Artpages gallery holding the auction.

With a starting price at 150,000 euros (\$160,000), the auctioneers say bids for the guitar could reach 500,000 euros (\$540,000) in the sale on May 17. A flagship of the 1990s Britpop movement built around the notoriously fractious Gallagher brothers, Oasis scored global success, selling 60 million albums and birthing hits like "Wonderwall" and "Don't Look Back In Anger". The band had been slated to play at Rock en Seine in 2009 towards the end of their year-long "Dig Out Your Soul" global tour-named for their album of the same name.

But "things had been brewing for a while between the two brothers," Berg said. "It exploded backstage, one of Noel's guitars got broken and that led to the group breaking up." An eager crowd waiting for the pair to appear were stunned to get the message that Oasis was history. The dramatic split set off years of public barbs between the brothers via the press and social media that have gradually cooled off. Both have continued making music since they parted ways, but have repeatedly ruled out getting Oasis back together.

### Painful reminder

Noel told AFP in 2015 that solo work was "more rewarding, it's more fulfilling. I like being in charge of everything." "I just write songs and I collect the songs together and I make an album out of them." Following the band's split, Noel sought out a guitar-maker to repair his smashed instrument, a Gibson ES-355 built in 1960 that he called the best guitar he ever played.

A London-based French luthier, Philippe Dubreulle, managed to put it back together two years later, and Noel played it again for a while with his group Noel Gallagher and the High Flying Birds. But the musician "got rid of it in the end, because it reminds me too much of Oasis," said gallery founder Berg's partner, Arthur Perault.

Also on the auction block, but expected to fetch much lower bids is a set of bondage gear worn by Depeche Mode's Martin Gore in a 1980s photoshoot. And a rare vinyl signed by both Jimi Hendrix and beloved French rocker Johnny Hallyday is up for grabs.

Hendrix signed the record after a 1966 concert in eastern French city Nancy, when a fan of "Johnny" sought out her idol in a cafe, but found only his supporting act, the then-unknown Jimi Hendrix Experience. Some 45 years later, in 2011, French Jimi Hendrix expert Yazid Manou put the owner in touch with Hallyday to finally complete the autograph collection. Both items are expected to sell for up to 12,000 euros. — AFP

## Romanian piano legend Radu Lupu dies aged 76

Radu Lupu, widely regarded as one of the world's greatest pianists, has died at the age of 76, the organizers of the George Enescu Festival in Bucharest announced. "We are deeply saddened to find out about the death of Maestro Radu Lupu, a dear friend of the Enescu Festival and a magnificent musician!" the festival wrote on its Facebook page. According to media reports, Lupu died in Lausanne in Switzerland after a long illness.

Lupu won the George Enescu International Piano Competition in 1967, nine years after the prestigious festival was set up in honour of Romanian composer George Enescu. "We will forever cherish his amazing way to transform music into magic. Words are not enough to express our sadness for this loss of the entire music world," the festival said.



Romanian piano legend Radu Lupu

Lupu was born on November 30, 1945, in Galati, Romania, and began playing the piano at the age of six. After being admitted to the Bucharest conservatory, he went on to win a scholarship to study at the legendary Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. Among the other top competitions, Lupu won the Van Cliburn prize in 1966 and the Leeds prize in 1969.

Known for his discretion and his perfectionism, Lupu was particularly highly regarded in the repertoire of composers such as Schumann, Brahms, Mozart and Beethoven. He made his US debut in 1971 with the Cleveland Orchestra under Daniel Barenboim and worked with many of the world's top orchestras and conductors, including Herbert von Karajan, Carlo Mario Giulini and Zubin Mehta.

Notorious for almost never giving interviews, he also largely shunned the studio since the 1990s, despite winning a Grammy in 1996 for his recording of Schubert piano sonatas. Resident in Switzerland, Lupu retired from performing at the end of the 2018/2019 season for health reasons. —AFP

## Sports

# Japan's record-breaking baseball phenomenon with a tragic past

**TOKYO:** At just 20, Japan's Roki Sasaki has already achieved what most pitchers can only dream of - a perfect game. Then he followed it up by very nearly doing it again. The Lotte Marines right-hander sparked a frenzy earlier this month when he became the first pitcher to deliver a perfect game in Japan in 28 years, as well as the youngest person ever to do so in the baseball-mad country.

A perfect game in baseball is when no opposing batter reaches base and it has been achieved by just 23 pitchers in the US major league and 16 in Japan, including Sasaki. None have achieved the feat twice. And after bagging 13 consecutive strikeouts in that game against the Orix Buffaloes - a new record-last weekend Sasaki proved his performance was far from a fluke, delivering eight perfect innings before being pulled by his coach to protect his arm.

"Two straight perfect games, which has never been done in Japan or US Major League Baseball, didn't quite happen. But the right-hander... made everyone imagine historic moments to come," Sports Nippon wrote. Sasaki also made international headlines. US media has described him as a "phenom", with one sports writer speculating American baseball fans would be "drooling in anticipation" over a possible stateside move.

But Japanese league rules require players to see

out nine seasons before becoming free agents to go overseas. Teams can post their players for MLB clubs, but fees for those under 25 years of age are limited under the rules, making it a less attractive prospect. Sasaki has met the furor with trademark reserve, telling local media the day after his perfect game that he was already looking ahead to his next performance.

Sasaki, who comes from Japan's northeastern Iwate region, has a tragic back story. As a young boy his world was turned upside down by the devastating 2011 earthquake-tsunami which wrought destruction in northeastern Japan. His father and grandparents were killed and his home was destroyed. He and his mother moved to another city, where the local school ground was occupied by emergency shelters, forcing him to practice baseball on makeshift fields.

"Pain and suffering of that time do not fade over time," Sasaki said last month on the 11th anniversary of the disaster. "But I know that I am able to focus on baseball because of all kinds of support provided by many people. I have nothing but gratitude for all those people who have supported me. I am sure there are many children who don't know about the disaster," he added. "I hope they don't take for granted that it is only natural that people who are important to them will always be around."

## 'It was the limit'

Sasaki is starting only his third season as a professional, but he was already a national figure in high school, throwing 160 km per hour fastballs that mesmerized scouts. His high-school coach controversially decided not to let him pitch in the final game of a regional tournament, hoping to protect the teen wonder's treasured arm. But the team lost and missed out on the national championship at the famed Koshien Stadium, a series that draws wall-to-wall coverage in Japan.

His coach at the Marines cited the same concern about Sasaki's arm in deciding to pull him after eight innings over the weekend. "He was fantastic. He was able to throw his pitches and shift gears at key moments," said Tadahito Iguchi, a veteran of teams including the Chicago White Sox and Philadelphia Phillies. "Of course we wanted to see him pitch through the end. I am sure fans felt the same way, but if you think about his future, it was the limit," he told local media.

The decision may have disappointed some of the 30,000 fans that filled Zozo Marine Stadium, and the team ended up losing 1-0, but Sasaki said he understood Iguchi's call. "The control and the quality of my pitches were a bit off compared with the last time, but I managed to get through," he told local media. "I was getting a bit tired." —AFP



**CHIBA, Japan:** This picture taken on April 17, 2022, shows Lotte Marines pitcher Roki Sasaki smiling during the Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) match between the Chiba Lotte Marines and Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters at ZOZO Marine Stadium. —AFP

## Buttler ton, Chahal hat-trick give Royals edge in IPL thriller

**MUMBAI:** Jos Buttler's 103 and a hat-trick by Yuzvendra Chahal helped Rajasthan Royals edge out Kolkata Knight Riders by seven runs in a nail-biting IPL contest on Monday. The England batter smashed his second IPL century this season to power Royals to 217 for five - the highest total of this edition. Umesh Yadav nearly got Kolkata through with his nine-ball 21 but West Indies left-arm quick Obed McCoy held his nerve on his IPL debut to defend 11 in the final over and bowl out the opposition for 210 in 19.4 overs.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer drove the chase with his valiant 51-ball 85 but Chahal, a leg-spinner who returned IPL best figures of 5-40, took him down at the start of the hat-trick that ended with a four-wicket over. "I respect KKR as a unit. We never thought we were in the game," said Royals skipper Sanju Samson. "I think I don't need to talk much about individuals. We are lucky to have great players."

Royals, who won the inaugural edition under Australia great Shane Warne, recorded their fourth win in six matches to climb to second behind table-toppers Gujarat Titans on the 15th birthday of the Indian Premier League. The money-spinning Twenty20 tournament began on April 18 in 2008 when the current Kolkata coach Brendon McCullum hit a match-winning 158 not out to set the league ablaze.

Come 2022 and the heat was on Kolkata after they invited Royals to bat and Buttler, who made match-winning 100 against Mumbai Indians earlier this month, quickly changed gears after a cautious start in the first two overs. Buttler put on a 97-run opening stand with Devdutt Padikkal, who hit a brisk 24, and then got going with Samson, who smashed 38 off 19 balls.

The Englishman took on the bowling and hit Pat Cummins for a four to bring up his fifty and smacked the Australian pace bowler for six to reach his 100 in 59 deliveries as he raised his bat and got a hug from Shimron Hetmyer. Buttler fell to Cummins three balls later and walked back to standing ovation from the limited crowd at the Brabourne Stadium. His innings laced with nine fours and five sixes.

Kolkata bowlers attempted to check the scoring but the left-handed Hetmyer finished with a flourish with two sixes and a four off the 20th over from Andre Russell. He made 26 off 13. In reply, Kolkata lost Sunil Narine run out for nought off the first ball but Aaron Finch, who made 58, put on 107 runs with Shreyas who kept up the fight after his partners' departure.

Shreyas fell lbw to Chahal and Kolkata fell short despite Umesh's cameo in a tense finish. McCullum said it was Chahal's hat-trick that proved to be the turning point of their loss. "Forty off four (needed to win) and we had six wickets in hand and we were very much in charge of the game, but credit to Chahal, he is just a brilliant bowler," McCullum told reporters. —AFP

## PSG hope to wrap up title but Messi misses out

**PARIS:** Mauricio Pochettino is hoping Paris Saint-Germain can clinch the Ligue 1 title on Wednesday despite being without the injured Lionel Messi, as the Argentine coach batted away questions about his future in the French capital beyond this season. PSG are 15 points clear of Marseille with six games left in the season after beating their rivals 2-1 on Sunday.

That means they could be crowned champions on Wednesday, provided Marseille fail to beat Nantes and PSG better their nearest challenger's result when they travel to Angers. If Marseille do not slip up, PSG will

have another chance to secure their eighth title in 10 seasons - and a record-equalling 10th French crown overall - when they play host to Lens on Saturday.

"The sooner the better," Pochettino said when asked if he would prefer to win the league away from home or in front of the PSG fans at the Parc des Princes, where supporters angry with club management and at the manner of their Champions League exit have decided to stay silent during remaining games this season.

"For me it would be an immense source of joy to be involved in winning the club's 10th league title. That should be a great source of motivation for everyone but we still need to go out and win it as soon as possible." Despite their strong position in the league, the end of the season is proving to be something of an anti-climax for PSG after they started the campaign by signing Messi and targeting Champions League glory.

Having also exited the French Cup early, the Champions League collapse against Real Madrid in the last 16 in March left the Qatar-owned club with the sole

remaining aim of reclaiming the domestic title they lost to Lille last season. Messi has contributed just three Ligue 1 goals and will play no part against Angers because of an inflamed Achilles tendon, PSG said.

Meanwhile Neymar, who has belatedly come to life this season and has scored six times in the last three matches, will also be absent due to suspension. "For a long time I have said that winning the Champions League is a fundamental objective for Paris Saint-Germain so it will always be a big disappointment for the club if we don't win it," admitted Pochettino.

His own future remains up in the air, with speculation linking him to Manchester United dying down now that Erik ten Hag is the favorite for the Old Trafford job. Pochettino added: "I have a year left on my contract and so it is not a matter of wanting to continue or not, it is a contractual matter. Obviously there are always expectations. Any coaching staff wants to do better than last season and we still have that desire to improve." —AFP

## Wheelchair fencing tourney a success



**KUWAIT:** Players in action during the wheelchair fencing championship.

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The first wheelchair fencing championship concluded Sunday under the patronage and presence of Honorary President of Irada Disabled Sports Club Sheikha Suhaila Al-Sabah, Secretary General of Kuwait Paralympic Committee Sharifa Al-Ghanem, Chairman of Irada Club Duaij Al-Hajeri, Chairman of Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Shafi Al-

Hajeri and Chairman of the Referees Committee at Kuwait Fencing Federation Rashid Al-Shamali.

Abdelaziz Al-Shatti took first place in epee, followed by Abdallah Al-Duraei, with Fahad Al-Bastaki and Farraj Al-Dousary in third place. Meanwhile, in foil, Ali Al-Nassar took first place and Suleman Al-Tameemi second, as third place went to Khalid Abdelkareem and Humoud Thunayan. In the women's category Reem Al-

Shatti won gold in epee, Khulood Al-Mutairi stood second, while Jumanah Al-Matrouk and Fatima Akbar were third.

Chairman of Irada club Duaij Al-Hajeri said the purpose of the tournament is to develop the technical abilities of the players and add to their experience. He said Kuwait is a leader in fencing and has a full record of achievements at the continental and international levels.

## Djokovic aiming to be 'as ready' as possible for French Open

**BELGRADE:** Novak Djokovic said on Monday that he is aiming to be "as ready as I can be" for the French Open as he prepares for just his third tournament of the season in Belgrade this week. The world number one was deported from Australia ahead of the Australian Open in January over his Covid vaccination status, before also missing Indian Wells and the Miami Open in the United States.

In the Serbian star's absence, Rafael Nadal won a record 21st Grand Slam singles title in Melbourne, moving out of a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer. Djokovic will be hoping to match his great rival's tally at the French Open, which begins on May 22. "Roland Garros is the quintessential clay-court tournament and I'm partly already there in my thoughts, in terms of preparation and everything I'm doing at the moment to get there as ready as I can be," Djokovic told reporters in Belgrade.

The 34-year-old also said he was planning to play in the Madrid Masters and the Italian Open ahead of Roland Garros. "My current plans include Madrid and Rome," he added. "It depends, really, on my result here and the shape I'm in. We'll decide then." Djokovic lost in his opening match of the Monte Carlo Masters last week to eventual runner-up Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, after a quarterfinal exit in Dubai in February.

"I was not fully ready for the tournament in Monte Carlo and I knew that before the tournament started," he said. "However, I need match practice and this is the surface (clay) that requires a lot of time spent on the court during training sessions, and even more during matches. I hope to play more matches in Belgrade than in Monte Carlo."

Djokovic won an ATP event in the Serbian capital last season, the week before the start of the French Open, which he won for the second time despite trailing Stefanos Tsitsipas by two sets in the final. "I had never before played a tournament in the week ahead of Roland Garros but last year I decided to do just that. "Because it was Belgrade and I needed the feeling that the audience is the wind beneath my wings. It came true, I won the tournament, and it turned out I made a good decision ahead of the French Open."

Top seed Djokovic will face a compatriot when he



**BELGRADE:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic attends a press conference during the Serbia Tennis Open ATP 250 series tournament on April 18, 2022. —AFP

enters the tournament in the second round - either Laslo Djere or Hamad Medjedovic. He could face former US Open champion and two-time French Open finalist Dominic Thiem in the quarterfinals, as the Austrian plays his first ATP event since last June after a series of injury setbacks. —AFP

## Retired tennis no.1 Barty to play celeb golf event

**SYDNEY:** Former tennis world number one Ashleigh Barty will play in a golf exhibition tournament, organizers said Tuesday, heightening speculation that she could become a golfer after her shock retirement. The three-time Grand Slam

champion stunned the tennis world when she stepped away from the sport in March, with the multi-talented 25-year-old coy about her plans.

But Icons Series organizers revealed that she would be among the sports stars competing in the US event in June. "We're thrilled to launch the Icons Series in America with a Mount Rushmore of the world's best athletes, all incredible golfers and fierce competitors," Icons Series chief executive Thomas Brookes said in a statement.

US Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola and

boxing legend Oscar De La Hoya are among other famous competitors due to take part at the Liberty National Golf Club in New Jersey. The 28 competitors will be split into Team USA, led by Fred Couples, and Team Rest of the World, led by Ernie Els.

The US tournament is the first in a series, with plans to host editions around the world including in Barty's home of Australia. "I'm excited to be part of the Icons Series and I hope through my participation in the series that we can encourage more women and girls to partici-

pate in golf around the world." Barty, known to be a talented golfer, told the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper.

"It's such a unique opportunity to have fun, test yourself and compete against the world's greatest athletes in a sport that we are all so passionate about." Few athletes can boast such a varied sporting resume as the down-to-earth Barty. She once ditched tennis and excelled in top-level cricket, and picked up her golf clubs in September 2020 to claim the Brookwater Golf Club women's title near Brisbane. —AFP

## Sports

# Barca top-4 finish in danger after shock defeat by Cadiz

**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's place in La Liga's top four looks much less secure after they suffered a surprise 1-0 defeat at home to relegation-battling Cadiz on Monday. Lucas Perez's close-range finish early in the second half condemned Barca to a second consecutive defeat, on the back of their shock exit at the hands of Eintracht Frankfurt in the Europa League on Thursday.

Barcelona stayed second but are level on points with both Sevilla in third and Atletico Madrid in fourth while Real Betis in fifth are only three points behind. Xavi Hernandez's team do have a game in hand over the trio below them. But the loss means Barca have won only one of their last four matches, that victory coming via an injury-time winner against 19th-placed Levante.

Any hopes they had of making leaders Real Madrid feel uncomfortable are surely over, with Madrid 15 points clear at the top, having played a game more. "We must be self-critical," said Xavi. "We have to say things to each others' faces. This is Barca and we have to be better. At home we have to show more hunger, more faith, more character. This was a final and we have not played it like that." Cadiz climb out of the relegation zone to 16th, two points clear of the bottom three.

The defeat by Frankfurt on Thursday was a particularly bitter pill to swallow, given the Catalans effectively ceded their home advantage by allowing more than 20,000 away fans into Camp Nou. Xavi said on Saturday Barca had felt "robbed in their own home" and one of the club's prominent fan groups boycotted the Cadiz game in protest, with

the section behind the goal at one end empty. "We need everyone," said Xavi. "Barca has to be more united than ever now."

Controversy surrounded Gerard Pique on Monday too, after a report by El Confidencial said the defender's company, Kosmos, are to receive €24 million for their part in moving the Spanish Super Cup to Saudi Arabia. Pique was not involved against Cadiz as he had a hamstring injury. As well as issues around the Frankfurt fans and Pique, Xavi finds himself confronting the team's first real dip since he was appointed in November.

Barcelona can ill-afford to miss out on Champions League qualification, with the club's debts at the start of the season amounting to more than a billion euros. Cadiz should have been in front at half-time but Perez shot wide after being given a simple finish by Ruben Sobrino. Ousmane Dembele had Barcelona's best chance but the Frenchman was unable to finish off a driving run, his shot straight at Cadiz goalkeeper Jeremias Ledesma.

Cadiz continued to create the better chances and two minutes into the second half, they took the lead. Jordi Alba lost the ball in midfield and Alex's cross found Sobrino, whose header was parried by Marc-Andre ter Stegen, only for Perez to follow in. Alex should have put Barca out of sight but fired wide from Ivan Alejo's pull-back before Barcelona's Luuk de Jong, on as a substitute, headed straight at Ledesma. Sergio Busquets tested Ledesma with a late strike from distance before Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang volleyed straight at the goalkeeper late on, Gavi unable to reach the rebound. —AFP



**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Gavi vies with Cadiz's Uruguayan defender Pacha Espino and Cadiz's Spanish midfielder Alex Fernandez during their Spanish League football match at the Camp Nou stadium on April 18, 2022. —AFP

## Shaarawy strikes to dent Napoli's title hopes

**MILAN:** Napoli's bid for a first Serie A title in 32 years suffered a massive setback on Monday as Stephan El Shaarawy's injury-time equalizer snatched a 1-1 draw for Roma. Lorenzo Insigne's early penalty looked to have put third-placed Napoli on track to move within two points of league leaders AC Milan with five matches remaining, but Shaarawy's late intervention left them four points behind.

Reigning champions Inter Milan are two points behind their city rivals in second place, but with a game in hand. Luciano Spalletti's Napoli are hoping to lift a first Scudetto since the second Diego Maradona-inspired triumph in 1990, but this bad-tempered draw could prove decisive come the end of the campaign. "There is a bit of disappointment," Spalletti told DAZN. "We did not manage to keep the ball as I had hoped at the end of the match and we conceded a largely avoidable goal."

The point was not much help to the top-four hopes of Jose Mourinho's Roma, who missed the chance to cut the gap to fourth-placed Juventus to three points. It has been a potentially ruinous spell for Napoli, following a 3-2 home loss to Fiorentina last time out. Napoli took the lead in the 11th minute at the Estadio Diego Armando Maradona after Hirving Lozano ran onto a ball into the box and was challenged from behind by Roma defender Roger Ibanez.

The referee initially did not award a penalty, but after a VAR review, he pointed to the spot and Insigne picked out the bottom corner to score his ninth league goal of the season. The home side could have doubled their advantage in the 20th minute, but Victor Osimhen's shot was blocked by Chris Smalling and visiting goalkeeper Rui Patricio



**NAPLES:** Roma's Italian midfielder Nicolò Zaniolo fights for the ball with Napoli's Italian goalkeeper Alex Meret during their Italian Serie A match at the Diego Armando Maradona stadium on April 18, 2022. —AFP

pushed away Lozano's follow-up effort. Roma almost equalised against the run of play before half-time as Osimhen flicked Lorenzo Pellegrini's free-kick against his own crossbar.

### Roma angered by penalty decision

England striker Tammy Abraham had a chance to level on the hour mark, but he mistimed a close-range header. A tense match threatened to boil over with four players booked in less than 20 second-half minutes. Roma started to look dangerous going forwards and were furious that they were not given a penalty when Nicolò Zaniolo was tackled by Napoli keeper Alex Meret. The referee showed a

red card to substitute goalkeeper Daniel Fuzato on the bench in the aftermath.

Mourinho was with the officials after the match, saying: "We need more respect, today it seems we didn't have the right to play to win." Osimhen had an opportunity to put the game to bed late on as he bore down on goal, but the Nigeria striker poked into the side-netting. Spalletti decided to replace Osimhen and Insigne late on and that proved costly. Abraham's flick found substitute Shaarawy who fired a low shot into the bottom corner in the first of eight minutes of added time. The momentum was all with the visitors, but Napoli at least held on for a disappointing draw. —AFP

## Union plot cup upset by cleaning or paying for pizza

**BERLIN:** Paying for pizza and cleaning are some of the unusual methods Union Berlin are using in their bid to pull off a German Cup semi-final upset at in-form RB Leipzig on Wednesday. Leipzig are on a 14-game unbeaten run which has seen them power into the last four of both the Europa League and German Cup, in which they host Union at home.

"We need a perfect performance to pull off a surprise," admitted Union coach Urs Fischer, who said beating Leipzig at home would be a "shock" result. His caution is understandable against a Leipzig side seeking a third German Cup final appearance in four seasons. Leipzig's French forward Christopher Nkunku is in outstanding form this season, scoring 30 goals including 17 in the

Bundesliga, where he has provided 15 assists.

Since last December's shock 2-1 home win over Manchester City in the Champions League group stages, Leipzig have recorded 15 wins, two draws and lost just twice. When Domenico Tedesco took over from Jesse Marsch just after the City win, Leipzig were 11th in the Bundesliga. They are now third in Germany's top flight after Dominik Szoboszlai's late goal on Sunday earned a 1-0 win at Leverkusen.

Leipzig bowed out of the Champions League despite downing Pep Guardiola's City in the final group game, but powered into the Europa League semis, where they face Scottish side Rangers, by knocking out Real Sociedad and Atalanta. To prepare for Wednesday's German Cup semi-final, Union boss Fischer held a mini training camp on Easter Monday, where penalties were also practiced.

As punishment, each spot kick which failed to hit the net meant paying for pizza or cleaning the changing rooms among the light-hearted punishments dished out. 'Iron Union', as they are nick-

named, have forged a reputation as a tough team to beat. They earned a third straight win on Sunday as early goals by Taiwo Awoniyi and Grisca Proemel sealed a 2-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt, who had three days previously beaten Barcelona away at Camp Nou. "We need a performance like Sunday's over 90 minutes against Leipzig," stressed Fischer.

Union are chasing only their second cup final appearance since losing 2-0 to Schalke in 2001. RB Leipzig, who were founded in 2009, are seeking their third German Cup final appearance having lost to Bayern Munich in 2019, then Dortmund last season. Second-tier Hamburg and Bundesliga side Freiburg clash in Tuesday's other semifinal.

Despite a heavy fixture list due to competing in three competitions, Leipzig are staying fresh by using the breadth of their squad. Tedesco made seven changes to Sunday's starting side at Leverkusen from the team which won 2-0 at Atalanta three days previously when Nkunku scored both goals. "That spirit is very important, so that we can make the changes without losing quality," said Tedesco. —AFP

## Derby relegated, Bournemouth close on Premier League

**LONDON:** Wayne Rooney said he wants to rebuild Derby County but a takeover has to happen soon to keep him at Pride Park after the club was relegated from the Championship on Monday. The Rams valiant attempt to stay up despite a 21-point deduction came to an end with a 1-0 defeat at QPR. Reading's recovery from 4-1 down to draw 4-4 at home to Swansea sealed Derby's fate and left Barnsley and Peterborough also on the verge of going down.

Derby delayed Fulham's promotion party with a stunning 2-1 win over the league leaders on Friday, but needed a miracle to haul themselves out of a dire situation caused by financial problems. The club remain in administration, although US businessman Chris Kirchner has been named as the preferred bidder ahead of a potential takeover. "I want to rebuild this club. But the takeover has to happen. If it doesn't, I'm really unsure of my future and the club's future. This takeover has to happen quick," said Rooney.

Derby would be comfortably in mid-table without the points deduction for entering administration and breaching financial sustainability rules in previous seasons. Luke Amos' late goal secured a vital three points for QPR's bid to climb into the playoff places and left Derby 10

points off safety with just three games to play. "I am disappointed, sad, angry, upset, but ultimately proud of the players, staff and fans, who have been excellent," added the former Manchester United and England captain.

"We know we'd be safe without the penalties we've had. This is where we've been left by the previous owner and we've been trying to pick up the pieces from that and trying to pull off something really special. We've got close and haven't managed to do it." Peterborough stayed alive with a 2-0 win at bottom-of-the-table Barnsley, but are seven points adrift of Reading.

The Royals produced a remarkable fightback in the game of the day as eight goals were shared with Swansea with Tom McIntyre snatching a point deep into stoppage time. At the other end of the table, Bournemouth have a four-point

### News in brief

#### Rueda out as Colombia coach

**BOGOTA:** Colombia have removed Reinaldo Rueda as coach of the national team following their failure to qualify for the World Cup, the football federation announced on Monday. The "Cafeteros" failed to qualify for the global extravaganza for the first time since 2010 following a disastrous campaign in which they set a national record of seven straight matches without scoring a goal. It was the second time Rueda, a Colombian, had failed to guide his country to a World Cup having also missed out in 2006 during a previous two-year stint in charge. The Colombian Football Federation said in a statement that it had "agreed with Reinaldo Rueda the termination of his position as technical director ... as well as his coaching team." —AFP

#### Maloney sacked as Hibernian boss

**LONDON:** Hibernian manager Shaun Maloney was sacked on Tuesday after just four months in charge of the Scottish Premiership club. Maloney left Easter Road following Saturday's 2-1 defeat against Edinburgh rivals Hearts in the Scottish Cup semifinal. "Our hope in appointing Shaun Maloney as a young, highly regarded coach was that he would help us take the club forward, but ultimately it didn't work out," Hibernian chairman Ron Gordon said. "We thank Shaun and his coaching staff for all their hard work and efforts and wish them all the best for the future." Former Celtic and Scotland midfielder Maloney quit his role as Belgium assistant manager to succeed Jack Ross at Hibernian in December. —AFP

#### Earthquakes dump Almeyda as coach

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The San Jose Earthquakes, off to the worst start in their Major League Soccer history, dumped Argentine coach Matias Almeyda on Monday after more than three seasons in the post. The 'Quakes, 0-4 with three drawn for a league-worst three points from seven matches, appointed top developmental coach Alex Covelio as interim coach, with former MLS stars Steve Ralston and Chris Wondolowski serving as interim assistants. "Matias has given everything he has to our club and we recognize the efforts he made," Earthquakes managing partner John Fisher said. Almeyda, 48, went 31-42 with 25 drawn in his tenure but San Jose made the playoffs only once since his arrival from Chivas of Mexico. —AFP

cushion over third-placed Huddersfield and two games in hand after a convincing 3-0 win at Coventry. Dominic Solanke struck twice after Jamal Lowe had opened the scoring to move Scott Parker's men to the brink of promotion.

Nottingham Forest ensured Fulham, who are in action on Tuesday at home to Preston, had to wait at least another day to seal promotion with a 4-0 win over 10-man West Brom. Huddersfield all but secured their place in the playoffs as goals from Naby Sarr and Jordan Rhodes earned a 2-0 win at Middlesbrough. Fourth-placed Luton are also in contention for a third promotion in five years as they won 1-0 at Cardiff. Sheffield United remain in the final playoff spot after a 1-1 draw at Bristol City, but are now just one point clear of Millwall, who were 2-1 winners over Hull. —AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: Aaron Gordon #50 of the Denver Nuggets and Andrew Wiggins #22 of the Golden State Warriors go for a rebound in the first half during Game Two of the Western Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Chase Center on April 18, 2022. — AFP

## Brunson's 41 leads Mavs over Utah

WASHINGTON: Jalen Brunson scored a career-high 41 points and Germany's Maxi Kleber added 25 points off the bench to spark the Dallas Mavericks over Utah 110-104 and level their NBA playoff series. The host Mavericks, playing without injured star Luka Doncic, deadlocked the best-of-seven matchup at 1-1 as the scene shifts to Salt Lake City. "We needed this win," Brunson said. "I just tried to go out there and have fun. I'm just being aggressive, trying to make plays, trying to engage multiple people, trying to create problems. Just playing my game."

Brunson sparked a 10-0 Dallas run to put the Mavs ahead 96-93 with 5:40 remaining. Utah scored the next five points but Kleber - who shot 8-for-11, all from 3-point range - followed with back-to-back 3-pointers for a 102-98 Dallas lead and the Jazz never matched them again. "Maxi was huge," Brunson said. "We've just got to keep playing together, no matter what. We're just taking one game at a time. This was great, but we've got to look forward."

The Mavericks made a team-record 22 3-pointers but committed only three turnovers, tying an NBA playoff record. In other playoff games Monday, the host Philadelphia 76ers seized a 2-0 series lead by beating Toronto 112-97 and Golden State ripped Denver 126-106 for a 2-0 series edge. At San Francisco, the visiting Nuggets seized a 43-

31 edge before Golden State closed the second quarter on a 26-8 run over the last seven minutes for a 57-51 halftime lead.

The decisive spurt, which began with a 16-0 run to give the Warriors their first lead, was sparked by the three-guard alignment of Stephen Curry, Jordan Poole and Klay Thompson. "We're executing the best we can," Poole said of the electrifying trio. "We're ready to fight night in and night out." Golden State seized command in the third quarter, leading 101-81 entering the fourth, and cruised to victory.

All-Star guard Curry, coming off the bench in his second game back from a foot injury, scored 34 points on 12-of-17 shooting, going 5-of-10 from 3-point range in 23 minutes. Poole had 29 points on 10-of-16 shooting and eight assists and Thompson contributed 21 points on 9-of-19 shooting. "We all want to see other people get going," Poole said of the Warriors backcourt trio. "We love playing team basketball. We can all get hot at any time. "We all feel like we're really special. Playing together makes us really lethal."

Serbian center Nikola Jokic, last season's NBA Most Valuable Player, led Denver with 26 points but was ejected after a second technical foul with seven minutes remaining.

"We've got it all"  
Philadelphia's Joel Embiid, a Cameroonian center

and like Jokic a 2022 NBA MVP finalist, delivered game highs of 31 points and 11 rebounds. Tyrese Maxey contributed 23 points, nine rebounds and a game-high eight assists for the Sixers while Tobias Harris added 20 points and 10 rebounds and James Harden had 14 points, six rebounds and six assists. As a result, Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers took his 100th career NBA playoff triumph. "We've got it all. We've just got to put it all together on the floor," Embiid said. "We have to keep playing the way we've been playing. We know what we've got to do. We've just got to execute."

Embiid was unhappy about the Sixers' 14 turnovers but pleased with their physical play in outbounding the Raptors 41-35. "These last two games we've been physical, rebounding the ball well, getting second chances," Embiid said. "We didn't do a good job taking care of the ball. We have to do a better job next game."

Toronto jumped ahead 11-2 but the Sixers grabbed a 67-52 halftime lead and pulled away in the third quarter. The Raptors, led by 26 points from O G Anunoby and 20 points each from Pascal Siakam and Fred VanVleet, trimmed their deficit in the final minutes but never threatened. Embiid suffered a right elbow injury late in the third quarter but played to the finish. "It was pretty sore," he said. "But it's the playoffs. Got to fight through it." — AFP



Cristiano Ronaldo and Georgina Rodriguez

## Football rallies around Ronaldo after death of son

MANCHESTER: The football world rallied around Cristiano Ronaldo and his partner Georgina Rodriguez on Tuesday after they announced that their newborn son had died. The 37-year-old Manchester United forward had revealed in a social media post last October that the couple was expecting twins. In a post released on Monday on the Portuguese international's Twitter account, they confirmed the birth of a baby girl.

"It is with our deepest sadness we have to announce that our baby boy has passed away. It is the greatest pain that any parents can feel," Ronaldo and Rodriguez said in a jointly signed statement. "Only the birth of our baby girl gives us the strength to live this moment with some hope and happiness. We would like to thank the doctors and nurses for all their expert care and support. We are all devastated at this loss and we kindly ask for privacy at this very difficult time."

The couple, who met during Ronaldo's time at Real Madrid, have a four-year-old daughter together, while Ronaldo has three other children. The announcement was met with widespread sympathy from across football. "Your pain is our pain, Cristiano," Manchester United tweeted. "Sending love and strength to you and the family at this time."

On their webpage, Real Madrid said that the club and its officials "deeply regret the death of one of the children that our beloved Cristiano Ronaldo and his partner, Georgina Rodriguez, were expecting". "Real Madrid joins the grief of the whole family and wants to show them all our love and affection," the Spanish giants said.

Rival clubs, among them Leeds United, Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur, also sent condolences. "All of us here at Liverpool FC send our deepest condolences to you, Georgina and the family," Liverpool tweeted. Ronaldo's United teammates also joined the outpouring of sympathy. "Thoughts are with you and Georgina, brother I'm so sorry," forward Marcus Rashford wrote on Twitter. Goalkeeper David de Gea responded to Ronaldo's announcement with a simple heart emoji. — AFP



BOSTON: Peres Jepchirchir of Kenya and Evans Chebet of Kenya pose for a portrait with the trophy after placing first in the professional women's and men's division during the 126th Boston Marathon on April 18, 2022. —AFP

## Kenyans Jepchirchir, Chebet win Boston Marathon titles

BOSTON: Kenya's Evans Chebet held off two past champions to win the men's crown and reigning Olympic champion compatriot Peres Jepchirchir captured the women's title on Monday at the 126th Boston Marathon. Chebet won in two hours, six minutes and 51 seconds to top the first all-Kenyan podium since 2012, beating 2019 Boston winner Lawrence Cherono by 30 seconds with defending champion Benson Kipruto third in 2:07:27. "I'm extremely proud," Chebet said through a translator. "I knew I had it in my legs to win."

Jepchirchir, last year's New York Marathon

champion, won her Boston debut by edging Ethiopia's Ababel Yeshaneh in the final strides, taking her fifth victory in a row since 2019 in 2:21:01. That was good enough to defeat Yeshaneh by four seconds with Kenya's Mary Ngugi third in 2:21:32. As they battled into the final mile, Jepchirchir made three pass attempts but Yeshaneh countered each. The Kenyan made her final move down the stretch and surged in the last 100 meters for the triumph.

"When I arrived to 41km, I knew was going to win the race," Jepchirchir said. "I was just keeping the energy for the finishing. Ababel was so strong. For me, it was just keeping my energy for the finishing kick. I just believed in myself. I usually have hope. When you see the tape for finishing, that's when the strength comes." Jepchirchir ranked Boston among her greatest victories. "It means a lot to me," she said. "I believe in myself more. I still have more victories to come." — AFP

## Former world champ Khan robbed at gunpoint

LONDON: Former world champion boxer Amir Khan has revealed he was robbed at gunpoint in London on Monday. Khan, 35, said he and his wife Faryal were safe after the incident, in which he had a watch stolen after being confronted by two men with a gun. "Just had my watch taken off me at gun point in East London, Leyton," the British fighter tweeted. "I crossed the road with Faryal, luckily she was a few steps behind me. Two men ran to me, he asked for my watch whilst having a gun pointed in my face. The main thing is we're both safe."

A statement from the Metropolitan Police said: "Police were called at 21:15 on Monday, April 18 to High Road, Leyton. "A man aged in his 30s is alleged to have been approached by two males who threatened him with a firearm before stealing his watch and fleeing. There were no reports of any shots fired or any injuries. Police responded and conducted an area search. At this very early stage there have been no arrests. An investigation has begun and police are following a number of enquiries." Khan, the former WBA and IBF light-welterweight champion, was beaten by fellow Briton Kell Brook in a sixth-round stoppage in Manchester in February. — AFP



Amir Khan