



3 Ramadan: A month packed with Kuwait historical events



10 Dung power: India taps new energy cash cow



16 Liverpool thrash Man United 4-0 to go top



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	03:54
Shurooq	05:16
Dhuhr	11:47
Asr	15:22
Maghrib	18:17
Isha	19:39

VOLVO

Churches in Jerusalem resist Zionist settlers and radicals

Blinken urges Zionists, Palestinians to 'end the cycle of violence'



JERUSALEM: Zionist policemen stand guard in front of Muslim women praying in front of the Dome of the Rock mosque as a group of religious Jewish men and women visit the Temple Mount, which is known to Muslims as the Haram Al-Sharif (The Noble Sanctuary), at the Al-Aqsa mosques compound in the old city of Jerusalem on April 20, 2022. — AFP

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

"Jerusalem also has her Christian character, and that is what is threatened," he said, as Christian worshippers readied for Easter celebrations. The patriarch charged that hardline Jewish settlers, known for a push to take over properties of Palestinian families, are also waging a campaign for control of Christian-owned lands. "Those radicals are driven by their ideology," Theophilus III said. "Their ideology is the syndrome of messianism, when they claim 'we want to redeem the Holy Land from the profanes.'"

The nationalist settler group Ateret Cohanim has worked to "Judaize" east Jerusalem—a Palestinian sector illegally annexed by Zionists according to the UN—by purchasing real estate through front companies and then moving Jewish settlers in. Since 2005, the group and the Orthodox church have been engaged in a complex legal wrangle over ownership of an Old City hostel at the Jaffa Gate entrance to the Christian Quarter.

The dispute took a fresh turn on March 27, when settlers took over part of the Petra Hotel by "breaking and entering", according to the Greek Orthodox

Church. Theophilus III said the Zionist government "promised us that they will try their best to deal with this issue, and put pressure on those radical groups to get out". But, after more than two weeks, the settlers are still there, he said. "It seems that the state doesn't have the power or the will to (put pressure) on those people," he added.

Hagit Ofran, of the anti-settler group Peace Now, said the dispute is "a big, big drama, because it's such a strategic place at the entrance to the Christian Quarter, a huge compound where they can bring hundreds of settlers." Ofran warned that "if they succeed, this is changing the whole character of the Old City—and of course of the Christian Quarter." About 300 Jewish settlers already live in the Christian Quarter.

The churches have voiced alarm about the trend, as well as acts of vandalism and anti-Christian aggression, arguing the problem extends beyond the ancient heart of Jerusalem. On the outskirts of the Old City, on the Mount of Olives where several prominent churches stand, Zionist entity plans to expand a park that will encroach on land belonging to Christian institutions.

The three communities concerned—Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Franciscan—sent a strongly worded letter to the authorities in February. "In recent years, we cannot help but feel that various entities are seeking to minimize, not to say eliminate, any non-Jewish characteristics of the Holy City by attempting to alter the status quo on the holy mountain," they wrote.

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Ramadan Kareem

Last 10 nights: A gift of divine proportions

By Mariam-Joyce DSouza

We are in a month of magnanimous goodness, great righteousness and abundant blessings. The blessed month of Ramadan is praised abundantly in the Noble Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (PBUH). It is the month of the Quran and goodness, and the month when people return to their Creator in a unique demonstration of faith.

This month is granted a privilege that is not granted to any other month, which is ten blessed nights - the last ten nights when God The Almighty blesses us in munificent ways. Thus, we should make the best use of these ten nights by: Observing Ihtikaaf (staying in seclusion for worship) in a mosque. Ihtikaaf is very important for those who devote themselves to the Creator and get rid of many endless worldly attractions by refraining from those countless issues in which he/she usually indulges.

If one cannot observe this complete retreat, he/she should aim to spend long hours in worship. Praying during most part of the night (Qiyaam) and Dhikr (remembrance of Allah). With the start of the last ten days of Ramadan, the Prophet (PBUH) used to keep his family awake for the prayers all night and abstained from conjugal rights. The least people can offer in the last ten days of Ramadan is increasing Qiyaam and reviving the night.

The last ten nights are the right time to increase reading the Holy Quran, reflecting on and understanding the messages mentioned therein along with increasing Dhikr (remembrance of Allah). These last ten nights should be devoted to worship. A wise person is he who directs his capacities and time to benefit the most from these days of blessings and enlightenment.

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Lebanon's crisis exposes kids to deadly viruses

BEIRUT: Child vaccination rates in Lebanon have dropped by more than 30 percent, compounding a health crisis marked by drug shortages and an exodus of trained professionals, the United Nations said Wednesday. "The critical drop in vaccination rates has left children vulnerable to potentially deadly diseases such as measles, diphtheria and pneumonia," the UN

children's agency UNICEF said in a new report titled "A worsening health crisis for children".

"Routine vaccination of children has dropped by 31 per cent when rates already were worryingly low, creating a large pool of unprotected children vulnerable to disease and its impact." Since 2019, Lebanon has been grappling with an unprecedented financial crisis that the World Bank says is of a scale usually associated with wars. The currency has lost more than 90 percent of its value and more than 80 percent of the population now lives below the poverty line. "Many families cannot even afford the

Continued on Page 6

'Quran burning' tests Swedish tolerance

STOCKHOLM: Riots across Sweden sparked by a notorious anti-immigrant provocateur threatening to tour the country burning the Quran has challenged the country's limits to free speech. Police clashed with groups of mostly masked young men in several towns and cities after the anti-Islam Danish-Swedish politician

Rasmus Paludan announced his Quran burning "tour" for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Swedish police insisted they had to grant permits for Paludan's incendiary events because of the country's liberal freedom of speech laws. But several Muslim countries have reacted angrily, with Iraq's foreign ministry warning the affair could have "serious repercussions" on "relations between Sweden and Muslims in general."

Despite the outcry, justice minister Morgan Johansson stressed the importance of protecting the country's freedoms.

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West vows more arms, sanctions against Russia

KRAMATORSK: Western allies on Tuesday pledged more military supplies and sanctions to assist Ukraine as its troops battle against Russian forces intensifying their offensive in the east of the country. Ukraine's armed forces said fighting had increased throughout Donbas, and the ministry of defense reported heavy clashes including near the town of Marinka in the

Donetsk region.

Responding to the new Russian push, the United States and European Union agreed to increase "Moscow's international isolation", during a virtual meeting between US President Joe Biden and European leaders on Tuesday. "We will further tighten our sanctions against Russia and step up financial and security assistance for Ukraine," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen wrote on Twitter. Russia's defense ministry said that "high-precision air-based missiles" had hit 13 Ukrainian positions in parts of Donbas while other air strikes "hit 60 military assets", including in towns close to the eastern frontline.

Biden suggested Tuesday to reporters that the United States would send more artillery - as the latest \$800 million US aid package starts to arrive in Ukraine,

including 18 howitzers, 40,000 artillery rounds, 200 armored personnel carriers and 11 helicopters. "We will continue to provide them more ammunition as we will provide them more military assistance," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in response to fears that Ukraine was running low.

The Pentagon said Tuesday that Ukraine had also recently received fighter planes and aircraft parts to bolster its air force, declining to specify the number of aircraft and their origin. Ukrainian forces "have available to them more fixed-wing fighter aircraft than they did two weeks ago," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters. Kyiv has asked its Western partners to provide MiG-29s that its pilots already know how to fly, and which a handful of Eastern European countries have. — AFP



BEIRUT: Vehicles drive in the centre of Lebanon's capital Beirut, while the background shows a giant billboard for the upcoming parliamentary election. — AFP



MALMO, Sweden: Photo shows a burning car near Rosengard in Malmo. Plans by a far-right group to publicly burn copies of the Quran sparked violent clashes with counter-demonstrators, police said. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Crown Prince receives new Kuwait University President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace Wednesday the newly appointed President of Kuwait University (KU) Dr Yousef Al-Roumi. His

Highness the Crown Prince wished Dr Al-Roumi success in his new post. Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf was present at the reception. His Highness

the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also received at Bayan Palace Minister Mudhaf, accompanied by the newly appointed President of Kuwait University Dr Roumi. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf, and the newly appointed President of Kuwait University Dr Yousef Al-Roumi.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf, and the newly appointed President of Kuwait University Dr Yousef Al-Roumi. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

Amir's representative visits Kuwait Disabled Sport Club

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 Tuesday visited Kuwait Disabled



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks with members of the Kuwait Disabled Sport Club.

Sport Club. His Highness the Crown Prince was received at the club by Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajhi, Director General of Public Authority for Sports Imoud Fulaiteh and head of the Club Shafi Mohammad Al-Hajri. On this occasion, His Highness the Crown Prince was given a souvenir. During the visit, 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 delivered a speech in which he conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir to the club's members. "At this blessed night we meet with our brothers and sons at the club to congratulate them on the holy month of Ramadan," Sheikh Mishal said. "This visit comes to confirm that the club's members have a status in our hearts and the Kuwaiti society's," His Highness the Crown Prince added. He wished every success to everyone in order to serve and raise the dear homeland's status, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir.

Meanwhile, chairman of the club Shafi Mohammad Al-Hajri delivered a speech in which he congratulated His Highness the Crown Prince on Ramadan. Hajri appreciated the visit of His Highness the Crown Prince, thanking him for supporting the club that helps the athletes achieve further accomplishments at several competitions. He stated that the disabled team could win Olympic medals in the name of Kuwait, thanks to the State's support. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir. — KUNA



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

Crown Prince visits Kuwait Blind Association

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 Tuesday visited Kuwait Blind Association. His Highness the Crown Prince delivered a speech in which he conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir to the association's members on the holy month of Ramadan. "On this occasion, we confirm to you that you have a strong insight and can make several achievements by your will. We support you and meet your demands," Sheikh Mishal said. His Highness the Crown Prince wished every success to the association's staff and all Kuwaitis in order to serve and raise the dear homeland's status, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. During the visit, 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 received by Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development, and Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Urban Development Mubarak Al-Mutairi, and Chairman of the association Fayed Al-Azmi and its secretary Mansour Al-Enzi. Meanwhile, the Chairman of the association welcomed His Highness the Crown Prince, conveying his congratulations and greetings to His Highness the Amir on Ramadan. He pointed to several activities and facilities established at the association to help their members practice many games. He wished further security, safety and stability to Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir. Azmi also wished His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince everlasting good health. At the end, Poet Seif Al-Khalifan read out a poem that pleased the attendees. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed at the Kuwait Blind Association.



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

Canadian ambassador to Kuwait visits Dasman Diabetes Institute

KUWAIT: The Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Aliya Mawani paid a field visit to Dasman Diabetes Institute, which was established by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. She was met by Dr Qais Saleh Al-Duwairi, Director-General, and Tarek Abdullah Aleryan, Director of Public Relations and Media at Dasman Diabetes Institute. The ambassador's visit aimed at getting to know closely the important institutions in Kuwait and strengthening scientific cooperation. During her visit to the

institute, many scientific and research topics and issues of common interest between the two sides were discussed. Dr Duwairi briefed the ambassador about the institute's scientific progress, its importance and its role in the service of scientific research in Kuwait, discussing ways to enhance joint research and scientific cooperation between the Institute and the Canadian institutes and universities. In turn, Ambassador Aliya Mawani praised the institute's impressive developments and achievements.



KUWAIT: (From left) Zahraa, Anoud Al-Dhafiri, Hanaa Jamal, Dr. Ali Mulla Ali, Abdellatif Sharaa and Mohammad Shaalan.

CAN hosts girgian party for children with cancer

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) held the 'healthy girgian' party for children with cancer on Monday at NBK children hospital in Sabah area. The party was held in cooperation with the 'I want to learn' society and the pediatric medicine society. Gifts were distributed to children, both in outpatient clinics and those hospitalized.

Hospital director Dr Ali Mulla Ali said such activities are important for children due to their special health conditions and their inability to be in large crowds, as many organizations attempt to take activities to them instead. Meanwhile, CAN Manager Hanaa Jamal said, "we wanted to bring joy to children's hearts in cooperation with soci-

eties and private companies." She thanked the hospital for hosting the activity and having children and their parents participate. Jamal said such activities lift the children's

spirits and make them accept treatment. She said this campaign is a month-long activity and has a variety of activities, all focusing on spreading awareness about cancer.



Children receive gifts at the hospital.

Local

Ramadan, a month packed with Kuwaiti historical events

KUWAIT: Head of Abdullah Al-Othman historical center, historian Anwar Al-Refai, displayed numerous historical events witnessed by Kuwait during the month of Ramadan. Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Refai mentioned that the year 1890, colloquially known as "Al-Dabba" year, was named after small locusts as they flooded the country during Ramadan of that year. He also noted that the British protection treaty signed by late Amir Mubarak Al-Sabah also took place in Ramadan of the year 1899. Refai spoke of what he considered the most famous Ramadan event, the building of the third wall which took place over two months in 1920. Kuwaitis broke their fast and headed to construction site, where they labored all night. The wall is an embodiment of solidarity between the leadership and the people as it was constructed to bolster the security of the land.

The historian also touched on "Al-Hadama" year 1934, or year of destruction, known as such because of the destructive rains that wrecked hundreds of homes. Mid Ramadan of the same year, Sheikh

Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed deal with Kuwait oil company Ltd. for oil excavation and production. Furthermore, Refai added, late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah in Ramadan issued a decree in Ramadan of 1962 dividing the country into three governorates, assima, hawally and Ahmadi. Ramadan of 1963 saw the inauguration of first elected parliament, the National Assembly, and the very first dismissal of National Assembly took place in Ramadan of 1976.

In 1985, on the sixth of Ramadan, late Kuwait Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was subject to an assassination attempt while passing through Arabian Gulf Street. In Ramadan of 1986, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah opened the Grand Mosque, Kuwait's most prominent Islamic architectural site. The first parliamentary elections to be held in Ramadan was in July of 2013. Refai added that the most notable event to take place in Ramadan is the suicidal bombing that took place in Al-Saddeq mosque in 2013, martyring 27 Kuwaiti worshippers. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The Grand Mosque, Kuwait's most prominent Islamic architectural site, was inaugurated during Ramadan in 1986. —KUNA

Gulf Bank organizes 'Naqsat Al-Khamis' during Ramadan

KUWAIT: In celebration of Kuwaiti customs and traditions, and in support of small and medium-sized enterprises, Gulf Bank is organizing a weekly "Naqsat Al-Khamis" initiative on Thursdays during Ramadan. Gulf Bank is collaborating with various Kuwaiti restaurants and bakeries as part of an ongoing series of community events that the Bank hosts for customers and the local community throughout Ramadan.

"By reviving this authentic Kuwaiti custom, we aim to communicate with our local community during the holy month. At the same time, the initiative is a wonderful opportunity to support bakeries and restaurants by helping them to market and advertise their products," said Duaa Shashtari, Senior Corporate Communications Officer at Gulf Bank.

She indicated that the Bank has collaborated with multiple shops and bakeries in preparing "Naqsat Al-Khamis" during Ramadan, an initia-

tive that has been widely greeted and by members of the local community who are eager to encourage young entrepreneurs.

She noted that "Naqsat Al-Khamis," a valuable local custom, has evolved from its earlier form of distributing simple dishes of home food, and embodies the spirit of brotherhood and neighborly love. Today, the custom is also celebrated by major community institutions, including Gulf Bank in collaboration with SMEs, and falls within Gulf Bank's framework of goals to communicate with the local community and distribute SME products to individuals and families.

Shashtari also noted that "Naqsat Al-Khamis" is one of the charitable events organized by Gulf Bank during the holy month of Ramadan. The initiative reflects the Bank's sixty year-long history of serving the local community, and highlights Gulf Bank's role in Kuwait's economic and social history.

Shashtari reiterated Gulf Bank's keenness to promote and implement various sustainability initiatives at the environmental, societal and economic levels, in keeping with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the national development plan (Kuwait Vision 2035), and Gulf Bank's 2025 Strategy.



Duaa Shashtari

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.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait have right to share Al-Durra resources: Saudi Cabinet

JEDDAH: The Cabinet of Saudi Arabia reiterated on Tuesday the right of both the Kingdom and Kuwait to exploit the natural resources and continue developing the Al-Durra oilfield, located in the divided submerged area. The right to share the natural resources of the divided area is enshrined in the minutes of the meeting held by both countries on March 21, 2022, the Cabinet noted in a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). The Cabinet meeting, chaired by King Salman bin Abdulaziz, reviewed the latest developments in the region and the world, with emphasis on the storming by Zionist police of Al-Aqsa Mosque in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Cabinet calls on the international community to shoulder its responsibility for holding the occupation forces fully responsible for these crimes and violations, citing their negative consequences on the chances of reviving the peace process in the Middle East. In a statement to the SPA following the session, Acting Minister of Media Dr Majid bin Abdullah Al-Qasabi said the Cabinet discussed the situation in Ukraine. The Cabinet stresses the Kingdom's support for efforts that could lead to a political solution to the crisis and achieve security and stability, stating that the Kingdom will continue to stand by the affected and needy people around the world to alleviate their suffering, the minister noted. —KUNA

Romanian Red Cross praises Kuwait's humanitarian efforts

VIENNA: General Director of Romanian Red Cross, Ioan Silviu Lefter, praised Wednesday Kuwait's humanitarian role in aiding all those in need, especially Ukrainian refugees. After meeting with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) head of board of directors Anwar Al-Hasawi, Lefter expressed gratitude to the society for efforts supporting Ukrainian refugees in Romania. He mentioned that the two looked into ways of bolstering mutual collaboration and coordination, and discussed ways to aid Ukrainian refugees, touching on the role of KRCS in aiding those subjected to natural or manmade catastrophes. Meanwhile, Hasawi commended the hospitality and coordination efforts of the Romanian Red Cross, indicating that KRCS is

keen on collaborating with humanitarian organizations to further relief work. Hasawi also added that logistic and material efforts aiding countries receiving Ukrainian refugees must be doubled.

A Kuwaiti Air Defense plane with 40 tons of medical aid on board has landed at Bucharest International Airport on Tuesday in a bid to alleviate the sufferings and woes of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. The Kuwaiti humanitarian gesture came in response to international calls for sending humanitarian and relief assistance to Ukrainian internally displaced persons and refugees. Kuwaiti Ambassador to Romania Talal Al-Hajri and embassy staff welcomed the accompanying team of the humanitarian aircraft to the airport. The ambassador said Kuwait's relief aid came at the behest of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, reflecting Kuwait's humanitarian role in easing out the anguish of people worldwide. He added that the initiative came in response to an international humanitarian appeal for helping Ukrainian displaced persons and refugees. —KUNA



The KRCS delegation in a photo with the Director General of the Romanian Red Cross.



Kuwait relief aircraft lands in Bucharest carrying aid for Ukraine refugees.

On the occasion of the



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News in brief

Kuwaiti, Japanese FMs discuss ties

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Japanese counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi discussed on Wednesday bilateral relations and ways to develop them. During a phone conversation, the two officials also touched on recent regional and international developments.

Interior Ministry ready

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry announced it has completed preparations to secure worship places, prevent violations and maintain traffic around Kuwait during the last 10 days of Ramadan.

Kuwait oil price at \$113.41 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 52 cents to \$113.41 per barrel on Tuesday as opposed to \$112.89 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Wednesday. At the global level, the Brent crude went down \$5.61 to \$107.25 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by 5.65 to \$102.56 pb.

Kuwait welcomes oath swearing

KUWAIT: Kuwait welcomed the oath swearing of the head and members of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, deeming it as a historical step in the history of Yemen. A statement by the Foreign Minister congratulated President of the Council Rashad Al-Alimi and members on their oath swearing, which occurred yesterday in front of parliament in Aden. The State of Kuwait will be supporting the Yemeni brethren and the council on its efforts to end the conflict in Yemen and bringing peace and prosperity to the country, added the statement.

Kuwait parliament denounces Zionist aggression

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti National Assembly condemned the recurrent Zionist aggression on Islamic and Christian holy sites and on Palestinian rights, along with recent Zionist incidents of breaking into Al-Aqsa Mosque. In a press statement, the parliament's caucus commended the steadfastness of the unarmed and defenseless Palestinian people in Jerusalem, while boasting about Kuwait's official and unofficial support for Palestinian struggle. It called on the international community to press for protecting Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, halting Zionist violations on the holy site, stopping incursions into Palestinian refugee camps and cities, and releasing all Palestinian prisoners.

BSK celebrates Festival of Achievement and Graduation 2022

KUWAIT: The British School of Kuwait (BSK) celebrated the achievements of their Year 11-13 students with a glittering graduation ceremony held at The Regency Hotel recently. Following the national anthems of Kuwait and the United Kingdom, Year 13 student and Deputy Head Girl, Reem Elassy delivered a reading from the Holy Quran. This was followed by the first speech of the evening, offered by BSK Chairman Sadiq Al-Mutawa when he delivered his Welcome Address, reflecting upon both the efforts and successes of all involved in utilizing technology in support of learning as well as the joy of having students back on campus once again.

The school was also privileged to be able to include within the event program a speech from Guest of Honor Dr Salman Al-Lafi, Director General of the Private Education Department who congratulated the graduates and spoke of the bright futures ahead of them, praising the efforts of the school to promote both the academic excellence and personal growth of their students and the distinguished reputation of the school.

The roll of honor included the graduation tiers of 180 recipients as well as details of the subject prize and commendations awards. For Year 11 this was



Sadiq Al-Mutawa, Chairman, delivers his speech.

Zain family gathered at annual ghabga

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, celebrated with its employees the annual Ramadan Ghabga at Al-Jawaher Hall in Four Seasons Hotel. The gathering was held in a beautiful one-family atmosphere, attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan and top executive management.

Zain's Ramadan Ghabga - which came back after a two-year halt due to the pandemic - is one of the company's main social programs held for employees during the Holy Month of Ramadan every year. The event is the biggest out-of-office gathering of Zain employees, and brings them together with senior executive management, further strengthening the links between members of the Zain family and renewing the spirit of teamwork.

During her opening speech, Zain Kuwait Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan said: "I'm very happy to meet you all here tonight. The Holy Month of Ramadan is the biggest season of the year where we look forward to meeting our extended families, as it presents a valuable opportunity to meet one another, and to communicate and forgive. We apply the same at Zain".

Roudhan added: "We have missed family gatherings and missed meeting one another out of office. Without a doubt, our gathering today is a special one that we cherish more than usual. We can see that in the size of this crowd, as it reflects everyone's longing for personally meeting after overcoming a challenging period during the pandemic.

"We thank God for His blessings today. One of the blessings that we lost during the past period is social gathering, and the freedom to communicate, meet, and move around. But before celebrating, we must remember our dear colleagues that we lost because of COVID. We pray for them, and even though we miss their presence with us today, they will always be in our hearts and memories.

Roudhan further noted: "As you all know, the past years were far from easy on everyone, for both individuals and institutions. Economies suffered, businesses closed, and entire ecosystems collapsed. However, at the same time, the pandemic brought with it many opportunities and deep changes in our lifestyle, the way we work, and the way we communicate with our customers.

"During the pandemic, it became vital to review strategies and workflows, diversify income sources, adopt creativity and innovation, as well as evaluate and develop skillsets and talents to ensure they are in line with our strategy, future goals, and digital transformation needs".

Roudhan continued: "All these factors became persistent needs to ensure the continuity and further growth of companies, institutions, and economies. Many large companies vanished because they were not able to keep up with the



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan with Zain's executive management.



Eaman Al-Roudhan recognizes long-serving Zain employees.

changes the pandemic brought forth, which were undoubtedly huge changes.

"At Zain, we were ready to manage these changes, and our early investment in digital transformation brought in fruitful results and helped us support the continuation of normal life and achieve business continuity in Kuwait. I'm very proud of what we have achieved together in the progress of our services and implementing digital transformation, and I'm also proud of the role Zain played in supporting the government to preserve the pace of normal life and continuation of vital sectors like education, medical services, and social communication".

Roudhan recognized the efforts of Zain employees by saying: "You have played a great role in empowering our services, progressing our digital channels, and maintaining the efficiency of our network that allowed everyone to communicate in spite of the accelerated and sudden increase in usage rates, especially broadband and data. Without your dedication and determination during this challenging time, we would not have been able to exert our community role as a company, support government

efforts, nor achieve great financial results".

Roudhan concluded by saying: "We aspire to continue our journey of success and leadership, and I'd like to recognize and thank each and every one of you for supporting me in facing the challenges and difficult times during an extraordinary period. You have supported your nation, government, and the most vulnerable in the community, and worked together to achieve our role within the community".

During the event, Zain recognized and honored employees who have been part of the Zain family for 20, 25, and 30 years, who's efforts, hard work, and achievements added to the company's success during the past years. Zain also showcased a documentary that highlighted the array of initiatives, programs, and activities of the company's extensive social campaign during the holy month of Ramadan.

Zain's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility campaign during the holy month of Ramadan includes many humanitarian and cultural programs, with the aim of celebrating the true spirit the Holy month brings and helping less fortunate people enjoy Ramadan happily.



From Zain's ghabga.



KUWAIT: Class of 2022.

read by Assistant Phase Coordinator Emily Beaton and Assistant Head Teacher Renee Richards, with the Sixth Form rolls of honor being delivered by Assistant Head Teacher John Leonard.

Another highlight of the evening was the music provided by the BSK Orchestra under the guidance of Director of Performance Music, Emily Jeffcott. This includes the playing of the March of The British Grenadiers that accompanied the entrance of the graduates and Johann Strauss' Radetzky March to which they exited the ballroom following their graduation, as well as their excellent rendition of Mishal Al-Arouj's Watani Habibi.

In delivering his address the Principal of BSK, Paul Shropshire, spoke of the importance of adaptability in times of change and of the strength of relationships between students, parents and teachers that was essential in facing the challenges of both online and hybrid learning. He also recognized the efforts of colleagues in supporting one another during the toughest times of the pandemic, as well as the joy of life-long friendships formed by graduates during their time at school.

The special awards section provided an opportunity to recognize some outstanding individual achievements. Academic Excellence Awards were conferred upon the highest achiev-

ing students in each year group. In Year 11 these awards went to Omar Badr, whilst in Year 12 Ibrahim Elhaj and Seung Woo Shin were both recognized for their outstanding grades, as was Year 13 winner Harshul Patel.

The Student Leadership Awards went to Head Students Ashira Sidhu and Husain Akbar on account of their excellent leadership of the student body this year, with the Service Award going to Head of England House Julia Charaf. The prestigious Head Teacher's awards were also awarded to one student from each of the three-year groups, with the accolades going to Fatima Alkandari (Year 11), Sohaila Ibrahim (Year 12) and Diya Sharda (Year 13).

In her address BSK Founder and Director Vera Al-Mutawa warmly congratulated all graduates on their achievement, reflecting upon all the hard-work, sacrifice and resilience they have shown over the past few years as well as the importance of staying connected to one another. She also offered her thanks to parents and families for their continued support and to the entire staff of The British School of Kuwait for their tremendous efforts. Her speech was then followed by the awarding of the most coveted award of the evening, the Founder's Medal of Honor, which this year was bestowed upon Deputy Head Girl, Reem Elassy.



Vera Al-Mutawa, Founder and Director (right) with the graduates.

The penultimate item of the program was the much-anticipated Head Students' Address, with Head Girl Ashira Sidhu and Head Boy Husain Akbar offering their thanks and reflections on their time at BSK on behalf of the student body, as well as their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Having held the last in-person graduation back in 2019 this was a much-anticipated return to what is the highlight of the school calendar and so the rousing finale of the event was the presentation of the Class of 2021-22 by Head Teacher Simon Amura - a fitting end to mark the achievements of an exceptional graduating class.



Ramos-Horta wins E Timor presidential election: Officials

'Miracle' survival of Ukrainian mother and daughter shelled by Russia

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COPENHAGEN, Denmark: File photo shows Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (L) and Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin at a joint press conference in the Prime Minister's Office in Copenhagen, Denmark. Finland's parliament will begin debating whether to seek NATO membership, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Finnish MPs open debate on joining NATO

'I think it will happen quite fast, within weeks, not within months'

HELSINKI, Finland: Finland's parliament Wednesday opened a debate on whether to seek NATO membership, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked a surge in political and public support for joining the military alliance. Despite Russia warning of a nuclear build-up in the Baltic should Finland and neighbouring Sweden join the military alliance, Finland's prime minister said that her country would now decide quickly on whether to apply for membership.

"I think it will happen quite fast. Within weeks, not within months," Prime Minister Sanna Marin said last week. Sweden is also discussing whether to submit a membership bid following Russia's February 24 invasion. The 200 MPs in Finland's Eduskunta last week received a government-commissioned "white paper" that assessed the implications of NATO membership alongside other security options, such as increased bilateral defence agreements.

The report did not make recommendations but stressed that without NATO membership, Finland enjoys no security guarantees despite currently being a partner to the alliance. It said the "deterrent effect" on Finland's defence would be "considerably greater" inside the bloc, while noting that membership also carried obligations for Finland to assist other NATO states.

After two decades of public support for NATO membership remaining steady at 20-30 percent, the war sparked a surge among those in favour to over 60

percent, according to opinion polls. "I used to be against joining NATO but because of this situation I'm now more in favour," said 24-year-old Sofia Lindblom, walking her dog in central Helsinki on Wednesday. "Joining would bring a certain kind of security," she told AFP. On nearby Senate Square, Vuokka Mustonen said the invasion of Ukraine has "utterly

changed" her opinion in favour of NATO membership. "I feel pretty safe, but quite worried," the 69-year-old said.

'Highly likely'
Public statements gathered by Finnish media suggest half of Finland's 200 MPs now support membership, while only around 12 oppose. Others say they will announce a position after detailed discussions. The Finnish government said it hopes to build a parliamentary consensus over the coming weeks, with MPs due to hear from a number of security experts.

On Saturday, Finland's European Affairs Minister Tytti Tuppurainen said

she believed a Finnish application was "highly likely." "But the decision is not yet made," she told Britain's Sky News. However, the Finns "seem to have already made up their mind and there is a huge majority for the NATO membership."

Many analysts predict Finland could submit a bid in time for a NATO summit in June. Any membership bid must be accepted by all 30 NATO states, a process that could take four months to a year. Finland has so far received public assurances from Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg that NATO's door remains open, and support from several members. President Sauli Niinisto said Russia's response could include airspace, territorial violations and hybrid attacks, which Finnish NATO proponents believe the country is well prepared to withstand. Finland declared independence in 1917 after 150 years of Russian rule.

During World War II, its vastly outnumbered army fought off a Soviet invasion, before a peace deal saw it cede several border areas to Moscow. The Nordic nation remained neutral during the Cold War in exchange for Soviet guarantees not to invade. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Finland firmly aligned itself with the West, by joining the EU and becoming a close partner of NATO. Successive Finnish leaders shied away from full membership believing that military non-alignment was the best way to maintain working relations with the Kremlin. — AFP



Joining would bring a certain kind of security

French presidency fight hits final stretch with TV showdown

PARIS, France: Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen braced for a televised debate Wednesday that is likely to prove the climax of this year's turbulent French presidential campaign, with millions of votes still up for grabs just four days before polls open.

The centrist incumbent and his far-right rival will trade blows starting at 9:00 pm (1900 GMT), a rematch of their 2017 face-off that was widely seen as disastrous for Le Pen. But this time Macron will not be the outsider making his first run at public office—he will have a five-year record to defend against a candidate who has softened her extremist edges to present a more mainstream image.

Recent polls give Macron the advantage, at 53 to 56 percent against 44 to 47 percent for Le Pen, who is making her third run at the presidency, though analysts say turnout could still sharply sway



LA PLAINE-SAINT-DENIS, France: File photo shows French journalists and TV hosts Christophe Jakubyszyn (L) and Nathalie Saint-Cricq pose on the TV set installed in a studio, in La Plaine Saint Denis, outside Paris, on the eve of a face-to-face TV debate where French presidential candidates will debate as part of their campaign for the second round. —AFP

the final result. Participation in the first round of voting was just 74 percent, meaning one in four eligible voters stayed home, a pool that both candidates are eager to motivate. In addition, the fiery hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon scored nearly 22 percent in the first round, and he has refused to urge his supporters to vote for Macron in order to keep Le Pen out of the Elysee Palace.

The decisions by those left-leaning vot-

ers—many of whom have expressed a visceral rejection of Macron's policies—could prove crucial. Looking ahead to parliamentary elections in June, often deemed the "third round" in France's electoral system, Melenchon on Tuesday called for a left-wing alliance that would deny either Macron or Le Pen a majority and potentially set him up as prime minister. "I will be prime minister, not because Macron or Le Pen want it, but because the French will have elected me," he told BFM television. — AFP

UK court issues order to extradite Assange to US

LONDON: A UK court on Wednesday issued a formal order to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States to face trial over the publication of secret files relating to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The decision now rests with interior minister Priti Patel, although Assange may still appeal within 14 days of any decision to approve the extradition.

The ruling Wednesday by a magistrate in central London brings the long-running legal saga in the UK courts closer to a conclusion. But Assange's lawyers have until May 18 to make representations to Patel and could potentially launch further appeals on other points in the case.

"No appeal to the High Court has yet been filed by him in respect of the other important issues he raised previously," his lawyers Birnberg Peirce Solicitors said in a statement last month. "That separate process of appeal has, of course, yet to be initiated."

Assange was last month denied permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court against moves to extradite him to the US, where he could face a lifetime in prison. Washington wants to put him on trial in connection with the publication of 500,000 secret military files relating to the US-led wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan. In January last year, the 50-year-old Australian appeared to have won a reprieve on the grounds he was a suicide risk if he was kept in solitary confinement at a maximum security US facility. But the US government appealed, and at a two-day appeal hearing in October its lawyers pointed to diplomatic assurances that Assange would not be held in punishing isolation at a federal supermax prison, and would receive appropriate care.

Jail wedding
Assange appealed that ruling and, in January, two judges allowed him to apply to the country's highest court on "points of law of general public importance". But the court refused permission to appeal, saying the application "didn't raise an arguable point of law".

The case has become a cause celebre for media freedom, with Assange's supporters accusing Washington of trying to muzzle reporting of legitimate security concerns. Assange is wanted to face trial for violating the US Espionage Act by publishing military and diplomatic files in 2010. He could face up to 175 years in jail if found guilty, although the exact sentence is difficult to estimate. — AFP

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International

'Miracle' survival of Ukrainian mother and daughter shelled by Russia

'If it wasn't for the fridge, my daughter would have been killed'

MALA TOKMACHKA, Ukraine: Tanya Los was washing the dishes at home in her southern Ukrainian village Mala Tokmachka on Sunday, her daughter Anastasia by her side, when a Russian rocket crashed into her kitchen. By what she called a "miracle", both women survived unscathed.

But the Los household was not the only civilian infrastructure hit by Russian forces in Mala Tokmachka in recent weeks, as Moscow intensifies attacks on Ukraine's south and east. Rockets have been raining down on the village, which lies around 60 kilometres (40 miles) southeast of regional hub Zaporizhzhia.

One of the village schools was hit, as was the building housing its teachers. A rocket blasted a hole in the facade of the local cultural centre. A village resident who now leads the local territorial defence group, Yuriy, told AFP that several houses were hit by Russian air strikes on Sunday.

One of the houses only has its walls left standing, and seems to have been taken over by cats. Half a dozen tomcats reigned in the yard of the abandoned home. The Los home was far luckier. A corner of the kitchen, which is isolated from the main body of the house, was pierced by a rocket. A plastic screen now covers two sections of the wall in the room and the floor has been damaged.

Constant shelling

"If it wasn't for the fridge, my daughter would have been killed," Tanya Los said. The 59-year-old mother said the pair were "protected" by an Orthodox icon in the room, where a religious calen-

dar still hangs. Anastasia, 24, was too shaken to speak to AFP.

The remnants of the rocket still lay in the family's kitchen, and it is hard to comprehend how the women survived the strike. The almost two-meter silver rocket had broken in two as its tail fins came off during the strike. It should not have left the mother and daughter any chance of surviving.

"It's a miracle," Tanya said. Based on the serial number on the wreckage and using the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment's online archive, AFP found that the rocket was likely fired from a



Several houses hit by Russian air strikes

Soviet-designed BM-27 Uragan missile launcher.

The weapon that hit the Los household would have dispersed submunitions in flight before crashing into the small brick house. "Now every time we hear the sound of bombardment, we run to the basement," Tanya said.

"The problem is that in the last two days it never stops. Day and night." During the hour and a half



ORIKHIV, Ukraine: Members of a family fleeing Russian attacks in the city Melitopol stop on a roadside in Orikhiv, near the southern front of fighting between Ukrainian and Russian forces, south of Zaporizhzhia. —AFP

that AFP was in Mala Tokmachka, the roar of heavy weapons was constant. It often came from nearby as the Ukrainian army launched outgoing fire. Russian forces responded from a distance. AFP found the same in the town of Orikhiv, a dozen kilometres

away. "In the last two or three days, the shelling has been more intense," said Dmytro Malovanyk, a fire brigade deputy chief, whose men intervened Tuesday after a supermarket and doctor's office where damaged by Russian rockets. —AFP



SINGAPORE: Hundreds of protesters in tightly controlled Singapore staged a rare demonstration against the death penalty.

Singapore to hang mentally disabled man next week

SINGAPORE: A mentally disabled Malaysian man will be hanged in Singapore next week after losing a last-ditch appeal, his sister said Wednesday, despite an international outcry about his case. Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam was arrested in 2009 for trafficking a small amount of heroin into the city-state, which has some of the world's toughest drugs laws, and handed a death sentence the following year.

But the plan to hang him sparked widespread criticism due to concerns about his intellectual disabilities, with the European Union and British billionaire Richard Branson among those condemning

it. After a years-long legal battle, the 34-year-old lost his final appeal last month, when judges rejected arguments that executing a man with mental disabilities contravenes international law.

His family has now been informed he will be executed on Wednesday next week, his sister Sarmila Dharmalingam told AFP. Family members, including his mother and three siblings, will travel to the city-state to see him beforehand, she said.

M. Ravi, a Singapore-based human rights lawyer assisting in the case, said the news of Nagaenthran's looming execution was "heartbreaking". "The Singapore state will never be able to recover from the disgrace it's going to face internationally in hanging an intellectually disabled person," he said in a social media post. Last month, the city-state conducted its first execution since 2019 when it hanged a drug trafficker, and fears are growing that several more people will be put to death in the coming months. —AFP

He said he sees "a lack of will" by the authorities to tackle the phenomenon of "anti-Christian hate crime". Schnabel argued that Jerusalem is unique because of its religious diversity, highlighted this year as the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Jewish Passover and Easter overlap. "How boring would Jerusalem be if it were only Jewish, only Christian or only Muslim?" he said. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Zionists and Palestinian leaders Tuesday to "end the cycle of violence" after a sharp escalation in tensions between the two sides in recent days. In separate calls with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and Zionist Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, Blinken stressed "the importance of Zionists and Palestinians working to end the cycle of violence by exercising restraint and refraining from actions that escalate tensions," the State Department said.

He also urged both sides to exercise "restraint" and refrain "from actions that escalate tensions" including at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third-holiest site, but known to Jews as the Temple Mount-Judaism's holiest place-in Jerusalem's annexed Old City. In his call with Lapid, Blinken reiterated the US government's "steadfast commitment" to Zionist security and condemned recent rocket attacks from Gaza.

In his call with Abbas, Blinken affirmed the US commitment to improving Palestinians' quality of life. But with both leaders, Blinken urged for a two-state solution. The State Department announced Tuesday evening that Yael Lempert, assistant secretary for near eastern affairs, would travel to Jordan, Zionist entity, the West Bank and Egypt for talks aimed at "reducing tensions" in the region. Her trip will last from Tuesday until April 26. —AFP

health care rose from 28 per cent to 34 per cent, according to the UNICEF report. With the government too poor to afford imports of basic commodities such as medicines, many are struggling to source lifesaving drugs, including those used to treat chronic illnesses.

According to the UNICEF report, more than 50 per cent of families were unable to obtain the medicines they needed and at least 58 per cent of hospitals reported drug shortages. Making matters worse, the financial crash has sparked an exodus of healthcare professionals. According to UNICEF, 40 per cent of doctors and 30 per cent of midwives have left the country. —AFP

Churches in Jerusalem resist Zionist...

Continued from Page 1

The letter charged that "after their attempts failed, they resorted to statutory powers, by advancing a plan to declare vast parts of the mountain as a national park". The government temporarily withdrew the project from its agenda. In December, Zionist entity was angered by comments made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, head of the Anglican Church, who charged that an increase in attacks and vandalism of holy places was a "concerted attempt" to drive Christians away. Zionist foreign ministry said the accusations were "baseless and distort the reality of the Christian community in Zionist entity".

Ofran, the Peace Now activist, said the government was only doing the bare minimum-and even "protecting the settlers" with its police force, which has failed to dislodge them. She said Zionist entity - which considers the whole of Jerusalem its indivisible capital-"is not going to kick out the churches themselves, but they want ... it to be a Jewish environment with Christian enclaves," a challenge similar to that faced by Muslims.

Father Nikodemus Schnabel, of the Benedictine community on Mount Zion, adjacent to the Old City, said that "this is really a concern, that Zionist entity has turned a blind eye". His Abbey of the Dormition has been the target of acts of vandalism blamed on settlers which have multiplied in recent months.

Lebanon's crisis exposes kids to...

Continued from Page 1

cost of transportation to take their children to a health care centre." UNICEF representative Ettie Higgins said in a statement. Between April and October 2021, the number of children who could not access

Solomons signed China security pact 'with our eyes wide open'

SYDNEY, Australia: The Solomon Islands signed a security pact with China with its "eyes wide open", the Pacific nation's prime minister said Wednesday, despite strong US and Australian opposition to the deal. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare said it was an "honour and privilege" to tell parliament the agreement had been signed by officials in Honiara and Beijing "a few days ago".

The deal, announced Tuesday by Beijing, has faced sharp criticism from the United States and Australia, which fear the pact could lead to China gaining a military foothold in the South Pacific.

Sogavare said his government had signed the deal "with our eyes wide open" but declined to say when the

signed version would be made public. A draft of the deal sent shockwaves across the region when it was leaked last month, particularly measures that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomon Islands, which lies less than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) from Australia.

The broad wording of the draft prompted a flurry of diplomatic overtures from Washington and Canberra to prevent it from being signed-including a last-ditch visit from Australia's Pacific minister-but they were ultimately unsuccessful. The Solomon Islands and China have been moving closer in recent years, with Sogavare's government severing ties with Taiwan in September 2019, just days before its Pacific neighbour Kiribati followed suit in recognising Beijing.

Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison faced a barrage of questions about his handling of the Solomon Islands as news of the deal broke during a closely fought federal election campaign. Morrison said he would visit the Pacific nation "at the first opportunity" but rejected criticism that he or Foreign Minister Marise Payne should have travelled to the Solomons to personally lobby against the deal. —AFP

Last 10 nights: A gift of divine...

Continued from Page 1

We should not forget in these ten days that we have brothers and sisters who are suffering from great calamities. We should not forget them, even if the least we can do is to make sincere supplication from a heart devoted to Allah The Exalted and give charity. Lastly, we should keep the poor and needy in our thoughts by giving charity.

The Night of Al-Qadr: It should be noted that the last ten days include a night that is the greatest night in the whole year namely the Night of Al-Qadr (Night of Divine Decree), which is considered to be better than a thousand months. How great is this gift - A gift of divine proportions! The majority of Muslim scholars agree that this night is one of the odd nights in the last ten nights of Ramadan.

Like Muslims all over the world, the night of Al-Qadr has a special place in the hearts of the Kuwaiti people too. Thousands of them long for it every year and gather in the Masjids to pray for relief from worries and woes, and to safeguard Kuwait from evil. Special preparations are made for the last ten nights of prayer.

Another distinct practice that takes place in most mosques during the blessed month of Ramadan is Ihtikaaf, where men abandon the comfort they enjoy at home and reside in the mosque in order to devote and dedicate themselves for worship during the last ten nights of Ramadan. Many mosques around the country distribute the Iftaar meal (the meal at sunset

'Quran burning' tests Swedish...

Continued from Page 1

"We are living in a democracy with far-reaching freedoms of speech and the press and we should be very proud of that," he said. But he admitted that those freedoms were being used by a "Danish extremist" to foster "hate, division and violence," which he deplored.

At least 40 people were hurt — 26 of them police officers-and as many arrested after days of rioting over the Easter weekend in Norrkoping, Linkoping, Landskrona, Orebro, Malmo and the capital Stockholm. A school was also set alight with 20 police vehicles either damaged or destroyed. But with Paludan announcing more events, many local officials are having misgivings.

"Under these circumstances, the police should not grant permits for more public gatherings," Anna Thorn, city manager of Norrkoping, told a press con-

ference Tuesday. Freedom of speech has historically enjoyed strong protection in Sweden. While police can deny permits for gatherings that would constitute "incitement of against an ethnic group", the bar is usually high. Much of the rioters' fury was directed at police, with national police chief Anders Thornberg even saying they "tried to kill police officers".

The Quran burnings were planned for areas with large Muslim populations, which also happen to be neighborhoods that Swedish police designate "vulnerable areas". The term refers to areas with "high levels of poverty, high levels of people of a foreign background and by having criminal networks exerting pressure on those living in or visiting these neighborhoods," Manne Gerell, an associate professor of Criminology at Malmo University, told AFP.

The wealthy Scandinavian country of 10.3 million has a generous immigration policy, granting asylum and family reunifications to more than 400,000 people between 2010 and 2019, according to official figures. But Sweden has struggled to integrate many, with experts claiming that thousands fail to learn the language proficiently and find jobs. Gerell said some of these areas have also seen riots targeting "authorities in general, and police in particular". —AFP

International

Ramos-Horta wins East Timor presidential election: Officials

Nearly 860,000 in the tiny nation of 1.3 million were eligible to vote

DILI, East Timor: Nobel laureate Jose Ramos-Horta scored a landslide victory in East Timor's presidential election, according to preliminary results published Wednesday by the election secretariat.

The 72-year-old secured 397,145 votes, or 62.09 percent, against incumbent Francisco "Lu-Olo" Guterres' 242,440, or 37.91 percent, the secretariat's website showed after all ballots were counted. The election results still need to be validated by the country's electoral commission. The victory gives Ramos-Horta his second term in office. He served as president of Southeast Asia's youngest country from 2007 to 2012 and was also the country's first prime minister.

"The elections were competitive, and the campaign was largely peaceful," EU observer Domènec Ruiz Devesa said Wednesday, adding the counting process had been assessed "positively". Ramos-Horta will be inaugurated on May 20 — the 20th anniversary of East Timor's independence from Indonesia, which occupied the former Portuguese colony for 24 years.

He had pledged to use his five-year term to break a longstanding deadlock between the two main political parties. The election could trigger a

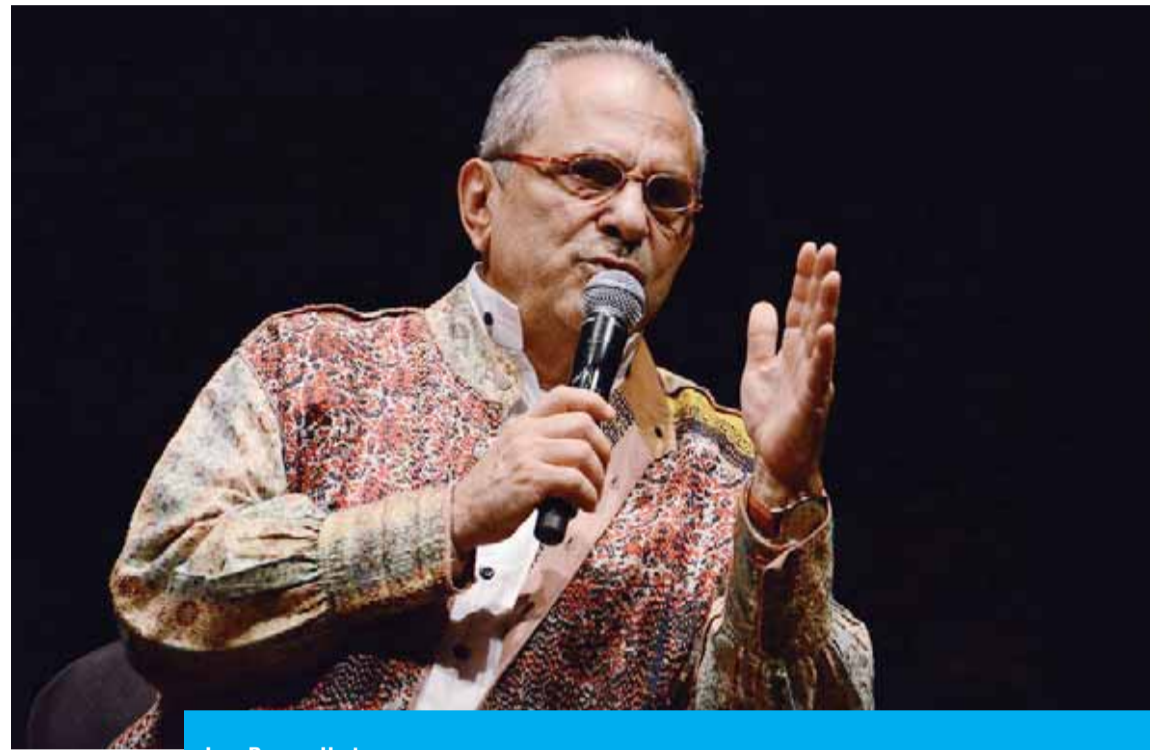
period of uncertainty, as Ramos-Horta has previously indicated he might dissolve the parliament if he won the election.

This week's vote was a rematch of the 2007 presidential poll that also saw Ramos-Horta win handily, with 69 percent of the votes. Ramos-Horta said he came out of retirement to run once more because he believed the outgoing president had violated the constitution.

Nearly 860,000 people in the tiny nation of 1.3 million were eligible to vote, and more than 75 percent of voters turned up to cast their ballots in the second round. Ramos-Horta was dominant in the election's March 19 first round, winning 46 percent of votes versus Guterres' 22 percent, but failed to secure the needed majority.

The Nobel laureate benefited from the backing of Xanana Gusmao, the country's first president and current leader of the National Congress of the Reconstruction of Timor-Leste (CNRT), often a kingmaker in East Timor. Ramos-Horta was awarded a Nobel prize for peace in 1996 for his efforts in facilitating conflict resolution in the country. In 2008, he survived an assassination attempt.

The new president faces the daunting task of lifting the country out of poverty. East Timor is



Jose Ramos-Horta

Campaign was largely peaceful



S Lanka town under curfew after police kill protester

RAMBUKKANA, Sri Lanka: Police enforced a curfew on Wednesday in a Sri Lankan town where an anti-government demonstrator was killed, a death that triggered international condemnation just as the crisis-hit country seeks an IMF bailout. Regular blackouts and acute shortages of food and fuel have sparked increasing public discontent in the island nation, which is dealing with its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948.

Huge protests have demanded the government's resignation, including the Tuesday blockade of a key highway and railway line on the day Sri Lanka's main petrol retailer announced another sudden price rise. Police dispersed the crowd in the town of Rambukkana with tear gas and a volley of live rounds that left a 42-year-old father of two dead, with nearly 30 others wounded in the confrontation.

"I was hit with a baton on my leg and hand," Vasantha Kumara, a local chef, told AFP on Wednesday. "I begged the cops not to beat me, but they didn't listen." "People are angry. We are all poor people fighting for basics." Authorities extended the curfew in Rambukkana, around 95 kilometres (60 miles) east of the capital Colombo, into Wednesday with shops closed through the morning.

Spent bullet cartridges littered the road hours after the previous evening's protest, which saw thousands of people blocking rail tracks and the highway to the central city of Kandy. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said he was "deeply saddened" by the police shooting

and promised the public's right to peacefully protest against his government would not be hindered.

Sri Lanka's police force "will carry out an impartial and transparent inquiry", he wrote on Twitter. Police said they were forced to act when the crowd was about to set alight a fuel tanker—a claim dismissed by Sri Lanka's political opposition. "These people are not suicidal to burn a tanker and get killed in the process," lawmaker Rohini Kumari Wijerathna said in parliament.

International concern

Tuesday's incident was the first fatal clash since widespread anti-government protests began this month. At least 29 people, including 11 police officers, were wounded in Rambukkana, according to official figures.

Later that night, police fired tear gas to break up another protest in Sri Lanka's south, one of the dozens of demonstrations staged simultaneously across the country. Colombo-based diplomats have expressed concern over the police shooting.

"A full, transparent investigation is essential and the people's right to peaceful protest must be upheld," US ambassador Julie Chung said. British High Commissioner Sarah Hulton condemned the violence and "call[ed] for restraint."

IMF talks

Sri Lanka opened talks with the International Monetary Fund in Washington this week after announcing an unprecedented default on the government's \$51 billion foreign debt. The IMF said it had asked Sri Lanka to restructure its borrowings before the lender finalises a bailout programme.

Talks with Sri Lanka were still at an "early stage", the IMF said, expressing concern over the hardships suffered by the country's people. Sri Lanka's economic meltdown began after the

Many were recaptured quickly, but 176 were still at large as of Wednesday afternoon, according to police.

After the riot erupted, the migrants broke through a door and barriers at the centre, with the 23 guards on duty unable to bring the situation under control. Six of the detainees—two adult men, two adult women, one girl and one boy—were killed as they attempted to cross a highway after escaping, police said.

The cause of the riot and break-out are under investigation, police said. Police, officers from other agencies and members of the public are hunting for the missing detainees. Relatively affluent, Muslim-majority Malaysia is a key destination for Rohingya fleeing persecution in their predominantly Buddhist homeland or refugee camps in Bangladesh.

More than 100,000 Rohingya live on the margins of society in the country, working illegally in construction and other low-paid jobs. —AFP

and sometimes years-crossing remote oceans to supply the seafood that ends up on our supermarket shelves. But the lucrative industry has come under fire for subjecting its migrant workforce to forced labour and other abuses, contrasting with the government's promotion of Taiwan as a regional human-rights beacon.

Activists welcomed Wednesday's indictment, saying it was rare to prosecute Taiwanese in such cases, as they called on authorities to follow through on promises to reform the industry. The nine people indicted by the prosecutors in Kaohsiung city for violating human trafficking laws included two Taiwanese crew members of the fishing vessel "Da Wang" as well as two heads of a company that owns the boat.

"Prosecutors have determined that the captain and first officer had actually resorted to forceful and

still reeling from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the World Bank has said

that 42 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. —AFP



RAMBUKKANA, Sri Lanka: Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party activists and supporters shout anti-government slogans during a demonstration in Rambukkana on April 20, 2022, a day after police killed an anti-government demonstrator while dispersing a protest against the high fuel prices and to demand President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation over the worsening economic crisis. —AFP

coronavirus pandemic torpedoed vital revenue from tourism and remittances.

The country is short of dollars to finance even the most important essentials, including food, fuel and medicines. Runaway inflation has worsened the population's hardships. The Colombo Stock Exchange has suspended trading to prevent an anticipated market collapse and the government has urged citizens abroad to donate money to help pay for desperately needed essentials.

A large crowd has been camped outside President Rajapaksa's seafront office in Colombo since April 9, demanding the leader step down. Rajapaksa has acknowledged public anger over the ruling family's mismanagement and appointed a new cabinet to navigate the country out of the crisis, but has refused to entertain calls for his resignation. —AFP



PENANG, Malaysia: Members of the Malaysia's paramilitary civil volunteer corps guard the main gate of the Malaysian Immigration's temporary Sungai Bakap depot in Penang on April 20, 2022. Hundreds of Rohingya migrants from Myanmar escaped the detention centre in Malaysia on April 20 after a riot broke out, with six killed on a highway as they fled, authorities said. —AFP

coercive means to commit labour exploitation of migrant fishermen," the prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The statement described longline fishing boats as "lawless islands" where migrants had to work long hours in abusive conditions with low pay. On the Da Wang, Indonesian and Filipino crew had to work 14 to 20 hours a day while Taiwanese officers frequently scolded them and beat those who defied their demands, the statement said.

They were also deprived of warm clothing, and Muslim fishermen were forced to eat pork—the main food offered on the boat. The Da Wang became the focus of attention by rights activists and prosecutors in 2019 following the death of an Indonesian crew member after he was allegedly hit in the head by the first officer.

Greenpeace gathered testimony from crew alleg-

HK pro-democracy DJ gets 40 months in jail for sedition

HONG KONG, China: A pro-democracy Hong Kong radio DJ was jailed for 40 months on Wednesday for "seditious speech" under a British colonial-era law that authorities have embraced as China flattens dissent in the city.

Tam Tak-chi, 49, is among a growing number of activists charged with sedition, a previously little-used law that prosecutors have dusted off in the wake of massive and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The DJ's crimes were made more serious by the fact they continued after China imposed a national security law on Hong Kong in 2020, Judge Stanley Chan said Wednesday while announcing the sentence. "Live long, mother, wait for me," Tam shouted afterwards as he was taken away from court.

Better known by the name "Fast Beat", Tam hosted a popular online talk show that backed democracy and was highly critical of the government, often using colourful language. He was a regular presence at the city's pro-democracy protests and often set up street booths to deliver political speeches.

Prosecutors accused Tam of inciting hatred against authorities by chanting the popular protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times", cursing the police, and repeatedly shouting "Down with the Communist Party".

The judge said Tam was "just a 50-year-old coarse man railing recklessly" in pursuit of a well-paid seat in the Hong Kong legislature. Tam said in a Facebook post that he would appeal. "My conviction affects Hong Kong people's freedom of speech," he wrote.

His 40-month sentence may not be the end of his legal troubles—he has been denied bail in a separate national security case. Tam's case was the first since Hong Kong's 1997 handover in which a sedition defendant pleaded not guilty and fought through a full trial. Two previous sedition cases featured guilty pleas. His conviction and sentencing will set precedents for a host of upcoming sedition cases as China remoulds Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image. Sedition, which carries a maximum penalty of two years in jail, is separate from the city's security law, but the courts now treat it with the same severity as acts that endanger national security.

Also on Wednesday, a man who operated a protest channel on the messaging app Telegram was convicted on multiple counts of "conspiracy to incite". Ng Man-ho had allowed the channel to become a platform for inciting crimes including arson, criminal damage and rioting during the 2019 protests, the judge said. —AFP

Hundreds of Rohingya escape Malaysia detention, six dead

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Hundreds of Rohingya migrants from Myanmar escaped a detention centre in Malaysia on Wednesday after a riot broke out, with six killed on a highway as they fled, authorities said. Many Rohingya arrive in Malaysia by boat after enduring harrowing, months-long sea journeys. Those who are caught are often sent to detention centres, which rights groups say are typically overcrowded and filthy.

A total of 528 people from the Muslim minority group fled a centre in northern Kedah state at 4:30 am (2030 GMT Tuesday), said Khairul Dzaimie Daud, the country's immigration chief.

Taiwan charges nine in migrant fishing abuse prosecution

TAIPEI, Taiwan: Taiwanese prosecutors on Wednesday charged nine people for exploiting and abusing foreign crew on a longline fishing boat, a scourge that activists have long warned was going under-reported and unpunished. Prosecutors allege that crew beat migrant fishermen, forced them to work up to 20 hours a day, and made Muslim employees eat pork.

Taiwan operates the world's second-largest deep-sea fishing fleet, with boats spending months-

ing that the deceased was stored in a freezer until the boat could dock in Fiji, and the vessel was later blacklisted by the United States. An official at the prosecutors' office told AFP that there was no evidence to press charges over the death, in part because Fiji authorities ruled that the cause of death was acute pulmonary oedema-excess fluid in the lungs.

The Da Wang operated under a Vanuatu "flag of convenience"—a category of ship where activists have long warned the worst abuses can take place. Greenpeace said the Taiwanese government could do more. "We demand Taiwan's government stop stalling and bring forth the human rights action plan for fishing industry" it has long promised... for a complete reform to prevent similar incidents on the Da Wang from happening again," its Taiwan unit said in a statement. —AFP

THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2022

Business

NIC holds analysts conference for 2021

NIC's net profit reaches KD 24.4 million for 2021

KUWAIT: National Investment Company (NIC) held its analysts conference for the year ended 31 December 2021. The conference was attended by Chief Financial Officer Girish S Nair, Senior Vice President for Investment Banking Sector Bashar Khan and Executive Vice President for Wealth Management Sector Almuthana Al-Maktoum. Al-Maktoum began the conference with a brief about the company and general overview about the positive results for 2021, which proved that NIC went through a year of distinguished performance and strong operational achievements, which strengthened its financial status.



BoD recommends distribution of 45 fils dividend per share

This had a positive effect on maintaining strong financial status and assets of good quality, and the NIC's ability to achieve sustainable growth due to the success of the company's strategy and the team's experience.

Nair gave an overview of the financial highlights of NIC's performance during 2021.

For the 12 months ending 31 December 2021, NIC reported a net profit of KD 24.4 million and earnings per

share of 31 fils through the income statement and a gain of KD 25.6 million as other comprehensive income through shareholders' equity.

The total comprehensive income for the period was KD 50 million. The total comprehensive gain was KD 1.1 million. Return on average equity and return on average assets were 12.5 percent and 10.7 percent respectively during 2021. The leverage ratio as at 31st December 2021 was only 0.23:1 and quick ratio was a healthy 68.7 percent. Total assets and shareholders' equity attributable to the parent company increased to KD 290.6 million and KD 216.8 million respectively as compared to KD 221.4 million and KD 175 million as on the previous year-end, Nair said.

Earnings per share during the current year reached 31 fils, and in agreement with NIC's special commitment to achieve fixed and distinguished returns for its shareholders, the board of directors recommended distribution of 45 fils dividend per share for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2021.

The dividends for 2021 will be higher for NIC during the last 15 years, as NIC has a strong and steady history of dividend distributions during the past years - NIC paid dividends that varied between 5 fils per share in 2016 to a proposed 45 fils for 2021.

Performance of main sectors:

Nair spoke about major events during 2021 for some main sectors of NIC:

1. MENA securities sector: Benefited from some investment opportunities through directing customers' finances and portfolios tactically towards qualified



Almuthana Al-Maktoum



Bashar Khan



Girish S Nair

sectors and companies.

2. Investment Banking Sector: The consultation services management succeeded in completing listing of Safat Investment Company on Boursa Kuwait, finding finances for a leading company in the field of physical fitness, is currently completing transactions for a leading logistics company, and completing a purchase transaction for a major company in Kuwait.
3. Alternative Investment Management: The company is in the final stages of investing in a leading regional platform of capitals, that is specialized in delivery of consumer orders.
4. Real Estate Investments Sector: Work continues on

increasing collection and revenues for the real estate portfolio and restructuring the sector, and put forth policies and procedures to achieve customer satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Khan spoke about many cases as clear examples on the company's ability to seize opportunities and execute them in the market, such as Boursa Kuwait, to invest in obtaining a strategically important asset with a strong, repeated and sustainable cash inflow. A controlling share was obtained in Boursa Kuwait in February 2019, and the company's direct share reached 14.4 percent since the takeover. The investment made a 9.24-fold return based on current market values.

Expected gridlock

After the economic downturn caused by COVID-19, the global economy is facing a new shock caused by Russia's invasion of its neighbor, which has driven prices for food and fuel higher and caused the IMF to lower the global growth outlook to 3.6 percent for this year. Russian finance ministry officials are expected to participate in the event remotely, but a US Treasury official said Yellen will make it clear that "the benefits and privileges of the leading economic institutions of the world... are reserved for countries that demonstrate respect for the core principles that underpin peace and security across the world." But the official said the group cannot let Russia stop the important work of the G20. France has signaled it would participate in the boycott.

A German government source said Berlin did not intend to follow suit, but "During and after the meetings ... will certainly send strong messages, and will not do so alone." US President Joe Biden has proposed ejecting Russia from the G20 but Mark Sobel, a former Treasury official who is now US chairman of the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum, told AFP there was no obvious mechanism for booting Moscow, which is to varying degrees supported by China and India. "I think that it really does raise a fundamental question about how are you going to manage global governance," he said of the tensions.

The divide also bodes ill for the G20 Common Framework, created during the pandemic to help heavily indebted countries find a path to restructure their debt, but which Sobel said is "flailing" as China and private sector creditors drag their feet on participating.

Washington and Beijing are increasingly at loggerheads over a host of issues unrelated to Ukraine, and Sobel said there is unlikely to be much progress over that initiative, either. "Given the state of US-China tensions, I don't think the US can speak really well to the China debt issues," he said. —AFP



RAMBUKKANA, Sri Lanka: Police officers inspect a damaged Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Rambukkana on April 20, 2022, a day after police killed an anti-government demonstrator while dispersing a protest against the high fuel prices and to demand President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation over the worsening economic crisis. — AFP

IMF asks Sri Lanka to restructure debt before bailout

COLOMBO: The International Monetary Fund said on Wednesday that it has asked cash-strapped Sri Lanka to "restructure" its huge foreign debt before a bailout program could be finalized as anti-government protests escalated across the island. Sri Lanka opened talks with the IMF in Washington this week after announcing its first ever default on external borrowings.

The South Asia country is in the grip of its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948 and has been rocked by a wave of protests over food and fuel shortages. "When the IMF determines that a country's debt is not sustainable, the country needs to take steps to restore debt sustainability prior to IMF lending," the Fund's country director Masahiro Nozaki said in a statement.

"Approval of an IMF-supported program for Sri Lanka would require adequate assurances that debt

sustainability will be restored." The IMF said talks with Sri Lanka were still at an "early stage," but it was "very concerned" about the economic situation and the hardships suffered by people, especially the poor and vulnerable. Earlier this year, the IMF warned Sri Lanka's approximately \$51 billion foreign debt was unsustainable.

Colombo's existing debt also means the country cannot apply for emergency financing, the IMF said. Sources in the country's finance ministry have made it clear that debt restructuring will require creditors to accept a "haircut"—a reduction in the value of their assets—or agree to longer repayment periods. Nearly two weeks ago, the government nearly doubled key interest rates and allowed the currency to depreciate faster, hoping the move would encourage foreign currency inflows.

On Monday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa conceded that Sri Lanka should have gone to the IMF "much earlier". The country is short of dollars to finance even the important essentials, including food, fuel and medicines. Widespread shortages have sparked nationwide protests that turned violent on Tuesday. One man was shot dead and 29 others were wounded in clashes in a central town, while tens of thousands continued demonstrations outside the president's office in Colombo demanding his resignation. —AFP

and wide-like seismic waves that emanate from the epicenter of an earthquake," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said in a report.

Oil prices began to recover Wednesday, however, and Asian stocks also mostly rose following a positive lead from Wall Street, where US stocks rallied on the back of promising housing-starts data and solid corporate earnings. Both main contracts climbed, but crude has suffered major shocks this year, from the war in Ukraine to the raging coronavirus outbreak in China, where the economy has been battered by anti-COVID restrictions. Tens of millions are still barred from leaving home in economic centre Shanghai and tech hub Shenzhen, where a COVID-19 outbreak has broken down supply lines and shuttered businesses. "China continues to stay wedded to deleveraging parts of the economy while attempting to add stimulus in a

G20 finance chiefs meet under the shadow of war

WASHINGTON: Finance officials from the world's richest countries met on Wednesday to address global challenges like rising debt and a possible food crisis—if they can overcome boiling tensions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Moscow's attack on its neighbor is set to dominate the meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors, the first since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion in February. Western nations have retaliated for the bloody incursion with sanctions meant to harm Russia's economy and turn it into a pariah state.

And US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will boycott some sessions if Russian officials are present, according to a senior US official, a stance other countries have said they will follow. The boycott threat underscores the tumult facing the Group of 20, and experts see little chance at this meeting for the bloc to find consensus on global challenges such as climate change and debt relief for poor nations. "I think expectations should be extremely low," said Matthew Goodman, senior vice president for economics at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

"It's hard to see how the G20 is going to pull together in the face of... the Ukraine crisis," he said in an interview. The G20, chaired by Indonesia this year, includes major economies like the United States, China, India, Brazil, Japan and several countries in Europe.

The officials will gather virtually on the sidelines of the World Bank and IMF's spring meetings in Washington.



JOINT BASE ANDREWS, US: US President Joe Biden steps off Air Force One upon arrival at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland on April 19, 2022. — AFP

targeted sector manner," said Jeffrey Haley, senior market analyst at Oanda.

"However, the Shanghai lockdown and fears its COVID-zero policy will crimp growth this year continue to weigh on markets that clearly want more of the usual cast-of-thousands stimulus measures from years past."

Netflix shares plunge

The Shanghai Composite Index was the biggest loser among major Asian markets, dropping 1.35 percent at the close. Hong Kong—which plummeted on Tuesday over concerns about Beijing's ongoing tech-sector crackdown—also ended down, with Chinese banks keeping lending rates unchanged.

"China disappointed markets that were looking for more comprehensive stimulus measures as it left both

its one and five-year Loan prime Rates (LPR) unchanged," Haley said.

Tokyo gained 0.86 percent, buoyed by a cheaper yen. Jakarta, Sydney and Taipei all inched upward while Seoul was flat. Despite the rally on Wall Street, there are concerns about the impact of the earnings report from Netflix showing a drop in subscriptions in the first quarter of the year.

This was the first such drop for Netflix in a decade and hammered the streaming giant's shares, which dropped by a quarter of their value in after-market trading.

Analysts have said this could dent Tuesday's gains when US markets open. After closing lower on Tuesday over the IMF announcement, Europe's major markets opened the day in positive territory, with London, Paris and Frankfurt all slightly up. — AFP

Oil stabilizes after big drop on IMF growth cut

LONDON: Asian markets were marginally higher on Wednesday while oil began recovering after a downgraded IMF global growth forecast for 2022 had sent crude prices plunging. The International Monetary Fund slashed its outlook by 0.8 percentage points, largely over inflationary crises linked to the Ukraine war and the coronavirus pandemic—prompting a five percent dive in oil prices on Tuesday.

"The economic effects of the war are spreading far

Business

Al-Sager: Posting highest interim profits in our history proves our prudent policies

NBK Group Vice-Chairman and CEO in an interview with Al-Arabiya Channel

- The political standoff leaves the government with very limited solutions
- We are optimistic about improving business activities with the rise in oil prices and the diminishing of the pandemic.
- The Kuwaiti dinar tracks the value of a basket of currencies, giving flexibility to take decisions based on the economic conditions
- Every 25 bps hike adds KD 13 million to the Group's net profit
- The devaluation of the Egyptian pound has a limited and temporary impact on our profits
- Our creditworthiness enables it to access debt markets whenever we need to diversify the financing base or to seize better pricing opportunities
- The accumulated provisions were more than enough to face a crisis of the pandemic's size, and we are now bearing the fruits of our conservative approach



Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

KUWAIT: Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer said that the Bank recorded strong profits for the first quarter of 2022, which are considered the highest interim profits in its history, reflecting our prudent and resilient business model.

In his interview with Al-Arabiya Channel, Al-Sager stated that Egypt represents a key growth market for the Group, and we are seeking further expansion there, noting that the impact of the devaluation of the Egyptian Pound on NBK's profits will be limited and temporary. Al-Sager expressed his optimism that despite the political standoff, business activities may see improvement going forward, on the back of the rise in oil prices, and the diminishing of the pandemic. He also affirmed that the profits of the first quarter prove that NBK is bearing the fruits of its conservative approach in building provisions over the past period.

Optimistic despite the political standoff

Al-Sager mentioned: "The political standoff between the National Assembly and the government will have an adverse impact on the chances of financial reform, leaving the government with very limited solutions, as it will have only one choice, which is to pass important bills such as public debt and mortgage laws."

"On the other hand, that the pace of government spending, project awarding and implementation will not be affected by the government's resignation, as it continues to running its business and complete existing projects," he indicated. Al-Sager expected a rebound in the pace of projects in the coming period from the stagnation witnessed over the last period on the backdrop of the pandemic. He also noted that business activities may see improvement going forward, which

will necessarily reflect on credit growth in light of the improving operational environment and public finance conditions, on the back of the rise in oil prices, and the diminishing of the pandemic.

Monetary tightening

Al-Sager highlighted that the monetary tightening cycle initiated by the US Federal Reserve and most of the major central banks globally will in turn reflect on the monetary policy of the Central Bank of Kuwait, which followed the Fed in raising interest rate during the first quarter of this year, a trend that he expects to continue going forward.

"On the long term, the Central Bank of Kuwait enjoys high flexibility as the Kuwaiti Dinar tracks the value of a basket of currencies, allowing for great capability to assess the economic conditions and emerging changes and take the appropriate decisions," he explained.

On the impact of interest rate hikes on NBK's performance, Al-Sager said: "The rate hike will have a positive impact represented in improving NIM, and the extent of this improvement depends on the Central Bank's decisions to raise the discount rate, in terms of the number and timing of these hikes in 2022." Al-Sager elaborated: "Every 25 bps hike, equivalent to 0.25 percent, adds an amount ranging between KD 12-13 million to the Group's net profit."

Egyptian market

On a question about the impact of the devaluation of the Egyptian pound on NBK's profits, Al-Sager mentioned that the devaluation of the Egyptian Pound will lead to a decline in NBK-Egypt's profits denominated

any more non-EU product," Woodhall said. European buyers would typically mix his beets in with others grown on the continent. But now the need to separate them to designate the British crop as non-EU produce was simply too costly and time-consuming.

"It's a lot of hassle. I can't blame them," he added. The farmer, who usually dispatches his crop over the winter months after harvesting in late autumn, has been left with several hundred tons worth around £90,000 (\$117,000, 109,000 euros). "I won't recoup that, so we've taken a massive hit," he said. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other Brexiters promised that reversing almost five decades of European economic integration would free the country from bureaucracy and open up new trading opportunities for "global Britain".

But for many like Woodhall involved in trade across the Channel, it has created new red tape and hindered rather than helped exports, leaving them with little choice but to look closer to home.

"It will just solely be for the UK now-no EU exports of our organic beetroot-which is a real shame," he said. He is planning to grow more of the other crops-spring onions, cereals, beans, peas-cultivated on the farm for domestic markets, and diversify the business. "You've got to just stride forward and do things," the farmer added, noting he was exploring everything from hosting glamping to drone racing. But on the farming front, he conceded British buyers can only replace some of the shortfall from lost EU orders, and short-term growth would undoubtedly be hampered. "You can't beat growing 34 hectares compared to growing 19 hectares," Woodhall said, explaining his costs would remain similarly high. "It is good to grow more and dilute it down really".

'Heartbreaking'

Despite all that, Woodhall, who voted to remain in 2016, is remarkably upbeat about the country's

potential long-term prospects outside the EU-if its promises are properly delivered. He believes the UK could be capitalizing in a decade, but will need that long to adjust and has more questions than answers. "I firmly believe that in 10 years time we'll be better off being out, (with) Brexit, being our own market... but it's just how many people will go bust between now and then? "And have we got the support higher up to do that? I don't know."

Woodhall argued agriculture is a big industry inside the EU with significant political backing, while British government support "falls short" due to the industry's smaller size.

"It's not worth as much, I suppose, but it is to individuals like myself-it's a livelihood for thousands of people," he said. In the meantime, Woodhall is left ruing the short-term fallout from the UK's new place outside the EU, left with little choice but to let his unwanted beets rot into compost. "It is heartbreaking. I come up here every day and look at it and put my head in my hands sometimes. "I just have to drive away from it and think about something else." —AFP

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PENKRIDGE, UK: Some of the five hundred tons of beetroot that is being left to rot due to a collapse in demand, is seen at Woodhall Growers in Penkridge, central England on April 14, 2022. —AFP

potential long-term prospects outside the EU-if its promises are properly delivered. He believes the UK could be capitalizing in a decade, but will need that long to adjust and has more questions than answers. "I firmly believe that in 10 years time we'll be better off being out, (with) Brexit, being our own market... but it's just how many people will go bust between now and then? "And have we got the support higher up to do that? I don't know."

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Brexit bureaucracy leaves British beet rotting

LONDON: In the heart of the English countryside, Will Woodhall is trying to stay positive, despite standing next to a vast pile of rotting beetroot that would once have been worth tens of thousands of pounds. "It's a real shame-a lot of effort has gone into this," the 35-year-old farm manager told AFP, gesturing to the 15-foot (4.5-metre) high mound of surplus vegetables that has been steadily decomposing on his farm since last October.

"I've never... had any crop leftover to this volume. Obviously it's a large dent to our business. Hopefully we can stomach it, and I'm trying to turn (it) into a positive."

Woodhall's beetroot is the latest victim of the UK's new post-Brexit reality, in which the bureaucracy and complexity of exporting many British goods into the European Union has left them increasingly unwanted. Woodhall Growers, a 1,900-acre (770-hectare) farm in Staffordshire, central England, has been growing organic beets for nearly a decade, typically sending just under half to EU countries.

Initially, the UK's formal departure from the now 27-member bloc in early 2020 seemed to have little impact. But a year later, following an 11-month transition period, it left the European single market and customs union and traders of all stripes and sizes have struggled to adapt.

'No EU exports'

Woodhall soon learned his buyer on the continent would renege on a contract to buy hundreds of tons of beets and no longer place future orders. "The phrase they used was that they don't want

Shutdown of Libya oil sites spreads to second terminal

TRIPOLI: Libya's National Oil Corporation announced Tuesday the closure of a second export terminal, paralyzing the vital energy sector in a North African country gripped by political crisis. The suspension of operations at Brega terminal, which has an export capacity of 60,000 barrels per day (bpd), follows a force majeure and closure on Monday of Zueitina port and several other major sites in the "Oil Crescent" region of eastern Libya. The NOC, in a statement, said it "declares a state of force majeure on the oil port of Brega because it is impossible to implement its commitments towards the oil market".

Force majeure, a legal move, allows parties to free themselves from contractual obligations when factors such as fighting or natural disasters make meeting them impossible. The NOC made a similar declaration on Monday at another major oil field, Al-Sharara.

"A group of individuals put pressure on workers in the

Al-Sharara oil field, which forced them to gradually shut down production," it said. Oil installations have often been attacked or blockaded by armed groups who hold sway in Libya. Libya has had two rival executives since the eastern-based parliament in February appointed a new prime minister in a direct challenge to the UN-brokered government in the capital Tripoli. The latest standoff pits Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah's interim government against that of former interior minister Fathi Bashagha, who was chosen by the parliament. The groups blocking the oil facilities are demanding "a fair distribution" of income and the transfer of power to Bashagha.

They have led to combined losses in production estimated at 600,000 bpd, about half of Libya's daily output. The NOC warned that Libya would pay a high price.

"At a time when oil prices are recovering significantly due to increased global demand... Libyan crude is being subjected to a wave of illegal closures, which will have serious damage to wells, reservoirs and surface equipment... as well as the loss of state treasury opportunities at prices that may not be repeated for decades to come," it said. The NOC is one of the few institutions in the troubled country to have stayed intact-and largely neutral-since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that ousted longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. —AFP



The Transmed pipeline brings gas from Algeria to Italy via this section in Tunisia

Credit Suisse takes hit from Ukraine war, litigation

ZURICH: Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse warned Wednesday that it will face a loss in the first quarter due to the impact of long-standing legal matters and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The country's second biggest bank said its results "will be adversely affected" by the Ukraine conflict to the tune of 200 million Swiss francs (195 million euros, \$211 million) in lost revenue and provisions for credit losses. Credit Suisse said it was also setting an extra 600 million Swiss francs aside for litigation that dates back more than a decade, bringing the total provisions for the cases to 700 million Swiss francs. The bank will also see losses of around 350 million Swiss francs from the decrease in value of its holding in Allfunds Group, a business-to-business platform.

Credit Suisse already suffered a loss in 2021 following the implosions of financial services firms Greensill and Archegos.

The bank said its first quarter losses will be partially offset by the recovery of 170 million Swiss francs that it had set aside in provisions related to Archegos, along with real estate gains of 160 million Swiss francs. It will publish its quarterly results on April 27. —AFP

Business

Dung power: India taps new energy cash cow

Bovine waste providing a vital revenue stream for Indian farmers

INDORE: India is tapping a new energy source that promises to help clean up smog-choked cities and is already providing a vital revenue stream for poor Indian farmers: truckloads of bovine manure.

Cows are venerated as sacred creatures by the country's Hindu majority. They also have pride of place in India's rural communities, where they are still regularly used as draught animals. Rural households have long burned sun-dried cattle droppings to heat stoves, a practice that continues despite government efforts to phase it out with subsidized gas cylinders. Villages on the outskirts of the central Indian city of Indore are now being handsomely rewarded for handing over their mounds of bovine waste in a pilot project to help meet the city's power needs.

"We have a very good quality dung, and we keep the dung clean to ensure it fetches the best price," farmer Suresh Sisodia told AFP. The 46-year-old has sold nearly a dozen truckloads of fresh manure at the equivalent of \$235 per shipment—more than the monthly income of the average Indian farming household. Sisodia's farm has 50 head of cattle and, in the past, occasionally offset costs by selling manure for fertilizer. Now, he is hopeful for a more reliable revenue stream.

'Dung money'

"The farmers pick it up once every six or 12 months and there are seasons when they don't—but the plant could give us a steady income," he said, adding that his farm generates enough manure to fill a



INDORE: A technician works inside the control room of the bio-CNG (compressed natural gas) plant in Indore. — AFP photos

truck every three weeks.

His family is one of the many beneficiaries of "Gobardhan"—literally "dung money" in Hindi—since the inauguration of a nearby biomass plant by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February. Sisodia's cattle droppings are carted to the plant, where they are mixed with household waste to produce flammable methane gas and an organic residue that can be used as fertilizer.

Eventually, the plant is slated to work through 500 tons of waste, including at least 25 tons of bovine faeces, each day—enough to power the city's public transit system, with plenty left over. "One half will run Indore buses and the other half

will be sold to industrial clients," plant boss Nitesh Kumar Tripathi told AFP.

The Gobardhan pilot program has faced its share of logistical hurdles, with decrepit rural roads making it hard for the plant's dung-carrying trucks to reach farms. Farmers have also been skeptical of what appears to be a get-rich-quick scheme and required careful "assurances of quick and regular" payments before signing on, said Ankit Choudhary, who scouts villages for potential suppliers.

The Indian government, however, has high hopes for the initiative, with Modi pledging waste-to-gas plants in 75 other locations since the Indore facility began operations. Cultivating alternative ener-



INDORE: An excavator loads cow dung for biogas production into a truck at the dairy farm of farmer Suresh Sisodia in Mayakhedi village on the outskirts of Indore.

gy sources is an urgent priority in India, which burns coal to meet nearly three-quarters of the energy needs of its 1.4 billion citizens.

Its cities regularly rank among the most smog-choked urban centers in the world as a result. Air pollution is blamed for more than a million deaths in India annually, according to a study published in *The Lancet* medical journal.

Sacred strays

The project is also guaranteed to appeal to Hindu nationalist groups—Modi's most important political constituency and vocal advocates of cow protection. Under their watch, "cow

vigilantes" have run Muslim-owned abattoirs out of business and lynched people accused of involvement in cattle slaughter. But bovine-centric religious policies have led to unintended consequences, with stray cows now a common sight in villages and even on busy roads in big cities.

Government acolytes such as Malini Laxmansingh Gaur, a former Indore mayor and member of Modi's party, hope that scaling up the biogas project will incentivize farmers to keep their cows even when they are too old to give milk or help till fields. "This extra income will both clean villages and help tackle the strays," she said. — AFP

Continental resumes Russia production

MOSCOW: German auto supplier Continental said Wednesday it had restarted production in Russia after local employees were threatened with "severe criminal consequences" if the company refused to serve local demand. Continental had announced it would pause production and cease trading with Russia at the beginning of March, just over a week after the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Russian authorities subsequently ordered close supervision of foreign-owned firms that suspend their activities in Russia over the Ukraine crisis. Russian President Vladimir Putin, without using the word nationalization, said he favored appointing outside administrators to companies that exit the market. Continental said in a statement that local workers and managers had been threatened with "severe criminal consequences" if Continental refused to "serve local demand".

To avoid this outcome, the parts maker would "temporarily" restart production of car tires at its site in Kaluga around 170 kilometers (106 miles) to the southwest of Moscow. With the restart, first reported by German daily FAZ on Tuesday, the company said it did not "intend to make a profit".

A wave of Western companies have decided to close their operations in the country following the invasion of Ukraine. In Germany, flagship auto manufacturers Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz and BMW have stopped exports to Russia and closed their local production sites. — AFP

Ukraine war slams brakes on European car sales

BRUSSELS: European car sales sank in March as Russia's invasion of Ukraine added more problems to a sector already struggling with shortages of semiconductors, industry data showed Wednesday.

Passenger car registrations fell 20.5 percent compared to the same period last year, with 844,187 units sold, according to the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA). Excluding 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the global economy, it was the worst performance for a month of March since statistics began in 1990. Car production has been hampered worldwide since last year by a severe shortage of semiconductors, a key component for modern cars as they power everything from anti-lock braking systems to airbags to parking assistance technology.

The war has led to shortages of other parts, such as the cables used in car wiring harnesses and of which Ukraine is a manufacturer. Several factories in Europe have had to go idle due to the lack of cables, with Volkswagen temporarily suspending production at a number of German sites.

Europe's top automaker saw sales fall by nearly a quarter in March, according to ACEA figures. "The ongoing supply chain disruptions, further exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, negatively affected car production," the ACEA said. Most countries in Europe had double-digit drops in car sales in March, the association said, with a fall of 17.5 percent in Germany, the biggest market. — AFP

Higher food prices could push 10m into poverty: Yellen

WASHINGTON: Rising food prices that have been pushed even higher by Russia's invasion of Ukraine could force upwards of 10 million people into poverty, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned on Tuesday. Moscow's invasion of its neighbor and retaliatory sanctions imposed by the West beginning in late February have caused a spike in crude oil and grain prices and constricted fertilizer supplies.

In a speech at a Treasury event, Yellen warned that these factors risk exacerbating the situation of the poor worldwide. "The war has made an already dire situation worse. Price and supply shocks are already materializing, adding to global inflationary pressures, creating risks to external balances, and undermining the recovery from the pandemic. I want to be clear: Russia's actions are responsible for this," Yellen said.

"Early estimates suggest that at least 10 million more people could be pushed into poverty due to higher food prices alone," Yellen spoke as the World Bank and IMF are holding their spring meetings, and suggested the Washington-based lenders could provide aid to vulnerable people, boost investments in agriculture and sort out supply chains for critical needs like fertilizer.

She also suggested that the G20, whose finance ministers will meet on Wednesday, could use a tool first launched during the 2008 global financial crisis to up investment in agriculture to aid the world's poor. "We have a strong international system, and we need to work together now," Yellen said.

Italy chases African gas to end Russia dependence

ROME: Italian ministers head to central Africa Wednesday in an urgent quest for new energy deals as Italy scrambles to break away from Russian gas over the Ukraine war. Prime Minister Mario Draghi is looking to add Angola and the Congo Republic to a portfolio of suppliers to substitute Russia, which provides about 45 percent of Italian gas.

"We do not want to depend on Russian gas any longer, because economic dependence must not become political subjection," he said in an interview with the *Corriere della Sera* daily published on Sunday. "Diversification is possible and can be implemented in a relatively short amount of time—quicker than we imagined just a month ago," he said.

Draghi, who has tested positive for COVID-19, is sending in his stead Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio and Ecological Transition Minister Roberto Cingolani, who will travel to Luanda on Wednesday and Brazzaville on Thursday. They will be accompanied by Claudio Descalzi, chief executive of Italian energy giant ENI.

There is also a possible trip to Mozambique on the cards in May. The foray follows the signing of agreements with Algeria and Egypt in recent weeks. Algeria is currently Italy's second-largest supplier, providing around 30 percent of its consumption. ENI said the deal with Algeria's Sonatrach would boost deliveries of gas through the Transmed under-sea pipeline by "up to nine billion cubic meters per

Aid families

Faced with surging inflation that is hitting poor families especially hard, which has sparked unrest in some countries, policymakers should take immediate steps to offset the pain with targeted and temporary relief, IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said Tuesday.

"We've seen already in some countries people protesting when they see the price of food or basic items increasing very rapidly," the official told AFP in an interview. Governments can alleviate impact of the price jumps with "targeted measures to try to support vulnerable populations," which can include steps like utility bill discounts or direct payments to poor families, he said.

Gourinchas earlier Tuesday unveiled the IMF's latest World Economic Outlook which flags rising inflation as a key risk, made worse by the Russian invasion of Ukraine that has caused a surge in prices of fuel and food. The damage the conflict is wreaking on the world economy, including the highest inflation in decades, is the key focus of global finance officials who are gathered this week for the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank.

Support also could include "energy price subsidies, as long as they're clear, they're transparent and they're temporary, so that they are not going to affect the budget for too long," Gourinchas said.

That is an unusual stance for the Washington-based crisis lender, which historically abhorred subsidies and demanded countries eliminate them and tighten spending in exchange for financial support.

The IMF has often been cast as the villain in popular protests against austerity measures imposed by governments seeking to right their economies with the help of a loan package. In recent weeks, demonstrators have taken to the streets in Peru and Sri Lanka to demand action from their leaders as the conflict in Ukraine and Western sanctions on Russia drove food and fuel prices to



Janet Yellen

soar and created shortages that officials warn could cause a food crisis. Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$51 billion in debt.

Faster debt relief

Gourinchas said some low income countries "with very limited fiscal space and elevated levels of debt," will need outside help. "The fund and other organizations are working on trying to address this food insecurity crisis, provide funding and food supplies to affected countries," he said.

But for other countries the debt will become unsustainable and they will need to restructure those loans, he said, noting that about 60 percent of low income countries already face or are at high risk of debt distress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Group of 20 adopted a Common Framework to provide a path to orderly debt restructuring, but only three countries have even applied for relief. "It's not been very successful yet, so we absolutely need to have a more rapid process," he said, although he acknowledged that the process is complex. — AFP



year" by 2023-24. Transmed only had spare pipeline capacity of 7.8 billion cubic meters per year in 2021 — though it has said it is ready to expand.

'Fanciful'

The Egypt accord could result in up to three billion cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG) bound to Europe and Italy in particular this year, ENI said. Italy is looking into buying or renting two floating storage and regasification units (FSRU) to allow it to import more LNG.

Diversification will not be cheap, warn experts, who foresee extra taxes passed on to businesses and families. Davide Tabarelli, head of energy think tank

Nomisma Energia, said Rome was rightly exploiting the "excellent relationships" that ENI has built up over 69 years in Africa, where it is the sector leader in terms of production and reserves.

But the idea of replacing Russian gas "in the short term" was "fanciful," he told AFP. "It will take at least two or three years." The government said it expects to get the floating regasification units into place within 18 months. It has also talked of kick-starting stalled projects for two onshore regasification plants, which would take some four years to build. "This is a race against time to make sure we stock gas and oil for the next winter season," said Francesco Galietti, head of Rome-based consultancy Policy Sonar. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Aerial view of the Araucano Park with its dry grass at Las Condes commune, in Santiago. — AFP photos



View of a water reservoir with which the Metropolitan park waters its gardens, in Santiago.



Aerial view of the Bicentenario Park with recently planted trees and bushes that need little water to grow.

UNDER SHADOW OF DROUGHT, SANTIAGO DITCHES EXOTIC PLANTS

With drought casting a constant shadow over Santiago's 7.1 million residents, there has been a recent rush to replace thirsty, exotic plants with hardier, native ones in the hopes of staving off water rationing. One of Latin America's most urbanized cities has experienced more than a decade of drought, and managing water access for its fast-growing population is becoming increasingly difficult. Last year saw the driest winter-the rainy season in Chile-this century, with 71 percent lower rainfall for Santiago than usual, according to the national meteorological office.

Predictions are equally dire for the southern-hemisphere winter about to start with the Mapocho River at 57 percent of capacity, the Maipo River at 61 percent and the El Yeso reservoir at just over two-thirds full. City authorities are bracing for tough times ahead. "We can't make it rain. That is out of our hands, but we can prepare for... an extreme situation," said Claudio Orrego, governor of Santiago. Last week, the municipal government announced a four-step crisis plan that starts with encouraging volun-



Aerial view of a water reservoir with which the Metropolitan park waters its gardens.

tary water conservation but could end in a "Red Alert" phase of rationing. If the water runs out, cuts will be rolled out to one sector of the city at a time, for a maximum of 24 hours each, under the plan. It could affect some 142,000

households supplied by the Mapocho River, which bypasses Santiago from east to west, and another 1.5 million that rely on the Maipo River to the south.

100,000 trees

Every day, agricultural engineer Pablo Lacalle-head of water resources at the Santiago Metropolitan Park (Parquem) — gauges the level of the Mapocho River. Last year, the water level fell by more than half, according to official data. "We have to plan... to know how much irrigation capacity we will have," Lacalle told AFP with a concerned look. "We have a deficit of about 87 percent of water in the park compared to previous years... Fifteen years ago the park had enough water to irrigate everything."

Faced with the new reality, the park is rolling out a drought-busting re-planting plan. "We have replaced exotic forest with native forest," with 100,000 trees replanted in three years on the park's northern slope, Parquem director Eduardo Villalobos said. Last year, pasture in the park was reduced by 50,000



Aerial view of a golf course with its almost dry grass at Las Condes commune, in Santiago.

square meters and replaced with endemic plants.

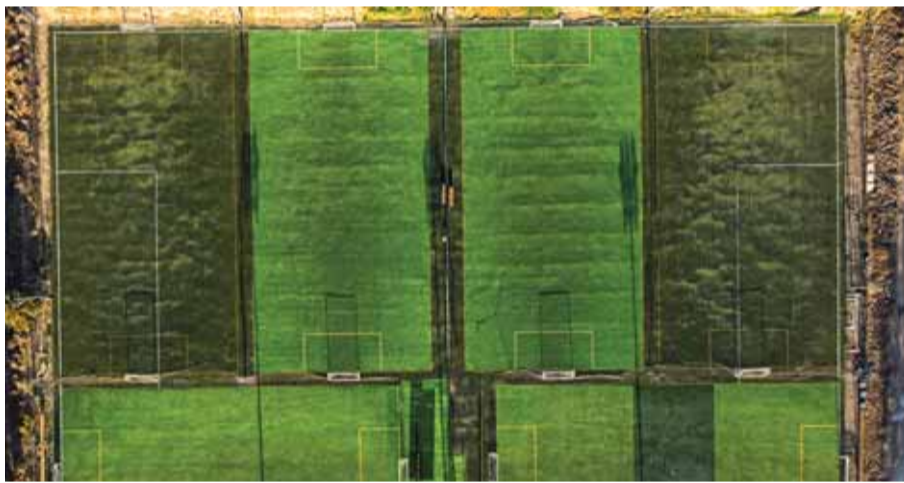
Every drop 'precious'

In the city itself, some are starting to take aim at green grass. Urban architect Joaquin Cerda in 2021 launched a movement against "European-style" grass-lined sidewalks. His project, "Vereda Nativa" (Native Sidewalk), has so far replaced some 150 square meters (1,600 square feet) of grass in the neighborhood of Pedro de Valdivia Norte with 25 native plant species. These were more adept, he said, to the climate of Santiago, "to prolonged drought and to live a long time without water," he told AFP. Now, "we water here once a week for half-an-hour using drip irrigation," said Cerda, reducing water consumption to less than a tenth of what it was before. "Every drop of water is very precious."

According to the World Bank, annual precipitation in Chile's coastal regions has decreased by 15 to 30 percent in the last century, leading to multiple periods of severe drought. Climate change would

likely change the frequency and magnitude of hazards such as wildfires and droughts, with risks for economic growth and public health, it says.

Access to water has become an increasingly contentious point in Chile. Legally, water is a resource for public use, but the government has granted almost all exploitation rights to the private sector. Industry accounts for about 20 percent of consumption and agriculture another 70 percent, with avocado-a major Chilean export-a particularly thirsty crop. This all posed little problem in times of abundance, but drought brought a furious reaction in 2020 when some communities started running out of water. Protesters occupied a well managed by a copper mining company, demanding it be used to provide water to communities instead. The Constitutional Convention drafting a proposed new founding law for Chile on Monday approved an article stating that water is an "inalienable public good." — AFP



Aerial view of football fields where the grass was substituted with synthetic grass at the Huechuraba commune.

Brazil readies first carnival since COVID

After two bleak years of lock-downs and loss, Rio de Janeiro will hold its famed carnival this weekend for the first time since COVID-19 hit Brazil, promising a giant, glittering spectacle of pandemic catharsis. Shimmering to throbbing samba beats, thousands of dancers in sequin-studded costumes are expected to reclaim the "Sambadrome," the iconic beach city's dedicated carnival parade venue, which was turned into a Covid-19 vaccination center in 2021.

Canceled last year as the pandemic death toll surged in hard-hit Brazil, then postponed by two months this year over fears of another wave, the carnival show is now set to go on at last, with all-night parades Friday and Saturday nights. "It will be a very special year. I'm just feeling, 'I'm alive, I did it!'" said Bianca Monteiro, the "drum-corps queen" of Portela, the samba school that has won

the most times in the history of Rio's carnival parade competition.

"We want to pay tribute to those who died of COVID. It's been a time of so much suffering, money troubles, hunger... The pandemic caused so much tragedy," she told AFP. COVID-19 has claimed more than 660,000 lives in Brazil, second only to the United States in absolute numbers.

But with more than 75 percent of the South American country's 213 million people now fully vaccinated, the average weekly death toll has plunged from more than 3,000 a year ago to less than 100 now. Everyone participating in and attending the weekend's 12 samba school parades will be required to present proof of vaccination. "I missed it enormously. I just love carnival," said Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes. "It's a party that represents so much of what we are as a city and a country. Carnival shows the world a people that is joyful, unprejudiced, that embraces diversity, religious tolerance."

Comeback carnival

Behind the frenzied swirl of floats, feathers and barely covered flesh, Rio's carnival is tightly shaped by tradition and rules. Each of the samba schools will have 60 to 70 minutes to tell a story in



A member of the Corao do Boitata street carnival group performs during a street party in the run up to Rio's carnival.

music and dance, to be evaluated on nine criteria by a team of judges. The reigning champions, Viradouro, chose as their theme Rio's legendary 1919 carnival-the first celebrated after the devastation of another pandemic, the Spanish flu.

Other schools chose themes charged with social messages, with Brazil facing divisive elections in October likely to pit far-right President Jair Bolsonaro against leftist ex-leader Luiz Inacio Lula

da Silva. Eight of the 12 schools' themes deal with racism or Afro-Brazilian history, loaded issues in a country where the current president has faced frequent accusations of racism. Their samba songs include treatments of the protests that erupted in the United States after the police killing of George Floyd in 2020; tributes to two "orixas," or deities, of Afro-Brazilian religion; and celebrations of the black samba singers Cartola and Martinho da Vila.

"Samba schools are (historically) a representation of Afro-Brazilian culture," said carnival historian Luiz Antonio Simas. "Under the current government, which is closely aligned with conservative movements that are hostile to carnival, it's highly political to have this black, visceral carnival."

Hydrating for tears

The excitement of carnival's return is also tinged with fatigue for the samba schools, which spend the entire year preparing-extended in this case because of the pandemic beyond the usual dates just before the Catholic season of Lent. "There's a lot of pent-up emotion. We'll have to hydrate really well to compensate for all the tears we're going to shed," said Talita Batista, who will be parading for Portela.

The event is also expected to bring some relief for a tourism sector battered by the pandemic. Rio hotels are expecting an occupancy rate of 85 percent, despite the fact the city has not authorized "blocos," the massive street parties that usually accompany the official parade competition. Several smaller street parties are still expected to be held. — AFP



Revelers of the street carnival group "Cordao Do Boitata" perform during a "bloco", one of the street parades leading up to the main samba contest in Rio's Sambodrome arena, at Madureira neighbourhood in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Lifestyle | Features

Netflix shares plunge as subscribers drop

Netflix shares lost a quarter of their value Tuesday after the company revealed its ranks of subscribers shrank in the first quarter of this year. It was the first time in a decade that the leading streaming television service had lost subscribers. The company blamed the quarter-over-quarter erosion to suspension of its service in Russia due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Netflix ended the first quarter of this year with 221.6 million subscribers, slightly less than the final quarter of last year. The Silicon Valley tech firm reported a net income of \$1.6 billion in the recently ended quarter, compared to \$1.7 billion in the same period a year earlier. Netflix shares were down more than 25 percent to \$259.30 in after-market trades that followed release of the earnings figures.

Netflix believes that factors hampering its growth includes subscribers sharing their accounts with people not living in

their homes. The streaming giant estimated that while it has nearly 222 million households paying for its service, accounts are shared with more than 100 million other households not paying sub-



This file photo the Netflix logo at the Anime Japan 2022 fair in Tokyo. — AFP

scription fees. "When we were growing fast it wasn't a high priority, and now we're working super hard on it," chief executive Reed Hastings said of account sharing during an earnings call. "These

are over a hundred million households that already are choosing to view Netflix; they love the service, we've just got to get paid in some degree for them."

Netflix is testing ways to make money from people sharing accounts, such as by adding a feature that lets subscribers pay slightly more to add other households. "If you've got a sister, let's say that's living in a different city, and you want to share Netflix with her - that's great," chief product officer Greg Peters said on the earnings call. "We're not trying to shut down that sharing, but we're going to ask you to pay a bit more to be able to share with her." Another factor crimping Netflix growth is intense competition from titans such as Apple and Disney.

Inflation squeeze

Netflix and its rivals in streaming television are also up against a rate of inflation that has people likely taking stock of

how many entertainment subscriptions they have racked up, according to analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group. "With inflation taking hold, people are starting to watch their pennies," Enderle said. "You get a situation where people are thinking through the subscriptions they have and the subscriptions that they keep." A big player in the market like Netflix will find it hard to grow in that kind of economic environment, especially in a market like the United States where it is deeply penetrated, Enderle told AFP.

Netflix recently announced subscription price bumps in the United States, with the basic option now costing \$9.99, and the most expensive going up to \$19.99. Netflix is looking at possibly adding a lower-priced subscription tier subsidized by advertising, a model that Hastings had long snubbed. "It's pretty clear that it's working for Hulu," Hastings said.

"If you still want the ad-free option, you will be able to have that. If you'd rather pay a lower price and you're ad-tolerant, we're going to cater to you also." Weaving ads into Netflix for revenue is "inevitable" given the recent earnings figures, said Upholdings portfolio manager Robert Cantwell. The streaming television race is heating up, with Disney showing earlier this year that it was closing the gap with market leader Netflix, whose stride has slowed. Like the Prime video streaming service fielded by Amazon, Disney is copying Netflix's tactic of investing in local content that appeals to the language, culture and tastes in respective international markets. Netflix has made that approach work, backing original blockbusters such as "Squid Game" from South Korea and France's "Lupin." — AFP



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (second right) present a certificate of achievement next to Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (right) embrace during the Global Ayush Investment and Innovation Summit in Gandhinagar yesterday. — AFP

WHO launches traditional medicine hub in India

The World Health Organization launched its Global Centre for Traditional Medicine at a site in India on Tuesday, aimed at unlocking its potential by blending ancient practices with modern science. The GCTM knowledge hub is intended to create a body of reliable evidence and data on traditional medicine practices and products to help inform standards and the cost-effective use of methods that go outside conventional medicine. "Harnessing the potential of traditional medicine would be a game-changer for health when founded on evidence, innovation and sustainability," the WHO said, noting that traditional medicine formed part of the growing health and wellness industries.

The hub will be temporarily housed at the Institute Teaching and Research in Ayurveda in Jamnagar on India's west coast until the new 35-acre (14-hectare) site in the city is completed in 2024. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus joined Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Gujarati city to lay the foundation stone. Around 80 percent of the world's population is thought to use traditional medicine, such as herbal mixtures, acupuncture, yoga, ayurvedic medicine and indigenous therapies.

Medicine of first resort

"For many millions of people around the world, traditional medicine is the first port of call to treat many diseases,"

Tedros told the ceremony. "The WHO GCTM that we are launching will help to harness the power of science to strengthen the evidence base for traditional medicine," he said, to optimize its use for health and wellbeing around the world. The UN health agency defines traditional medicine as the knowledge, skills and practices that indigenous and different cultures have used over time to maintain health and prevent, diagnose and treat physical and mental illness.

India has put \$250 million into the project, with Modi saying traditional medicine encompasses a holistic science of life and would gain global importance in the coming 30 years. "Our traditional medicine is a repository of hundreds of years of accumulated knowledge," he said. "Going forward, we must use technology to create a global database, repository of traditional medicine practices," to help future generations. "They should also make international standards so that people's trust in these traditional medicines goes up."

The hub will focus on four strategic areas: evidence and learning; data and analytics; sustainability and equity; and innovation and technology. It is hoped that a solid evidence base will help countries regulate quality and safety. Of the WHO's 194 member states, 170 acknowledged their use of traditional and complementary medicine since 2018, but only 124 reported having laws or regulations for the use of herbal medicines while only half had a national policy on such methods and medicines. The WHO said that traditional medicine was increasingly prominent in modern science, with 40 percent of approved pharmaceutical products currently in use deriving from natural substances. — AFP

of massage, with a view to creating jobs for a community that faces deep discrimination in Rwanda. Even today, demand for the massage services offered by her company Seeing Hands is limited to foreigners, she said.

"Rwandans say that they don't want their bodies to be touched by a blind person, that it can be a sign of bad luck," she told AFP. "It is as if Rwandans think that being blind is contagious." The stigma is widespread across the East African nation, with visually impaired citizens struggling to access educational or professional opportunities, according to the Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB).

"They live in isolation and solitude.

Brazil paper plane pilots seek international glory

More than a century after their beloved countryman Alberto Santos-Dumont made aviation history, young Brazilians are taking to the skies seeking international glory of their own... with paper airplanes. Eight finalists took part Monday in a heated competition in Rio de Janeiro to pick Brazil's entrants for the world paper airplane championships in Salzburg, Austria in May. Now in its sixth edition, Red Bull Paper Wings 2022 will pit representatives of 62 countries against each other in contests to decide the world's best paper airplane flyers in both distance and airtime.

The Brazilian qualifiers were held at the Museum of Tomorrow, a sleek struc-

ture opened in the run-up to the 2016 Rio Olympics whose exhibitions have included tributes to Santos-Dumont (1873-1932), a national hero who won the Deutsch prize in 1901 for being the first person to pilot a dirigible airship around the Eiffel Tower.

Flying in the face of aviation historians, many Brazilians also insist the legendary bon vivant was the first to fly an airplane, and not the Wright brothers. His would-be heirs face what some might consider an equally quixotic challenge: using a standard piece of 100-gram (3.5-ounce) A4 paper, create and fly the best-performing paper planes in the world. Brazil has won the world championships twice, in 2006 and 2009, both in the airtime category.

Rockets and gliders

Eight students in fields as diverse as engineering, veterinary medicine and nutrition took part in Monday's finals, after surviving preliminary qualifiers with an initial field of 2,500 entrants. Standing on an indoor competition tract painted like an airport runway, they artfully tossed their

paper creations aloft into the bright sunlight shining through the museum's high, airy dome. Jose Silva, a 24-year-old computer science major from the central-western city of Goiania, was competing in his second qualifiers. "Planes built for distance are like rockets," he explained. "Planes built for airtime are like gliders, with wide wings."

His own airtime entry came in at 2.11 seconds, losing to that of 19-year-old Pedro Cruz Capriotti, at 7.61 seconds, and well off the world record of 27.9 seconds held by Takuo Toda of Japan. The distance category was won by 19-year-old Isaac Queiroz Leite, with a flight of 40.3 meters (132 feet). He will be chasing a world record of 69.1 meters, held by Joe Ayoob of the United States. Third-place finisher Richard Amorin, 23, was confident team Brazil would shine in Austria. Like Santos-Dumont, "Brazilians always manage to find a way," he said. — AFP



A competitor throws his paper plane during the national Red Bull Paper Wings paper airplane throwing championships at the Museum of Tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP photos



A competitor makes a paper plane.



Competitor Isaac Queiroz Leite throws his paper plane a winning distance of 40.3 meters.



Competitor Isaac Queiroz Leite celebrates after throwing his paper plane a winning distance of 40.3 meters.

Blind Rwandans take up massage to fight stigma

On a chilly morning, Beth Gatonye loaded two vibrating chairs into her van and headed to the US embassy in Kigali with three blind colleagues, ready to offer massage therapy. Since 2017, the 43-year-old has trained dozens of visually impaired women and some men in the art

Some are... hidden from the public by their families because they represent shame," RUB spokeswoman Rachel Musabyimana told AFP. Blind Rwandans were unable to attend secondary school until the 1990s, when the curriculum was converted to braille. They faced an even longer wait to access university education, which only became available in 2008. "Rwandans consider us to be useless people," said Immaculee Karuhura, a visually impaired massage therapist who works with Seeing Hands. "They think we only survive through begging," Karuhura told AFP.

Sense of purpose

Although the coronavirus pandemic hit

their business hard, with massage services banned during Rwanda's lockdown, these days Gatonye can't keep up with demand. "I have 15 blind women so far working as massage therapists... Getting back everyone who worked here before the COVID pandemic is difficult but we are trying," she said.

Visually-impaired people comprise more than one percent of the country's 13 million population, according to Rwanda's 2021 National Blindness Survey. The major causes of their condition are untreated cataract and glaucoma-up to 80 percent of cases are deemed preventable or reversible. Businesses like Seeing Hands hold out the promise of financial freedom

to blind Rwandans.

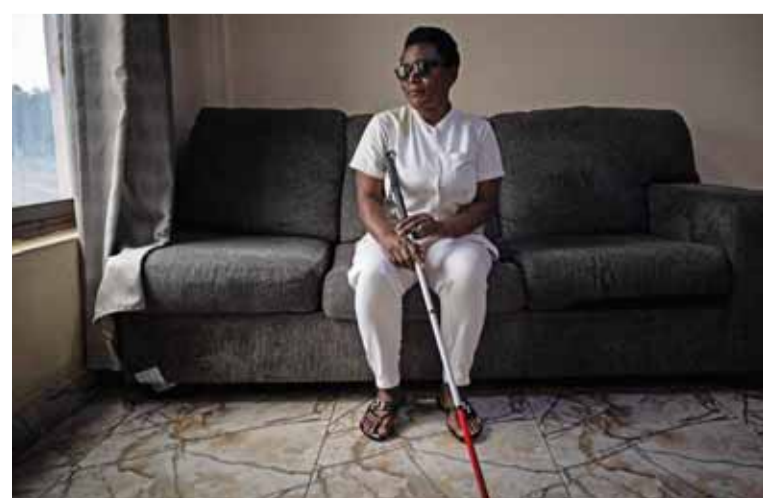
On average, the masseurs earn the equivalent of about \$100 (92 euros) a month—more than double the salaries of workers such as waitresses or housemaids "Now I can take care of my life. I can pay rent and also pay for my children's school fees," Karuhura said. But the job means much more than that to her, she added. "When I am serving a client, I feel happy," she said, pointing out how the work had given her a sense of purpose and belonging. "It feels like I am communicating with my clients during a therapy session, and this is something that makes me very emotional." — AFP



Visually impaired massage therapists practice on a colleague during a training session at Seeing Hands office in Kigali, Rwanda. — AFP photos



Immaculee Karuhura, a visually impaired massage therapist, gives a massage to a client.



Immaculee Karuhura, a visually impaired massage therapist, poses for a portrait at the Seeing Hands office in Kigali, Rwanda.

Lifestyle | Features



Members of the Cypriot Melodists Byzantine choir read off a tablet showing the Byzantine chant notation as they chant at the Greek Orthodox Church of Ayia Napa (Panagia Church) in Cyprus' eastern coastal city of Ayia Napa. — AFP photos



Evaggelos Georgiou (center) leads a group of volunteer chanters during mass at the the Greek Orthodox Church of Chryseleousa Panagia in the village of Athienou, Cyprus.

Johnny Depp rejects 'heinous' abuse charges at US defamation trial

"Pirates of the Caribbean" star Johnny Depp denied ever striking a woman as he took the witness stand on Tuesday at the US defamation trial against his former wife, the actress Amber Heard. "There were arguments and things of that nature but never did I myself reach the point of striking Miss Heard in any way," Depp told the jury hearing the case at the Fairfax County Circuit Court in Virginia. "Nor have I ever struck any woman in my life," he said. Depp said the "heinous and disturbing" allegations of physical abuse made against him by Heard were "not based in any species of truth" and came as a "complete shock."



US actor Johnny Depp testifies during his defamation trial in the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP photos

Depp was asked by one of his lawyers why he had brought the defamation case against his ex-wife. "I felt it my responsibility to stand up not only for myself, but stand up for my children," Depp said. "I wanted to clear my children of this horrid thing that they were having to read about their father that was untrue."

"It's strange when one day you're Cinderella, so to speak, and then in 0.6 seconds you're Quasimodo," he added. The 58-year-old Depp, his hair slicked back in a ponytail and wearing a black suit, black shirt and floral pattern tie, took the stand on the fifth day of the blockbuster defamation trial. Heard, who was dressed in a white pintriped blouse with a bow, listened attentively but impassively as Depp testified in a slow and measured voice punctuated by elaborate hand gestures.

Depp filed the suit after Heard, who turns 36 on Friday, wrote a column for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse." The actress never named Depp, whom she met in 2009 on the set of the film "The Rum Diary," but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages.

Heard, who was married to Depp from 2015 to 2017, countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands. Depp accuses Heard of seeking to "generate positive publicity for herself" ahead of the release of the film "Aquaman," in which she had a starring role. Depp filed the defamation complaint against Heard in the United States after losing a separate libel case in London in November 2020 that he brought against the tabloid The Sun for calling him a "wife-beater."



US actress Amber Heard speaks to her attorney at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia.

"Never seen Johnny abuse anybody"
On the stand, Depp pushed back against claims by Heard's lawyers that the actor would become a "monster" during drug- and alcohol-fueled benders and physically and sexually abuse Heard. Depp said his first experience with drugs came at the age of 11 when he would steal "nerve pills" from his volatile and abusive mother. "I have taken substances over the years, on and off, to numb myself of the ghosts, the wraiths, that were still with me from my youth," he said. "Essentially it was just self-medication." But Depp said he is "not some maniac who needs to be high or loaded all the time." "The characterization of my quote unquote substance abuse that's been delivered by Miss Heard is grossly embellished and, I'm sorry to say, but a lot of it is just plainly false."

Depp was asked about the early days of his relationship with Heard. "She was attentive, she was loving," he said. "It was as if she was too good to be true." Only later, the actor added, did "things begin to reveal themselves" and "within a year or a year and a half she had become another person almost." Depp's attorneys told the jury the allegations against Depp have had a "devastating" impact on his career. He left his role as Captain Jack Sparrow in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise and was asked to step down from the "Fantastic Beasts" series based on the book by Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling. — AFP

Chanters in Cyprus carry on 'rich heritage' of Byzantine music

Chanting resonates through a church in the Cypriot resort town of Ayia Napa, darkened but for a few low lights and mobile devices displaying the singers' Byzantine melodies. "This music aims to touch people's souls," said Thomas Anastasiou, 35, a Greek Cypriot chanter from a nearby district. "Singing with people around us is something very important for us."

The UN's cultural agency UNESCO inscribed Byzantine chant on its list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity in late 2019 following its nomination by Greece and Cyprus. UNESCO describes the tradition as a "living art that has existed for more than 2,000 years", and an integral part of Greek Orthodox Christian worship and spiritual life, "interwoven with the most important events in a person's life", from weddings to funerals and religious festivals.

Shortly after, the coronavirus pandemic outbreak halted or put limitations on everything from concerts to church attendance. But now as restrictions continue to ease in Cyprus and elsewhere, celebrations this Orthodox Easter on the eastern Mediterranean island are moving closer to normal.

One Sunday evening in the lead-up to Holy Week, dozens of people gathered for

vespers in the Panagia Church in the heart of Ayia Napa, a seaside resort better known as a rowdy party town in summertime. Boys and men, including members of the Cypriot Melodists Byzantine choir, carried the verses, sometimes to the drone of a bass note, as elderly women prayed, mothers rocked babies and visitors lit candles at the church entry. "You fall in love with this music," said choir director Evaggelos Georgiou, 42. The music teacher recalled chanting alone in the church of his home village of Athienou at Easter two years ago, in the early days of the pandemic. "We missed this a lot," he said. "Now we are back."

'Treasure'

In the archive of the archbishopric in the Cypriot capital Nicosia, Father Dimitrios Dimosthenous examines a thick, 14th-century Byzantine chant manuscript, its fragile pages of mostly black writing pockmarked and stained by age, insects and humidity. Picking up his phone, he scrolls through an electronic version of the score's modern transcription, and the room falls silent as he begins to sing.

"This is the old way of writing the Byzantine music," he says, pointing at the carefully crafted lines. A new system introduced in 1814 expressed the notation in

far greater detail. Byzantine chant is monophonic and unaccompanied, and based on a system of eight modes.

"It's very difficult to know the notation made before 1814 because it was like one sign was a whole melodic line," explained Christodoulos Vassiliades, a teacher at the Kykkos Monastery Byzantine Music School, noting the importance of the aural tradition. The manuscript and others in the archive testify to the centuries-old practice of chanting on the island.

Its original owner was the neighboring former cathedral of St John, where Father Dimitrios served for 24 years and was the director of its choir. The old manuscripts are "a treasure for Byzantine music", he said, noting hymns to Cypriot saints. "I'm looking at my history."

'Perpetual student'

In the church of St John, Ioannis Eliades gestures towards one of the 18th-century paintings covering the walls and roof-a scene from the Old Testament of people chanting. It is "the only depiction (of chanters) that we have all over Cyprus", said Eliades, director of the Byzantine Museum in Nicosia and a member of Cyprus's UNESCO committee. The designation means Byzantine

music "is appreciated not only in Cyprus but worldwide", he said enthusiastically.

"It's a rich heritage... and it's important to safeguard it," he said. While chanting is a predominantly male tradition, women sing in monasteries and sometimes in churches. Among them is graphic design student Polymnia Panayi, who has been studying at the Kykkos music school in Nicosia since 2018.

Chanting "makes me happy and... helps me to pray", said the 22-year-old, who sometimes sings with other women at a local church. The school has 60-70 students a year, aged around 10 to 60. Some 40 percent are female, a representative of the school told AFP, noting "increasing interest" among women. Panayi expressed hope that more churches would open up to female voices.

"There are women that chant but they just don't have a chance yet," she said. Back in Ayia Napa at the end of the vespers, chanter Anastasiou said "learning Byzantine music never ends". "You are a perpetual student, even if you are a teacher, as the sources of Byzantine music are... unlimited," he reflected. "It's a never-ending tradition." — AFP



Evaggelos Georgiou presents a slide-show displaying scans of old chant manuscripts showing the traditional Byzantine notation during a seminar before a group of volunteer chanters in the village of Athienou, Cyprus.



A view of a fresco depicting people chanting and playing musical instruments inside the former cathedral of St John in the old walled city of Cyprus' capital Nicosia.

Greece eyes bullish tourism season despite Ukraine war

Greece's pandemic-battered tourism industry is hoping the war in Ukraine won't derail recovery, with hundreds of thousands cancelling trips as the country lifts COVID restrictions in a bid to revive the key sector. The war in Ukraine erupted just as tourism in Greece was coming back to life, with officials betting on a strong season following two years of lockdowns and restrictions.

But it has meant the loss of some

600,000 Russians and 240,000 Ukrainians who have cancelled reservations, said Lyssandros Tsilidis, head of the Federation of Travel Agencies of Greece. On the Russian side alone, the loss amounts to 700,000 euros (\$755,000), for Greece, whose economy depends on tourism for around a quarter of national income. Greece closed its airspace to Russian flights after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, in line with other EU countries. Russian national carrier Aeroflot also suspended all its international flights from March 8.

The tourist shortfall is acutely felt on the island of Crete, one of Greece's premier travel destinations. Russian and Ukrainian travelers traditionally account for one in 10 visitors to the island "of which Russians are the majority", says Nikos Halkiadakis, president of the hotel union of Heraklion. "This clientele will not be replaced."

'We are not afraid'

Like much of the world, Greece rolled

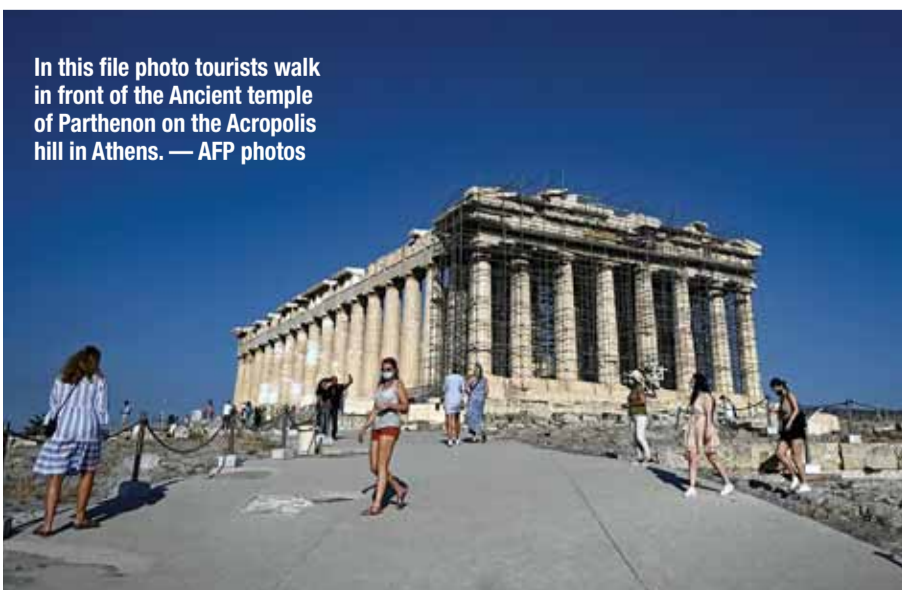
out various lockdowns and restrictions as the pandemic took hold in 2020, effectively grinding tourism to a halt. After a benchmark year in 2019 that saw 33 million tourists visit the country, numbers in 2020 plummeted to 7.4 million—a 78 percent drop, according to the Bank of Greece. Revenues also tumbled 76 percent to 4.3 million euros (\$4.6 million).

But as the country opened up last year, arrivals jumped by 94 percent and revenues shot up by 142 percent, central bank figures showed. In a bid to further boost visitor numbers, the government has once again peeled back restrictions this year. Mandatory screening tests for travelers who hold a European vaccination certificate were scrapped in February. And vaccine passes will no longer be required in restaurants, bars and shops from May 1, while mandatory masks indoors will be scrapped from June 1.

Though Russia's invasion has somewhat dampened hopes of a strong recovery this year, all hope is not lost. Deputy

tourism minister Sofia Zacharaki says experts expect a "doubling" of last year's arrivals. "The season has already portrayed a very encouraging image, which allows us to be optimistic," she told AFP.

Tourism Minister Vassilis Kikilias told Skai TV Monday that some key destinations including Corfu, Santorini and Paros were already 80 percent full or more. Arrivals in Athens and Thessaloniki also increased during Catholic Easter, he added. Apart from denting visitor numbers, Russia's war in Ukraine has compounded energy-fueled price hikes that started last autumn. Energy costs are up 70 percent, and food and drinks have increased by 28 percent, says Halkiadakis. Still, Tsilidis is hopeful for a bounce-back, albeit slower than expected. "After experiencing the worst in the past two years, we are not afraid, even if the pace of tourism recovery remains slow due to the war in Ukraine," he said. — AFP



In this file photo tourists walk in front of the Ancient temple of Parthenon on the Acropolis hill in Athens. — AFP photos



In this file photo tourists and Greek clients sit on the terrace of a cafe-bar in central Athens.

Sports

Pelicans shock Suns in NBA playoffs; Heat, Grizzlies win

WASHINGTON: Brandon Ingram scored 37 points and the New Orleans Pelicans stunned top seed Phoenix 125-114 in the NBA playoffs on Tuesday, with the Suns worrying about a hamstring injury to star Devin Booker. Ingram added 11 rebounds and nine assists while C.J. McCollum had 23 points, nine assists and eight rebounds as the Pelicans pulled level at 1-1 in the best-of-seven first-round series, which moves to New Orleans for game three on Friday.

"We'll just continue to have fun, be loose, lock into the game," Ingram said. "It's going to be a good time." Herbert Jones had 14 points and Jonas Valanciunas pulled down 13 rebounds to go with 10 points for New Orleans. "We came out aggressive," Ingram said. "When they came at us, we stayed resilient. We got the best shot on the floor every time down."

In a game that featured 20 lead changes, the Pelicans outscored the Suns 28-16 over the last 7:30, hitting five three-pointers in a row in the run. Ingram scored 14 points in the third quarter and 12 in the fourth. "My teammates helped me out a lot, giving me the ball in the right spots," Ingram said. "We did a good job on the defensive end. We'll continue to get better."

Booker scored 31 of Phoenix's 61 first-half points as the Suns led by five at halftime, his seven first-half three-pointers a career playoff high for any full game. But Booker tweaked his left hamstring and was removed in the third quarter. His future remains uncertain for the rest of the series pending an MRI exam. "It is a hamstring issue," Suns coach Monty Williams said.

Booker, a 25-year-old All-Star guard who helped the United States win Olympic gold last

year, averaged a career-high 26.8 points a game this season for the Suns. The Suns went 5-2 when Booker was sidelined with a right hamstring issue earlier in the season. New Orleans won two play-in games to reach the playoffs after a 36-46 season, but humbled the Suns, who won an NBA-best 64 games this season.

"That was probably the worst we've ever looked in transition (defense) since I've been here and for that to happen in a playoff game was a bit unsettling for everybody," Williams said. "This team is going to play us hard every possession. We miss a shot and they are going to take advantage. They showed that in the third quarter and then they got hot from three-point range." Mikal Bridges added 19 points for the Suns and Chris Paul had 17 points and 14 assists.

'Killer Butler'

Western Conference second seed Memphis ripped Minnesota 124-96 to level their series 1-1 and Eastern Conference top seed Miami beat Atlanta 115-105 for a 2-0 series edge. Jimmy Butler scored a career playoff high 45 points for host Miami. The Hawks had pulled within 104-101 in the final minutes before Butler answered with a slam dunk, a three-pointer and a layup to give coach Erik Spoelstra's squad a 10-point lead and seal Atlanta's fate.

"Coach told me to go out there and be a killer, score as many points as possible, so that's what I did," Butler said. Butler made 15-of-25 shots from the floor, 4-of-7 from three-point range, and sank 11-of-12 free throws while also contributing five rebounds, five assists and two steals. "Just staying aggressive, taking what the defense gives me," Butler said. "My team-



PHOENIX: Brandon Ingram #14 of the New Orleans Pelicans handles the ball against Chris Paul #3 of the Phoenix Suns during the first half of Game Two of the Western Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Footprint Center on April 19, 2022. —AFP

mates want me to play like that. I felt like I'm in a groove. I'm comfortable. My guys are always looking for me." Atlanta's Trae Young, kept to a season-low eight points Sunday in an opening loss, had 25 points but also committed 10 turnovers.

At Memphis, Ja Morant led the host Grizzlies with 23 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds after taking the blame for an opening loss. "My job was to come

out and correct that and that's what I did," Morant said. "No point to be mad about game one. There's a lot of basketball to be played." The 22-year-old guard scored 11 points in the third quarter, when Memphis pulled away. Desmond Bane and Jaren Jackson each added 16 points for Memphis, which had seven double-digit scorers. Anthony Edwards led the Timberwolves with 20 points. —AFP

'Duel in the Pool' to pit Ledecy vs Titmus as clash

SYDNEY: Swimming superpowers Australia and the United States will clash in a "Duel in the Pool" with Ariarne Titmus and Katie Ledecy renewing their Olympic rivalry, it was announced Wednesday. Each nation will have a squad of 30 competing in Sydney on August 19-21, reprising a blockbuster event last held in 2007. Australia and the United States dominated the pool at the Tokyo Games last year, taking 50 Olympic swimming medals between them.

"Watch Australia and the USA battle it out for points and pride at this year's Duel in the Pool 2022," tweeted Swimming Australia. Compared to 2007, new race and relay formats are expected to be unveiled for the made-for-television event designed to attract new audiences to the sport. But the biggest attraction is likely to be Australian Titmus squaring up again with American Ledecy after they both won two freestyle golds in Tokyo.

Ledecy had to settle for silver behind Titmus in the 400m in Tokyo but turned the tables to stand atop the 800m podium ahead of the Australian. Titmus also won 200m gold where Ledecy finished a disappointing fifth but the American powered to a second individual Tokyo Olympics title in the 1500m.

Other big names featuring could be Australians Kyle Chalmers and Emma McKeon, and Americans Caeleb Dressel and Regan Smith. The original Duel in the Pool in 2003 was held after Sydney's successful Olympics. Each country's team will include Olympians, Paralympians and open water swimmers, with an ocean race to be staged at Bondi Beach. —AFP

Reigning champ USA learn path to 2023 Women's World Cup

MIAMI: Reigning Women's World Cup champion United States was drawn against Mexico, Jamaica and Haiti for July's CONCACAF W Championship, the North American qualifying event for the 2023 Women's World Cup. The draw conducted Tuesday by the regional football governing body at Miami placed the Americans and their rivals in Group A while Group B will feature Canada, Costa Rica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago.

The CONCACAF event will be staged July 4-18 at Monterrey, Mexico. Two teams will advance from each group to the tournament semi-finals and those four nations will qualify for next year's FIFA Women's World Cup in New Zealand and Australia. In addition, the overall champion will qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics while the runner-up and third-place squad will meet in a September 2023 playoff for the other CONCACAF berth at the Olympics in France.

Third-place teams in each group will qualify for a 10-team inter-confederation playoff next February to decide three final berths in next year's Women's World Cup. The United States women have won four Women's World Cup titles and four Olympic gold medals. They are chasing an unprecedented third consecutive Women's World Cup crown after hoisting trophies in 2015 at Canada and 2019 in France. They last won Olympic gold in London in 2012. The US women are 32-1 in all-time CONCACAF Women's World Cup qualifying, their only loss coming to Mexico in a 2010 semi-final. The Americans own a 4-0 all-time record against Jamaica, a 7-0 mark against Haiti and are 39-1-1 all-time against Mexico. —AFP

Overcooked Kohli risks 'fried brain' if not rested: Shastri

NEW DELHI: Out-of-sorts Virat Kohli could be lost to cricket with a "fried brain" if he is not given a break soon, said former India coach Ravi Shastri after the batsman's latest IPL failure. Kohli's extended lean patch in the Indian Premier League continued when the Royal Challengers Bangalore star was out first ball against Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday to take his aggregate to 119 runs from seven matches.

Bangalore rode skipper Faf du Plessis's 96 to win the match and jump to second in the 10-team table of the Twenty20 tournament. "Virat Kohli is overcooked. If anyone needs a break, it's him," Shastri told Star Sports on Tuesday. "Whether it's two months or a month and a half, whether it's after (the) England (tour in July) or before England - he needs

Home hero Hardik has Gujarat flying high in IPL

NEW DELHI: Surprise-package Gujarat Titans have taken the IPL by storm in their debut season with a cleverly assembled and astutely coached team led by the all-round talents of local star Hardik Pandya. Founded by global venture fund CVC Capital for \$690 million, Gujarat on Sunday stunned four-time champions Chennai Super Kings to sit atop the 10-team standings of the money-spinning Twenty20 tournament.

Their batting has exceeded expectations with Hardik and South Africa's David Miller leading the way with stellar performances in the early half of the season. Gujarat-born Hardik has excelled with both bat and ball, accumulating 228 runs in five matches and claiming four wickets during economical pace-bowling spells. The team also shone in his injury-enforced absence, their stunning three-wicket win over Chennai coming off the back of an unbeaten 94 by Miller and a batting blitz by stand-in skipper Rashid Khan.

"The team has been selected well, led well and coached well. You can see they picked the kind of players they wanted and got the kind of balance they wanted," sports journalist Sharda Ugra told

Wimbledon to ban Russian and Belarus players

LONDON: Men's tennis world number two Daniil Medvedev is set to be barred from this year's Wimbledon Grand Slam tournament as The Times reported organizers are to ban Russian and Belarus players due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russian and Belarusian players have been able to continue to compete in ATP and WTA events under a neutral flag since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24.

It was believed this would extend to the three remaining Grand Slam events - though the ITF banned both countries' teams from the Davis Cup and the Billie Jean King Cup. However, The Times says sources have told them that after almost two months of talks Wimbledon organizers prefer to ban

a break because he has got six to seven years of cricket left in him and you don't want to lose that with a fried brain."

Kohli, 33, has stepped down as captain India in both white- and red-ball cricket and stood aside as skipper at Bangalore in the past seven months. He has failed to score a century in his last 100 matches in all formats. The former India captain had last year warned about players getting "cooked" mentally because of relentless cricket in bio-secure bubbles during the coronavirus pandemic.

Former England skipper Kevin Pietersen also backed Kohli to take a break and reset his personal and professional life. "The guy has had so much to deal with, from marriage to baby to media scrutiny and all on his personal life. He is the biggest star on show," Pietersen said. "Virat Kohli needs to say: 'Cricket boots, for six months, I will see you later.' Turn off social media, go and get re-energized."

"When the stadiums are full again, you guarantee him a spot in that side for the next 12, 24 or 36 months. Tell him: 'You're our guy. We know you'll deliver for us.'" Nicknamed King Kohli, the batsman has played 101 Tests, 260 one-day internationals and

AFP. "And in the choice of Hardik Pandya, he was picked as a kind of symbolic representative of cricket in Gujarat. He carries the aura of a superstar." Gujarat netted the 28-year-old Hardik and Rashid for \$2.08 million each in the Indian Premier League draft pick. They also paid \$1.32 million in the auction for New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson, who leads the pace pack alongside Indian veteran Mohammed Shami.

"Look at the quality of their bowling," said Ugra. "They have got Rashid Khan. They have got express pace in Lockie Ferguson and they have got Mohammed Shami, so that is three straight team of the IPL kind of players." Australian wicketkeeper-batsman Matthew Wade and India's up-and-coming batting star Shubman Gill have also had a telling impact on the team's early success.

'Surprise-package'

The selection of Ashish Nehra as coach made for a low-key appointment in contrast to other teams, such as Mahela Jayawardene at the Mumbai Indians and Kolkata's Brendon McCullum. But his straightforward style is paying off and television images of the former Indian pace bowler strategizing on paper in the dugout as other team coaches work off computers has made an impression on pundits.

"Paper or laptop, it's how Nehra is working his mind to convince the players and get the best out of them," former India spinner Pragyan Ojha told specialist website Cricbuzz. The team staff also

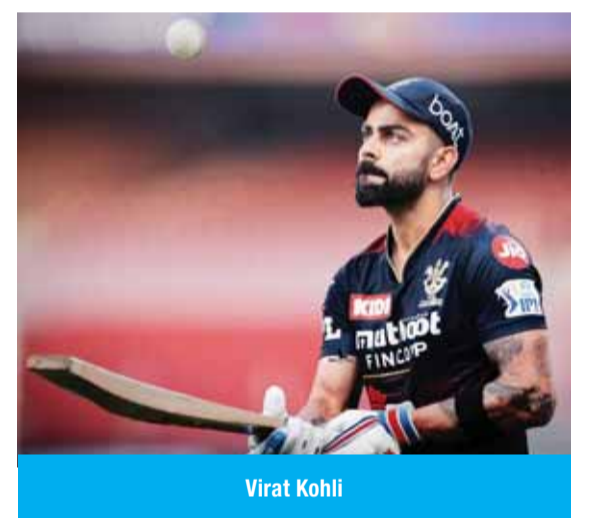
the players rather than adhere to a compromise solution offered by the British government.

That would have seen the likes of Medvedev and last year's Wimbledon women's singles semi-finalist Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus sign statements that they would not make supportive comments of Russian President Vladimir Putin or the war. Wimbledon organizers believe signing such statements could impact negatively on the families of the players. The BBC reported that confirmation of the decision is to come later on Wednesday.

'Stop the war'

The Kremlin reacted angrily to the reports deeming it "unacceptable". "Once again they simply turn athletes into hostages to political prejudice, political intrigues," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "This is unacceptable." "Taking into account that Russia is a very strong tennis country, our athletes are at the top of world rankings, the competition itself will suffer from their removal," he added.

It is likely that this ban will apply to all British grass-court tournaments this summer. The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), which oversees key Wimbledon warm-up tournaments such as Queen's and Eastbourne, said last week they would follow Wimbledon's lead. "We think from a public perspective and indeed a practical implementation per-



Virat Kohli

97 Twenty20 matches for India since 2008, during which time he has amassed 23,650 runs across the three formats including 70 centuries. Kohli is still searching for a first IPL title with Bangalore, a team he captained from 2013 to 2021. —AFP



Hardik Pandya

features World Cup-winning coach Gary Kirsten of South Africa as head of batting and mentor, and former England international Vikram Solanki as director of cricket.

Former India opener Wasim Jaffer called Gujarat a "surprise-package", but warned Hardik must stay fit if they are to maintain momentum at the business end of the tournament. Gujarat next play two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders on Saturday and it remains to be seen whether they can keep up their charge all the way to the play-offs. Fellow debutants Lucknow Super Giants, led by KL Rahul, are fourth in the table. "Both the new teams are playing good-quality cricket and producing great results for their fans," Ugra said. —AFP

spective that there needs to be alignment [between the All England Club and LTA], so it is really clear and understood," said LTA chief executive Scott Lloyd. "That is critically important."

Russian and Belarus players have been muted in their condemnation of the war though men's world number eight Andrey Rublev did scrawl 'no war please' on a TV camera when competing in Dubai just after the invasion took place. Medvedev - presently recuperating after a hernia operation - restricted himself to saying "I want peace in all of the world."

However, Russia's top female player Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova was more forthright. "Stop the war, stop the violence," she tweeted in March. "I am not afraid to clearly state my position. I am against war and violence." Belarusian tennis star Victoria Azarenka, a former world number one and two-time Grand Slam title winner, was also outspoken. "It is heartbreaking to see how many innocent people have been affected and continue to be affected by such violence," the 32-year-old said in March.

"I have always seen and experienced Ukrainian and Belarusian people friendly and supportive of each other. It's hard to witness the violent separation currently taking place." Belarus is seen as an ally of Russia and facilitated the invasion by allowing troops to cross over their border into Ukraine. —AFP



Sports

Resilient Whyte has ability to surprise, says Fury's trainer

Fury has 'zero' business with controversial Kinahan

LONDON: Dillian Whyte may be the underdog in Saturday's all-British heavyweight WBC world title bout with the incumbent Tyson Fury but the latter's trainer says the pugilist known as 'The Bodysnatcher' can "surprise people". Whyte is fortunate even to be stepping into the ring in a sold out Wembley Stadium after being shot - he once pulled a bullet out of his knee - and stabbed as a youngster. The Jamaica-born father of three - his first child was born when he was just 13 - said back in 2018 nothing in the ring can rival the dangers he faced on the streets.

"Growing up, I got stabbed in a few places, had a few stitches, I got shot in the leg," he told the Sun. "But I've always been a survivor, that's what I'm good at doing." Whyte's resilience in his professional career is attested to by staying in the game despite a two year doping ban and two bruising losses first to Anthony Joshua in 2015 and then Russian Alexander Povetkin - which he avenged in March 2021.

Those are the only two defeats Whyte - who came to Britain aged 12 - has suffered in 30 bouts. No wonder Fury's trainer, Sugarhill Steward, says the 34-year-old is not to be taken lightly. "I think Dillian Whyte's jab has got a lot better. I'm aware of that and working with Tyson on that. 'He's not a special talent of a fighter, but he's consistent with pressure and comes with a lot of power. 'You always have to watch out for Dillian. He can surprise people."

'He's the Bodysnatcher'

Whyte faces an opponent known as 'The Gypsy King' who is unbeaten in 32 fights - 31 victories and one draw. However, Whyte says having experienced the school of hard knocks he is well placed to produce an upset. "I've come to leave it all on the line. I'm used to taking risks and taking chances is nothing to me," Whyte told the BBC. "I've had a lot of different fights in different places and fights where I've been the underdog. I've been through the mill already."

Whyte says 33-year-old Fury deserves respect but he is not the second coming of the legends of the division. "He's a very good fighter," said Whyte. "He's

the only one of our era who's won all the titles-he's a top fighter, undefeated, big guy. "But I don't see him like everyone else sees him, like he's the white 6ft 9in Muhammad Ali, Mike Tyson, Joe Frazier mix that's re-born-I don't see him as that."

Neutral observers largely favor Fury retaining his belt but one, Dave Coldwell - who guided Tony Bellew to the WBC cruiserweight world title - has a caveat. "Dillian's not going to go out there and out-box Tyson Fury," Coldwell told the BBC. "Dillian's a great body puncher. He's the Bodysnatcher. "He has some vicious body punches. I think he has to do that in this fight. "But his feet have got to be in range and that's where the trickiness of the fight lies. "It's all about whether he can get his feet into range and if he can't then this is a very tough ask."

Meanwhile, Fury on Tuesday insisted he had "absolutely zero" business with Daniel Kinahan and said sanctions against the alleged crime boss were nothing to do with him. Fury's defense of the WBC title against Whyte has been overshadowed by a heated debate over the champion's reported links to Kinahan. The 33-year-old Briton mentioned Kinahan as a "key advisor" in the past.

Kinahan was recently named as being a head of the Irish Kinahan crime gang and hit with worldwide financial sanctions by the United States government, who have offered a \$5 million (£3.84m) reward for information on the group leading to the arrest and conviction of its leaders. Dubai-based Kinahan, who has always denied any wrongdoing, is alleged to be one of the leaders of a cartel the US authorities accuse of smuggling drugs, money laundering and bringing violence to "the most vulnerable in society".

Fury had avoided questions about Kinahan last week, but he finally addressed the controversy after Tuesday's open workout at Boxpark Wembley. Asked if he had any business with Kinahan, Fury said: "Zero, absolutely zero. It's none of my business. I keep my own business to myself, that's it. Has it been a distraction? Not really, it's got nowt to do with me, has it? If I say, 'There's a war going on in Ukraine', and people ask me about that, it's got nowt to do with me. I keep my business to myself. I've got my own troubles to look after with six kids and a wife.



LONDON: World Boxing Council (WBC) President Mauricio Sulaiman poses in a sparring ring ahead of an open work-out session with WBC heavyweight title holder Britain's Tyson Fury (unseen) in Wembley on April 19, 2022. —AFP

I've got a lot more to think about than other people's business. In my life, I've got a man who wants to punch my face in next week and I've got to deal with that. Anything else is out of my control."

Fury, who is co-promoted by Top Rank, was pictured with Kinahan in Dubai in February but played down the image. "A picture doesn't mean I am a criminal," said Fury. "I can't control who is in the building. "There could be a criminal in this building now. It doesn't mean I am involved in his criminal activity, does it?"

Frank Warren, who also promotes Fury, added: "Let me make a couple of things very clear - one, Daniel Kinahan has nothing to do with this show and, two, as Tyson said, he was unaware of any payments

made by Top Rank to Daniel Kinahan." At last month's unveiling press conference for the Whyte fight, Fury said he was set to retire after the bout, before then taking a more non-committal approach when asked about his future last week.

Quizzed again on his retirement plans on Tuesday, Fury appeared to rule out returning to the ring once he has faced Whyte. "That's it. Get a good victory here on Saturday night, relax, sit back and enjoy life. I am loving every second of this week," he said. "It's been a long old journey, ups and downs in my career, lots of ups and downs. I'm coming up to 34, 20 years as a boxer, that's enough for anybody. There's plenty of other stuff I need to do like look after my kids and wife and enjoy them." —AFP

Markaz's first padel tournament for employees witnesses strong participation



KUWAIT: Further strengthening its commitment to creating the ideal work environment, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" successfully held its first internal padel tournament. It was well received by its employees who enthusiastically participated in the fun-filled competitions. The tournament comes as part of Markaz's efforts to promote staff wellness and encourage sports activities by inspiring healthy lifestyle choices among employees and improving engagement and collaboration among them.

The exciting tournament held at Terra Rooftop Courts in Shuwaikh saw 16 teams composed of Markaz employees competing against each other. The event also turned into a true showcase of the company's skilled sports talent pool. Beating their opponents, two teams reached the finals as cheerful spectators motivated them. The (ACL) team secured

a hard-fought win in the finals.

The tournament forms part of a series of internal events Markaz held this year after the COVID-19 pandemic got in the way of in-person gatherings and activities over the past two years. With people being its biggest asset, Markaz places special importance on continuously investing, not only in their professional growth, but also in their personal development by creating teambuilding opportunities for them to come together in a casual and friendly setting.

Markaz chose padel as it is easy to learn, suitable for all ages and engages a diverse audience. Being played on enclosed courts roughly three-quarters the size of a tennis court, the racket game is increasingly popular among various sports enthusiasts and is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world.

As well as promoting sports and physical activities internally, Markaz has supported Kuwait's Kuwaiti jet ski champion Yousef Al-Abdulrazzaq as the 'Gold Sponsor' in the Aquabike World Championship 2021, as part of its ongoing corporate social responsibility initiatives to build human capabilities and promote youth development in the country.

In addition, Markaz continues to support AC Milan soccer academy in Kuwait, with the aim to improve the youths' skills in sports in general and football specifically. Markaz's corporate social responsibility strategy is founded on three pillars, namely, building human capacity, aligning its business environment with the principles of sustainable development, and promoting good governance in the business environment.

Inter see off Milan to reach Italian Cup final

MILAN: Lautaro Martinez scored twice as Inter Milan beat city rivals AC Milan 3-0 on Tuesday to reach the Italian Cup final, where they will face either Juventus or Fiorentina. The semi-final second leg was closer than the scoreline suggested, but Inter ultimately were comfortable winners on aggregate after a goalless draw in the first fixture. Simone Inzaghi's men will take on the winners of Wednesday's other semi-final, which Juventus lead 1-0 after the first leg, at the Stadio Olimpico on May 11.

"I am happy because we are playing another final, we work to bring Inter to the top and tonight we proved it again," said Martinez. "The fans are pleased and so are we." AC Milan remain without a major trophy since winning the 2011 Serie A title, but the Scudetto is still up for grabs this season. Stefano Pioli's men lead Inter by two points in the table, although the reigning champions have a game in hand.

Inter Milan made a dream start on

Tuesday as they struck inside the first four minutes. Matteo Darmian's dinked cross found its way to Martinez, and the Argentinian slammed a volley into the top corner to score his 18th goal of the season in all competitions. AC Milan eventually burst into life around the half-hour mark, with Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic having to make smart saves from Rafael Leao and Alexis Saelemaekers.

They almost levelled again twice in quick succession five minutes before half-time, as Ivan Perisic somehow scrambled the ball off the line with his chest, before Leao's effort was kept out by Handanovic's legs. But Inter sprung straight up the other end to double their advantage against the run of play, as Joaquin Correa played a lovely through ball into the path of Martinez, who coolly chipped the ball over advancing goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

Milan started the second half brightly, with the defense producing crucial blocks from attempts by Brahim Diaz, Olivier Giroud and Pierre Kalulu. The Serie A leaders thought they had given themselves hope in the 66th minute through Ismael Bennacer's excellent long-range drive. But the goal was dis-



MILAN: Inter Milan's Dutch defender Stefan de Vrij and AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud go for the ball during their Italian Cup semifinal, second leg match on April 19, 2022 at the San Siro stadium. —AFP

allowed by VAR due to Kalulu standing in front of Handanovic in an offside position.

Pioli was angered by the decision, which took the wind out of Milan's sails. "Look at Handanovic's reaction. He doesn't even complain," Pioli told Mediaset. "Tell me a goalkeeper who doesn't react after conceding if a

Milan player had damaged his view. Instead, he does nothing, they only complained about a handball that wasn't even there. Come on! Come on." Inter secured their place in the final with eight minutes remaining on the counterattack, as Marcelo Brozovic crossed for substitute Robin Gosens to score. —AFP

Freiburg brush aside Hamburg to reach German Cup final

HAMBURG: Freiburg cruised into the first German Cup final in the club's history with a 3-1 victory at second-tier Hamburg in Tuesday's semi-final, with all their goals coming in the first half. Bundesliga side Freiburg dominated Hamburg, who have spent the last four seasons in the second division, with Nils Petersen, Nicolas Hoefler and Vincenzo Grifo scoring in the opening 35 minutes.

Hamburg managed a consolation goal with two minutes left when Robert Glatzel headed in. "It's indescribable - we've written history, Freiburg has never managed this before," said Hoefler. "We can still achieve a lot. I couldn't care less who we play in the final, we just want to win it." There will be a new German Cup winner when the final is held at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on May 21.

Neither Freiburg, nor Union Berlin and RB Leipzig who meet in Wednesday's other semi-final, have previously lifted the trophy. Hamburg were the only club in the semifinals to have already won the cup, with the last of their three victories coming during the fallen giants' glory days of the 1980s. Hosts Hamburg were behind on just 11 minutes when Hoefler swung in a cross which Petersen met to score.

Hoefler then smashed in a shot which deflected off Hamburg captain Sebastian Schonlau six minutes later. Hamburg rallied, with forwards Bakery Jatta and Glatzel going close. But Freiburg grabbed their third when Grifo converted a penalty after a foul on Germany defender Nico Schlotterbeck. To compound Hamburg's misery, midfielder Anssi Suhonen had a goal disallowed for offside.

The game's tempo dropped after the break as Freiburg's defense contained Hamburg, apart from a great chance for Suhonen who dribbled through the defense before Hoefler blocked his shot. Glatzel scored a deserved late consolation for Hamburg when he headed home. —AFP



HAMBURG: Freiburg's German midfielder Maximilian Eggstein controls the ball during the German Cup semifinal match against Hamburg on April 19, 2022. —AFP



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah fights for the ball with Manchester United's English defender Aaron Wan-Bissaka during their English Premier League match at Anfield on April 19, 2022. —AFP

Liverpool thrash Man Utd to go top

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool embarrassed Manchester United for the second time this season to move top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah struck twice in a 4-0 thrashing on Tuesday. Jurgen Klopp's men won 5-0 at Old Trafford in October and expectations of a similar rout were well-founded as Liverpool exposed the massive gulf between the sides with Luis Diaz and Sadio Mane also on target.

Liverpool move two points ahead of Manchester City at the top of the table, but still need the English champions to slip up in their remaining seven league games of the season to win the title. In contrast to the fine margins separating Liverpool and City, a 22-point gap now lies between the league leaders and United in sixth with only Tottenham and Arsenal's own failings keeping the Red Devils in the race to qualify for

next season's Champions League.

United interim manager Ralf Rangnick forewarned what would happen to his side if they defended as they did in a 3-2 home win over bottom-of-the-table Norwich on Saturday. The German's attempt to plug the holes in the United defence was a recall for Phil Jones, making just his second Premier League appearance since January 2020, as part of a back five. But it took just five minutes for the visitors to be cut open.

Mane's through ball picked out Salah in acres of space and he found Diaz to apply a simple finish from close range. Two minutes later the fierce rivalry between English football's two most successful clubs was set aside in a show of support for Cristiano Ronaldo. The Portuguese superstar was missing for United after revealing on Monday that

his newborn baby son had died.

Supporters on all sides of Anfield stood for a minute's applause, while the Liverpool fans sang their own anthem "You'll never walk alone". On the field, the one-way traffic continued with United barely able to get out of their own half. A second Liverpool goal seemed inevitable and when it arrived, it was of the highest quality. Joel Matip fished the ball into Mane's feet and the Senegalese lofted a first time pass over the top for Salah.

The Egyptian had not scored for Liverpool from open play since February, but showed no signs of a lack of confidence as he cushioned the ball into his path and slotted low past David de Gea. Diaz rounded off another brilliant team move before half-time only to be flagged offside. Half-time offered United some respite and they improved

markedly after the break thanks to the introduction of Jadon Sancho.

The England winger created the visitors' one big chance to get back into the game as Alisson Becker spread himself to block from Marcus Rashford and Anthony Elanga. Liverpool are now potentially 10 games away from a first ever quadruple of Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup titles. And they look set to pounce on any wobble from City in the run-in with their lethal collection of forwards all in top form.

Mane coolly steered home the third from Diaz's cross to end any hope of a United revival. Salah then took his tally for the season to 30, five of which have come in two games against United, as he lifted the ball over De Gea from Diogo Jota's pass five minutes from time. —AFP

Pele hospitalized again for colon cancer treatment

SAO PAULO: Brazilian football great Pele has been hospitalized in Sao Paulo since Monday as part of his treatment for colon cancer, the medical center that treats him said. The clinical condition of Edson Arantes do Nascimento is "good and stable, and he should be discharged from hospital in the next few days," the Albert Einstein Hospital said Tuesday in a statement.

Considered by many the greatest footballer of all time, Pele is the only player in history to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970).

Known in Brazil as "O Rei," or "The King," the 81-year-old must go to the hospital at least once a month to undergo check-ups and continue chemotherapy against the colon tumor that was detected last September, according to his family.

Before his diagnosis of colon cancer, which led to Pele being hospitalized for a month last year, the former star of Santos and the Brazilian team was hospitalized in Paris in 2019 and transferred to Sao Paulo to have a kidney stone removed. In 2014, the legendary "10" was hospitalized in intensive care due to a urinary tract infection that forced him to undergo dialysis on his left kidney, after the right one was removed in the 1970s due to an injury when he was still a player. He also had hip problems that limited his mobility and forced him to use a wheelchair. —AFP



Pele

Former no. 1 Sharapova pregnant with first child

PARIS: Former women's tennis world number one Maria Sharapova is pregnant with her first child, the Russian announced on her 35th birthday on Tuesday. The five-time Grand Slam singles champion has been engaged since December 2020 to British businessman Alexander Gilkes. "Precious beginnings!!! Eating birthday cake for two has always been my specialty," she captioned the photo on Instagram.

In the picture, Sharapova - who lives in the United States - is seen touching her stomach and posing on a beach. Sharapova followed the initial message up posting a thank you to those of her 4.2 million subscribers on Instagram who had congratulated her on the news. "Waking up in paradise and to so many beautiful messages," she wrote. Sharapova won all four Grand Slam singles titles - including the French Open twice - before retiring in 2020. —AFP



Maria Sharapova

Kenyan-born Bahraini runner found dead

NAIROBI: A Kenyan-born Bahraini athlete was found dead in her native country on Tuesday, an incident that has revived memories of the killing last year of record-breaking distance runner Agnes Tirop in the same town. Damaris Muthee Mutua's body was discovered in the world famous running hub of Iten in western Kenya and police said they have launched a manhunt for her Ethiopian boyfriend.

Mutua, 28, competed for Kenya as a junior athlete and won two bronze medals at the 2010 Summer Youth Olympics in Singapore and the East African junior athletics championships in Khartoum, before

switching her allegiance to Bahrain. "According to Mutua's immediate neighbor, her boyfriend was seen in the house on Sunday morning. It's likely that the incident happened late Saturday or early Sunday since the body was in a state of decomposition," county police chief Tom Makori told AFP.

"We have launched a manhunt for the Ethiopian who is believed to have fled the country." The sleepy farming town of Iten, a high-altitude endurance training center for top athletes, hit the headlines in October when Tirop was found stabbed to death in her home. The killing of Tirop, a rising star in long-distance running and a two-time World Championship bronze medalist, sent shockwaves across the nation and the athletics world. Tirop's estranged husband Emmanuel Ibrahim Rotich has been charged with her murder and remains in custody but he has denied the accusations against him. A bail hearing for Rotich has been postponed several times and it has now been set for April 27. —AFP



Damaris Muthee Mutua