



7 Beijing expands mass testing; COVID lockdown fears grow



12 French nun becomes world's oldest person



16 Celtics sweep Nets as Raptors, Mavs romp



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	03:45
Shurooq	05:10
Dhuhr	11:46
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:21
Isha	19:44



Kuwait urges Security Council to react to Zionist aggressions

Palestinian killed during West Bank 'counter-terrorism' raid



NEW YORK: Kuwait has reiterated its condemnation of the Zionist aggressions against Palestinians, notably the repeated storming of the holy Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Delivering Kuwait's speech to UN Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle East on Monday, Ambassador Bader Abdullah Al-Munayekh thanked the Council President for April, Barbara Woodward, of the United Kingdom, for her successful handling of the affairs of the Council.

Al-Munayekh, Acting Charge d'Affaires of Kuwait Mission to the United Nations Minister Plenipotentiary, also appreciated the briefing made earlier by UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland as well as all efforts aimed to restore calm in the region. Kuwait's envoy said his country as well as the international community followed with profound concern the recent serious escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories due to the crimes and brutalities committed by the Zionists against the Palestinians.

The Zionist occupation forces have, regrettably, stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque repeatedly and attacked peaceful worshippers in the recent days during the holy month of Ramadan, Ambassador Al-Munayekh pointed out. "The brutal attacks resulted in hun-

dreds of casualties and arrests among the worshippers, including women and children besides the material damage to Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Kuwait reiterates strong condemnation of such incursions, and attacks on armless worshippers and civilians.

Meanwhile, one Palestinian was killed Tuesday when Zionist forces stormed a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, in what the army called a "counter-terrorism" operation that sparked violent riots. The incident is the latest in wave of unrest rocking the West Bank and Zionist entity as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish holiday of Passover overlapped this month.

The Palestinian health ministry said 20-year-old Ahmed Ibrahim Oweidat "succumbed to critical wounds sustained by live bullets to the head, at dawn today in Aqabat Jaber camp" which is near Jericho. The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said three men were injured when the "undercover" forces raided the camp overnight.

Zionist army in a statement to AFP said that soldiers conducted an overnight operation in Aqabat "to apprehend wanted suspects." "During the operational activity, dozens of Palestinians violently rioted and attacked the soldiers.

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JERUSALEM: Zionist security forces deploy inside Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque complex following clashes which broke out with Palestinian protesters. — AFP

The Night of Power

Ramadan Kareem

By Sharafun-Nisa'a Mohammed Farouk

The Night of Power is a very important occasion in Islam. It is a night of mercy, blessings, peace and guidance. God says what can be translated as, "We have indeed revealed this (Quran) in the Night of Power. And what will explain to you what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit (Archangel Gabriel) by God's permission, on every errand. Peace is this night until the rise of morning." Chapter 97

When the night of spiritual darkness is removed by the glory of God, wonderful peace and sense of security arise in the soul. Such an occasion is one in which divine Wisdom places before us, through Revelation, the solution of spiritual problems of the highest import to mankind. The night that a message descends from God is indeed a blessed night like a day of rain for a parched land.

Why was it named Night of Power?

The following verse of the Quran gives us the answer: ".....in it (the Night of Power) is made distinct every affair of wisdom, by command from Our (Allah's) presence. We ever send revelations." (44:4 -5) Qatadah (Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) companion) said, "God passes judgments and prescribes injunctions for His creatures on that night in terms of what will happen in the following year.

In it, God also predetermines the sustenance of His servants, their life span and the moments of each one's death. It is enough to call it the "Night of Power" due to the fact that the Quran, which has been a great school for mankind, was revealed in its entirety to the first heaven during this blessed night." Muslims celebrate the Night of Power wholeheartedly and enthusiastically.

Mosques and communities celebrate the night by staying up all night, listening to lectures, reading and reciting the Quran and supplicating to God Almighty to give them more favors and blessings, to forgive their sins and to secure for them a lofty place in Paradise. What is recommended, however, is to reflect on the Divine Words and to act upon them. Unless that is done, the real power will not be received from that night.

When should Muslims await the Night of Power?

Continued on Page 6

Russia expels 43 Swedish, German diplomats

MOSCOW: Moscow on Tuesday said it was expelling three Swedish diplomats after Stockholm expelled three Russian diplomats over the conflict in Ukraine, despite Sweden saying four were dismissed. Russia's foreign ministry said it summoned

the Swedish ambassador to Russia and "strongly protested" the expulsion of Russian diplomats and Sweden's "military support to the Kyiv regime".

It also accused Sweden of "covering up the crimes of Ukrainian nationalists against the civilian population of Donbas and Ukraine," referring to a region in eastern Ukraine, parts of which are controlled by pro-Russia separatists. "In response to this, the Russian side decided to declare persona non grata three diplomats of the Swedish embassy in Russia," the ministry said.

In early April, Sweden said it was expelling three Russian diplomats who conducted "illegal opera-

tions", following similar moves by other EU allies. Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde said the action was "very regrettable," but said that a total of four diplomats had been expelled - three from the embassy in Moscow and another at the Swedish consulate in Saint Petersburg.

In a written response to AFP, Linde stressed that Sweden expelled the Russians because they had conducted operations that "violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations," but claimed the Swedish diplomats had conducted "traditional diplomatic activities."

Continued on Page 6

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka to sell 'golden' visas

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka announced Tuesday it would sell long-term visas to attract desperately needed foreign currency after the island nation ran out of dollars to pay for food and fuel. Foreigners who deposit a minimum of \$100,000 locally will be granted permission to live and work in Sri Lanka for 10 years under the "Golden Paradise Visa Program," the government said.

The money should be locked in a local bank account for the duration of the stay, the government said in a statement. "This scheme will help Sri

Lanka at a time when we are facing the worst financial crisis since our independence," media minister Nalaka Godahewa told reporters in Colombo. The government also approved the granting of five-year visas to any foreigner spending a minimum of \$75,000 to buy an apartment on the island.

Acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines have triggered widespread protests, with thousands of people camped outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's seaford office to demand his resignation. The government has signaled a willingness to consider constitutional reforms that could pare back the authority of the president, who gave himself sweeping powers to appoint and sack ministers, judges and public servants after his 2019 election.

Continued on Page 6

Musk buys Twitter for \$44 billion

NEW YORK: Elon Musk, the world's richest man, struck a deal Monday to buy Twitter for \$44 billion, capping a saga complete with hostile takeover threats before delivering him personal control of one of the most influential social media platforms on the planet. Twitter famously served as a megaphone for former US president Donald Trump before the platform banned him, and Musk - a self-proclaimed "free-speech absolutist" - has said he wants to reform what he sees as the platform's

over-zealous content moderation.

"Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated," Musk said in a statement released by Twitter. "I also want to make Twitter better than ever by enhancing the product with new features, making the algorithms open source to increase trust, defeating the spam bots and authenticating all humans."

However advocacy groups were wary of the type of content Musk might allow on the platform, and Derrick Johnson, president of the NAACP civil rights organization, tweeted, "Do not allow Twitter to become a petri dish for hate

Continued on Page 6



COLOMBO: Muslim devotees break their fast during the holy fasting month of Ramadan while protesting along with others near the president's office in Colombo on April 25, 2022. — AFP



CHICAGO: In this photo illustration, news about Elon Musk's bid to takeover Twitter is tweeted on April 25, 2022 in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Foreign Minister holds 'sohour' banquet for retired ambassadors



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah is seen during a 'sohour' banquet held in honor of the retired ambassadors and officials of the ministry. —KUNA photos



Guests attend the gathering.

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah held a 'sohour' banquet late Monday, in honor of the retired ambassadors and officials of the ministry. The minister conveyed greetings and appreciation of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to those diplomats and officials for their sincere efforts and contribution to represent and serve Kuwait and citizens. — KUNA

Mexican Ambassador sends Eid greetings

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Mexico Miguel Angel Isidro extended his sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh



Ambassador of Mexico Miguel Angel Isidro

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister, the government and the people of the State of Kuwait, on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr, wishing the friendly people of Kuwait further prosperity and stability. Ambassador Isidro added, "In recent years, the two countries have enjoyed deepening bilateral relations, practical cooperation and cultural exchanges. Mexico stands ready to work with Kuwait to enhance dialogue, communication and cooperation, continue to support each other on international and regional issues in a view to push our bilateral relations to a new high. Mexico is looking forward to enhancing high level exchanges and cooperation with Kuwait and strengthening coordination in international forums to further cement and promote the friendship between our two countries and peoples."



Zain continues iftar meals initiative in last 10 days of Ramadan

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the continuation of its Iftar meals initiative during the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan under the theme "30 Days of Blessings". As part of its social campaign during the holy month, the company distributes over 30,000 Iftar meals throughout Ramadan in collaboration with its strategic partner the Kuwait Food Bank.

Zain recently visited Souq Al-Mubarakkiya at the heart of Kuwait City to distribute Iftar meals, attended by Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan, Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, Vice Chairman of the Kuwait Food Bank Meshal Al-Ansari, as well as Zain and Food bank teams and volunteers.

This year, Zain's iftar initiative came back for its 15th year after a halt of two years due to the pandemic. The iftar initiative is one of the main pillars of the company's Ramadan campaign as part of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility Strategy, put-



ting Zain at the forefront of leading national companies that exert charitable and volunteer efforts.

To commit to health measures and achieve social distancing, Zain directly offers the Iftar meals to fasting individuals this year in strategic partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank via special trucks that deliver the meals daily across the country, in place of the traditional iftar halls the company used to host before the pandemic. The trucks visit the most populated areas to secure the daily Iftar meal for workers, underprivileged individuals and families, and others who are in most need during Ramadan.

This annual initiative is considered a main pillar of Zain's comprehensive Corporate Sustainability and

Social Responsibility (CSSR) campaign during the holy month of Ramadan. The iftar meals distribution is supervised by Zain's team as part of its commitment to present an added value to the community.

This initiative is part of a series of programs the company is organizing throughout the holy month of Ramadan with the aim of having a deep positive impact on the community's various segments, especially the most vulnerable ones. The company's solid CSSR strategy primarily focuses on the wellbeing of the entire nation. For this reason, the company has maintained its support of numerous initiatives that spread awareness and help make a difference to people's everyday lives.

KFAED inks deal with Somalia relating to debt-burdened countries



KUWAIT: A picture taken from the ceremony to sign the agreement between Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Federal Government of Somalia. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Federal Government of Somalia on Tuesday signed a debt relief agreement under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) framework. This agreement will allow rescheduling of the arrears and outstanding balance of the eligible loans granted to the Federal Government of Somalia by the Fund and resuming the bilateral relationship between the two parties that had been interrupted by the instability in Somalia period close to thirty years. It is worth mentioning that in the last five years or so, the Federal Government of

Somalia has undertaken and implemented a series of economic and institutional reforms that resulted in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank announcing that Somalia qualified for debt relief package under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative on March 24, 2020. Therefore, the current agreement between Somalia and Kuwait Fund is part of the broader international efforts to wipe off a significant portion of national debts in recognition of the significant economic reforms and forecasted positive national debt sustainability analysis.



KUWAIT: People line up to receive food boxes during an iftar distribution campaign in Salmiya in the holy month of Ramadan. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Local

Kuwait urges UNSC to react to Zionist entity's incursions in Al-Aqsa Mosque

OIC reiterates rejection of changing legal, historical status of Jerusalem

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait reiterated its condemnation of the Zionist entity's aggressions against the Palestinian people, notably the repeated storming of the holy Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Delivering Kuwait's speech to UN Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle East on Monday, Ambassador Bader Abdullah Al-Munayekh thanked the Council President for April Barbara Woodward, of the United Kingdom, for her successful handling of the affairs of the Council.

Munayekh, Acting Charge d'Affaires of Kuwait Mission to the United Nations Minister Plenipotentiary, also appreciated the briefing made earlier by UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland as well as all efforts aimed to restore calm in the region. Kuwait's envoy said his country as well as the international community followed with profound concern the recent serious escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories due to the crimes and brutalities committed by the Zionist entity, the occupying power, against the Palestinian people.

The Zionist occupation forces have, regrettably, stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque repeatedly and attacked peaceful worshippers in the recent days during the holy month of Ramadan, Ambassador Munayekh pointed out. "The brutal attacks resulted in hundreds of casualties and arrests among the worshippers, including women and children besides the material damage to Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The State of Kuwait reiterates strong condemnation of such incursions, and attacks on armless worshippers and civilians. Such abuses run counter to all international conventions and UNSC resolutions, and could lead only to fomenting violence and extremism, which could further destabilize the region," he stressed.

"The recent [Zionist] crimes fall in the framework of violations of the UNSC resolutions 476, 478 and 2334, which provide for a special status

of Jerusalem and ban any attempt to change the historical and legal status quo of the holy city," Ambassador Munayekh reminded. He called on the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, to shoulder their responsibility for holding the Zionist entity accountable for such serious abuses, desecration of the Islamic holy shrines and the violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. He stressed the need of urgent collective action to restore calm and revive the Middle East peace process.

"Failure to hold the [Zionist] occupation authorities accountable their violations and force them into honoring their legal obligations under relevant international laws, will definitely encourage them to commit more crimes," he cautioned. The State of Kuwait maintains commitment to the stance of the Arab and Muslim world favoring peace as strategic option, and backs the two-state solution envisaging realization of the legitimate political right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, he concluded.



Zionist forces attacked peaceful worshippers in Ramadan

Jerusalem's status

Separately, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) reaffirmed its rejection of the Zionist entity's attempts aiming to change the legal and historical status of the occupied Jerusalem City. This came during the final communique of the extraordinary meeting of the OIC executive committee that discussed the continued attacks of the Zionist entity on Al-Aqsa Mosque. The communique stressed the principles and goals of the OIC charters, and legal, historical and moral responsibility of the Muslim nation. It emphasized that the comprehensive and fair peace will be only achieved by ending the occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestine state with Jerusalem as its capital.

The communique also stressed the relevant UN resolutions, including the legal advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in 2004. The meeting lauded steadfastness of Palestinian peo-



JERUSALEM: Zionist police arrest a Palestinian man at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque on April 22, 2022. —AFP

ple and their legitimate struggle in defense of their sanctities, freedom and inalienable rights. The conferees stated that all measures taken by the Zionist entity - as an illegitimate occupation power - to impose its laws on Jerusalem are null and void, the communique said, affirming that Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque are a red line for the Muslim nation. In addition, the meeting condemned the continued Zionist attacks on Muslims while praying in Al-Aqsa Mosque and on Palestinian people over the past days that wounded dozens of them, it said. It called for an immediate halt of these steps and stressed Palestine's sovereignty over all Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.

The meeting called for backing Palestinians' steadfastness and their legitimate rights and urged

member states to provide urgent humanitarian aid to alleviate Palestinians' sufferings. The gathering stressed the role of the historical Hashemite guardianship assumed by Jordan's King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein in protecting the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and their historical and legal status. Moreover, the communique affirmed the central role of the Al-Quds Committee headed by Morocco's King Mohammed VI in confronting the dangerous measures taken by the Zionist occupation authorities in Jerusalem. The conferees called on the international community to respect the resolutions of international legitimacy on Jerusalem, with the aim of pressing the Zionist entity to end its illegal occupation of the land of the State of Palestine occupied in 1967. — KUNA

Iraq urges nationals to report information about missing Kuwaiti POWs

BAGHDAD: Iraq's ministries of foreign and defense affairs renewed a call upon citizens on Tuesday to report any information regarding remains of missing Kuwaitis or Kuwaiti properties. The two ministries,

in a written humanitarian appeal distributed Tuesday, urged Iraqis or any person who may possess information about burial locations of Iraqis or Kuwaitis, lost in the beginning of the 1990/91 Iraqi invasion or any information about the Kuwaiti properties, namely documents, the Amiri archive, and report back rapidly. The ministries also provided several phone numbers, including of Kuwaiti missions in the country, Iraqis, in and out of the country, could call. The file of the missing Kuwaitis and the Kuwaiti archive had been restricted to the Iraqi human rights ministry before it was shifted to the defense ministry. And later, the foreign affairs department was added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi (right) signs the agreement with Head of the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) Yunus Sezer. —KUNA

KRCS to establish disaster relief center in Turkey

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Monday that it signed an agreement to establish a disaster relief and response center in Antalya, Turkey, with a generous donation from Kuwait Finance House (KFH). On the sidelines of the agreement signing ceremony, KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi

said that the center would address emergencies such as the recent fires, which plagued Turkish forests. He expressed gratitude towards KFH for its donation, saying that it reflected the generous spirit of the Kuwaiti people. Meanwhile, Head of the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) Yunus Sezer lauded the KRCS and KFH for their contributions, affirming that the State of Kuwait had a tremendous record of accomplishment when it came to humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Koytak, KFH CEO Abdulwahab Iesa Al-Rushood, and KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas attended the signing ceremony. — KUNA

Al-Zour refinery to be operated within few weeks: KIPIC

KUWAIT: Al-Zour refinery is set to be operated within the next few weeks, said the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company

(KIPIC) Monday. In a press statement, KIPIC denied what was reported about the suspension of the refinery's operation, stressing that it was "untrue." Al-Zour Refinery is the largest in Kuwait to be established in accordance with international environmental specifications and standards, as it will contribute to improving air quality by reducing the percentage of polluting gases emitted from power plants by 75 percent by providing them with environmental fuels with low sulfur content. — KUNA

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News in brief

Kuwaitis set for Schengen Visa exemption

KUWAIT: Kuwait is soon expected to be added to the list of countries whose citizens can travel through Europe without applying for a Schengen Visa. The decision, expected to be officially announced in the next few days, comes eight years after Kuwait applied to the European Commission for Schengen Visa exemption in 2014.

Court issues gag order on complaint

KUWAIT: The Criminal Court gave orders Tuesday to ban publishing any news or information regarding the complaint lodged by Sheikh Hamad Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah against Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and others in all printed, audiovisual and digital media platforms as well as all information technology means.

Kuwaiti oil barrel down to \$104.41 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil barrel dropped \$5.4 to reach \$104.41 per barrel (pb) on Monday, compared with \$109.81 pb last Friday, according to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Tuesday. In international markets, Brent crude oil went down \$4.33 upon settlement to reach \$102.32 pb, while West Texas crude dropped \$3.53 to stand at \$98.54 pb.

Two injured in Wafra Road crash

KUWAIT: A two-vehicle collision on Wafra Road resulted in critically injuring a Kuwaiti man and his daughter. Kout firemen freed the two and handed them to paramedics. Meanwhile, a vehicle rammed into the shopfront of a printshop, wounding two expats working there. Both were taken to hospital.



KUWAIT: The vehicle involved in the accident on Wafra Road.



The vehicle that crashed into the printshop.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: This picture shows a traditional old market in Kuwait. (Source: A total commemorative printed images to the Ministry of Information in the 1960s and 1970s. Prepared by Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, heritage researcher at the Ministry of Information).

Thailand to 'fully re-open' from May 1

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Thailand in Kuwait announced that starting from May 1, 2022, Thailand will fully re-open, and the RT-PCR test and quarantine for fully vaccinated travelers to the country are no longer required. Travelers are advised to register Thailand Pass prior to travel with the travel insurance. The relaxing restrictions also apply to restaurants, tourist destinations and other business sectors in day and night throughout the country where they are allowed to re-open or operate with extra hours.

The Thai government will continue to encourage international travelers to self-test using antigen test kits during their stays in Thailand. Treatments for those who test positive will be covered by their travel insurance. All travelers to Thailand can register for Thailand Pass prior to travel via website <https://tp.consular.go.th> and upload necessary documents based on the entry criteria. The system takes only 1 - 2 days to approve and will issue the Thailand Pass QR code for the traveler to use in their travel to Thailand.

In the year 2019, before COVID-19, Thailand was one of the top destinations for Kuwait, with average of 70,000 travelers for tourism and medical treatment. "When we fully re-open the country, it means that business is back to normal. We hope to attract more tourists to visit Thailand this year. The Royal Thai Embassy stands by ready to assist and welcome Kuwaitis to visit Thailand," said Rooge Thammongkol, Thai Ambassador to Kuwait.



Ministry inspects domestic help offices

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry began inspections of domestic help offices in all governorates to make sure they comply with ministry laws and ministerial decision 33/2021 with regards to setting the cost of bringing in helpers at KD 890. Meanwhile, the ministry closed a store in Sharq for selling subsidized and expired foodstuff. Further legal action will follow.





Human Rights Watch chief to step down

Beijing expands mass testing as lockdown fears grow



RAMSTEIN AIR BASE: Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov (3rd right) talks with Lithuania's Minister of Defense Arvydas Anusauskas (2nd right) and Danish Minister of Defense Morten Bodskov (right) as they attend a meeting with members of a Ukraine Security Consultative Group at the US Air Base in Ramstein, western Germany, on April 26, 2022. —AFP

US vows to bolstering Ukraine

Ukraine clearly believes that it can win and so does everyone here

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany: The United States vowed Tuesday to move "heaven and earth" to help Ukraine win its battle against Russia's unprovoked invasion, as allies from 40 nations met to bolster Kyiv's defence against Moscow.

The meeting called by the US at its Ramstein airbase in southwestern Germany aims "to help Ukraine win the fight against Russia's unjust invasion and to build up Ukraine's defences for tomorrow's challenges", said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin as he opened the talks.

"Ukraine clearly believes that it can win and so does everyone here," he added. The US is already the biggest supplier of international military aid to Ukraine and Austin said Washington is "going to keep moving heaven and earth so that we can meet" Kyiv's needs.

At the talks, German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht said Berlin has agreed to give the go-ahead to the delivery of used Gepard anti-aircraft tanks to Ukraine. The move towards heavy weapons deliveries marked a turning point from Germany's timid backing for Kyiv which has put Chancellor Olaf Scholz under fire at home and abroad.

Lambrecht admitted that the Bundeswehr's weapons stocks are limited, but said it will turn to the inventory of Germany's armaments manufacturers. "Ukraine orders and Germany pays," she said. Kyiv has been asking for heavy artillery and tanks to repel Russian forces trying to seize complete control of its vast southern plains and the

eastern region of Donbas.

But the Russian-made equipment which Ukrainians have been trained to use is now rare. Some countries in eastern Europe which still had stocks have sent them to Kyiv, sometimes in exchange for newer generation US equipment.

Diapers and howitzers

Austin had held a press conference on Monday at a Polish warehouse stacked high with tonnes of



'Ukraine orders, Germany pays'

humanitarian and military aid ready to be packed onto trucks bound for Ukraine. Next to the pallets of medical material and diapers were hundreds of Russian-made shells and rockets provided by countries that prefer to remain discreet on their participation in arming Ukraine.

Outside the warehouse, seven vehicles towing howitzers with a range of 30 kilometres (18 miles)

were awaiting transfer. They were parked in front of hundreds of pallets of carefully packed shells and various ammunitions.

But all that is insufficient, and Washington, which had in the beginning limited its deliveries to so-called "defensive" weapons, has started to send heavy US-made arms, like howitzer cannons and various armoured vehicles. The US is "engaging our colleagues in other countries for the same type of capability, and we see indications early on that... many countries are going to come forward and provide additional munitions and howitzers," said Austin.

France is delivering Caesar cannons with a range of 40 kilometres and Britain has provided Starstreak anti-air missiles and tanks. The meeting is also aimed at ensuring Ukraine's security in the longer term once the war is over.

"Ukraine needs our help to win today and they will still need our help when the war is over," noted Austin. The meeting on Tuesday is not being held under the auspices of NATO, but the alliance's members including Washington's European allies are in attendance.

Also present are countries further afield like Japan or Australia, which fear that a Russian victory in Ukraine could set a precedent and spur on the territorial ambitions of China. Finland and Sweden, traditionally neutral countries now looking at joining NATO following Russia's aggression in Ukraine, are likewise participating. —AFP

"We just beg her to grant him clemency. We beg her to reconsider whether in this day and age Singapore should... be in the business of hanging people. "It's just so inhumane". "I don't think civilised countries should be in the business of killing their own people, or killing anybody," he added. While the president's role is largely ceremonial in Singapore, Halimah has the power to grant clemency, which is effectively Nagaenthran's last chance to be spared after exhausting the usual appeals process.

'Abolish the death penalty'

Branson said he had "enormous respect" for the financial hub, but that capital punishment was the one aspect of Singapore that was "really negative". "It's the one horrible blotch on its reputation," the 71-year-old said, speaking via video call from his home in the British Virgin Islands.

He urged the city-state to "abolish the death penalty altogether" and "do what most other civilised countries have done". Nagaenthran, 34, was originally scheduled to be executed in November but lodged an appeal that was finally rejected by Singapore's top court last month.

He was arrested aged 21 as he tried to enter Singapore with a bundle of heroin weighing about 43 grams (one and a half ounces) — equivalent to about three tablespoons. Supporters say he has an IQ of 69, a level recognised as a disability, and was coerced into committing the crime.

"I was laundering when I heard the gunshots... (it) scared us and we decided to leave," said Mariatou Badjie, 42, a resident of Karinorr, a village close to the border with Senegal. Fleeing with her three daughters, two boys and her grandmother, Badjie says the family received a warm welcome in a safe location and were given temporary accommodation. They chose to return after the Gambian army assured her they would be protected. The army has "created safety" by patrolling every three or four days, she said, but added that life was still far from back to normal.

"We depend on our cashews for survival but now it is very unsafe to even go to those cashew farms," said Badjie, who spoke to an AFP journalist during a tour organised by the Gambian army in the border area. "So when we get a little money, we buy one or



KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Activists protest against the planned execution of Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, a mentally disabled Malaysian man sentenced to death for trafficking heroin into Singapore in 2009, outside the Singapore High Commission in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

But authorities have defended his conviction, saying that legal rulings found he knew what he was doing at the time of the offence. His mother will mount a further legal challenge at Singapore's Court of Appeal later Tuesday.

Chances of success look slim, but Branson urged the judge hearing the case to "have some humanity for the mother of this young man". Nagaenthran's case has also generated some concern in Singapore, and hundreds of people held a candlelight vigil at a downtown park late Monday to protest the looming execution. —AFP

two fish and keep that for our evening meal," she said. The MFDC began its campaign for the independence of the Senegalese region of Casamance back in 1982. The obscure, low-intensity conflict has claimed several thousand lives, typically in sporadic clashes. The rebels are accused of trafficking in tropical hardwoods and cannabis and holing up in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, which also has a border with Senegal. The Gambia, sandwiched between Casamance and the rest of Senegal, is the smallest country in continental Africa, straddling the Gambia River. According to Gambia's National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), nearly 5,500 Gambians fled their homes and 7,700 refugees crossed from Senegal after the Senegalese army launched an offensive to "dismantle" MFDC bases in the border zone. —AFP

Radio chief sees Russia 'thrown back 40 years'

MOSCOW: It survived for decades as one of Russia's leading independent voices, but when radio station Echo of Moscow shut down last month, long-time editor Alexei Venediktov knew it was the end of an era. "The country has been thrown back in every sense, for me it's been set back 40 years," said Venediktov, who joined the station at its founding in 1990 and steered it through the 20 years of Vladimir Putin's rule, until the Russian president sent troops into Ukraine two months ago.

"We are now somewhere around 1983... war is going on in Afghanistan, dissidents are in jail or kicked out of the country and Andropov is in the Kremlin," he said, referring to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, who like Putin served in the KGB. With his mop of curly grey hair, 66-year-old Venediktov has been a top figure of Russia's media scene for years, leading the flagship of liberal broadcasters.

Echo of Moscow first took to the airwaves in August 1990, in the final months of the Soviet Union, becoming a symbol of Russia's new-found media freedoms. Venediktov, a former history teacher, joined the station as a reporter and became editor-in-chief in 1998. As pressure mounted on Russian media over the last 20 years and many other independent outlets fell under state control, Echo of Moscow survived a fact many chafed up to Venediktov's links with powerful officials, including in the Kremlin.

'Drinking buddies'

He made no secret of having friends in high places, referring to them jokingly as his "drinking buddies", and was one of the few journalists in Russia who continued to openly criticise Putin. The Kremlin chief even intervened when zealous officials wanted to shut the station down, Venediktov told AFP during an interview in a central Moscow restaurant.

"Putin said three times: 'No, let them work.'" But that changed when Russia launched the military offensive in Ukraine on February 24 and Echo of Moscow described the campaign as a "political mistake".

Echo of Moscow was taken off the air on March 1, and then formally shut down by its board of directors, where the majority of votes were controlled by state energy giant Gazprom. The station's frequencies in Moscow and several other cities were taken over by state-owned Sputnik Radio.

"I understand (Putin's) logic: he could not keep us because propaganda during such operations must be total," Venediktov said. Russia in March also introduced prison terms of up to 15 years for publishing information about the army deemed false by the government and in late April Venediktov was designated a "foreign agent". Last month, he posted images online of a pig's head wearing a curly wig that was left outside his apartment and an anti-Semitic sticker glued to his door. —AFP



MOSCOW: Russian journalist and former editor of the Ekho Moskvy radio station, Alexei Venediktov, attends an AFP interview in Moscow. —AFP

Branson urges Singapore not to execute disabled man

SINGAPORE: British tycoon Richard Branson on Tuesday urged Singapore to spare the life of a mentally disabled Malaysian facing execution, telling AFP the death penalty was a "horrible blotch" on the city-state's reputation. Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, convicted of trafficking a small amount of heroin into Singapore, is due to be hanged on Wednesday after more than a decade on death row.

The planned execution has sparked an international outcry, with the United Nations and European Union among those condemning a punishment they say is cruel and ineffective as a deterrent. In an interview with AFP, Branson, a long-time campaigner against the death penalty, urged Singaporean President Halimah Yacob to grant Nagaenthran clemency.

"I really just hope that on Wednesday evening, she does not have this young man's death on her hands," said the billionaire founder of Virgin Group. Branson, who is part of a group with other business leaders that campaigns against capital punishment, said they were urging the president to pardon Nagaenthran.

Gambians start to return home after Senegal offensive

KARINORR, Gambia: Gambians who fled border villages last month after the Senegalese army launched an offensive against separatist rebels are starting to return, but many say they remain deeply fearful. Unleashed on March 13, Senegal's crackdown targets the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), behind one of sub-Saharan Africa's longest-running breakaway conflicts.

International

Beijing expands mass testing as lockdown fears grow

'Shanghai's situation has gone beyond everyone's imagination'

BEIJING, China: Beijing launched mass coronavirus testing on Tuesday for nearly all its 21 million residents, as fears grew that the Chinese capital may be placed under a strict lockdown like Shanghai. Under its zero-COVID policy, China has used lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions to stamp out infections.

Its biggest city, Shanghai, has been almost entirely locked down for weeks, and the mass testing order in Beijing has sparked worries the capital will be placed under similar restrictions. "Shanghai's situation has gone beyond everyone's imagination, and many people think it's absurd that a modern metropolis... has handled the situation like that," said Beijing resident Ms Zhao as she did her regular shopping at a supermarket.

"I believe our situation will not be as bad... but to be honest, we also bought some rice, noodles, grains and oil. We've made preparations for at least one to two weeks," the 35-year-old human resources professional told AFP. Beijing has ordered residents of the 12 central districts home to most of its population to undergo three rounds of testing after dozens of infections were found in recent days.

The capital's most populous district, Chaoyang, was the first to order mass testing from Monday, with people waiting in long lines to be swabbed by health workers in protective gear. Eleven more districts began testing on Tuesday.

The testing order for Chaoyang sparked panic buying on Sunday night, with residents lining up at supermarkets with full carts as state media tried to reassure the public there were plentiful supplies. Beijing residents told AFP they feared a repeat of the sudden lockdown in Shanghai, where people

have struggled to obtain food and medical care for non-COVID conditions.

Several residential compounds have already been sealed off in Chaoyang. One resident, who declined to be identified for fear of reprisal, told AFP he felt "a little anxious" after fences were suddenly put up in his neighbourhood.

Residents in his building were ordered Monday night to stay home for at least 14 days after one neighbour tested positive. "I'm worried that if we need medicine or other items in the future, we won't be able to get them delivered," he said.

Meanwhile, Beijing suspended large gatherings such as wedding banquets, closed theatres, and ordered a halt in some construction projects. Many of the new infections were linked to one wedding party, officials told reporters, saying efforts to control the spread of the virus were at a "critical stage".

They urged residents to wear stronger N95 masks. Multiple residents took to social media to lament the last-minute postponement of their weddings. "I'll develop psychological problems if this goes on," wrote a woman who said she would have to delay her wedding, planned for the upcoming May national holiday—a popular time for couples tying the knot.

Economic pressure

The capital reported 33 new cases Tuesday, a fraction of Shanghai's daily tally of 16,000 infections and 52 new deaths. But Beijing officials are anxious to avoid a spiralling outbreak. They have urged companies to allow employees to work from home and suspended local group tourism ahead of the May national holiday.

Authorities have urged residents not to leave



BEIJING: A health worker takes a swab sample from a man to be tested for COVID-19 at a makeshift testing site in Zhongguancun in Beijing. —AFP

Beijing unless necessary. Beijing's measures are mild, however, compared with actions taken elsewhere. Pinpoint Asset Management chief economist Zhiwei Zhang said in a note. "I am surprised that the government did not impose restrictive policies in Beijing as harshly and quickly as in other cities that experienced similar outbreaks in recent weeks," he wrote.

Authorities are increasingly struggling with the impact of strict zero-COVID protocols on the economy, especially when outbreaks appear in the country's most important cities. Concerns have

also grown about how China's COVID-19 policies could impact the global economy, especially supply chains.

The city of Baotou in China's Inner Mongolia region—a major supplier of rare earths—said Monday that after the detection of two virus cases, all residents must stay home, with each household only sending one member out each day for necessities.

China's central bank promised to "increase support" for the economy on Tuesday, particularly for smaller businesses affected by the pandemic. —AFP

Japan PM urges warmer ties in talks with South Koreans

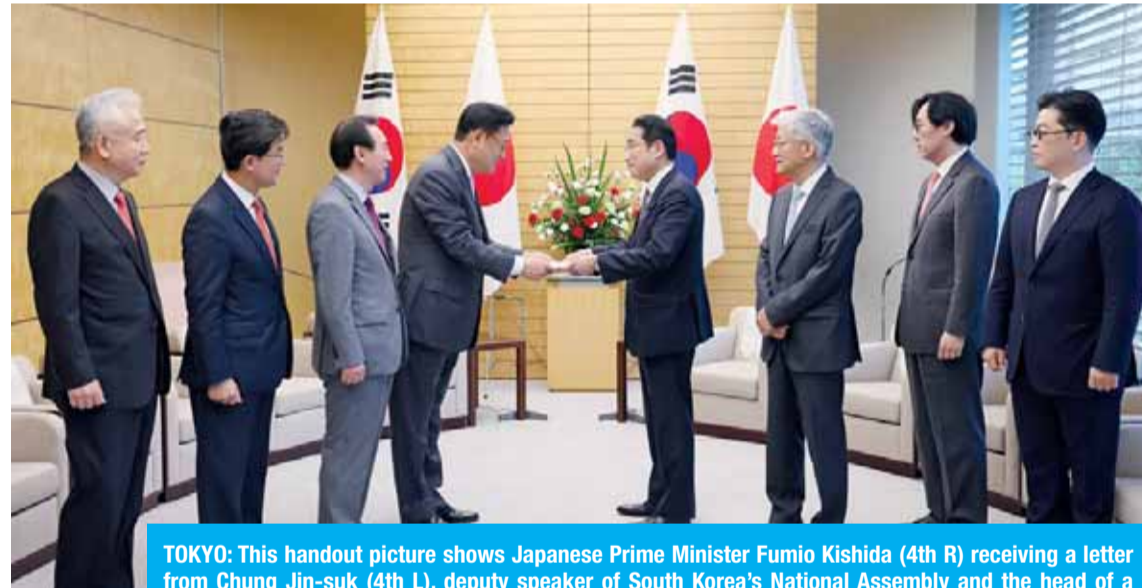
TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a South Korean delegation Tuesday that the countries "can't afford to waste time" in improving relations, following years of tensions over wartime issues. The meeting in Tokyo represents a cautious step towards mending ties ahead of expected visits to the two US allies by President Joe Biden, and with growing regional security threats from North Korea and China.

"Given the current international situation, where the rules-based international order is under threat, now is a time when strategic cooperation... is needed more than ever," Kishida told the delegation, according to a foreign ministry statement.

"We can't afford to waste time in improving the Japan-South Korea relationship," he added. Japanese media reports said the seven-member delegation of lawmakers, academics and ex-diplomats handed Kishida a letter from conservative president-elect Yoon Suk-yeol, whose inauguration is on May 10.

Japan and South Korea are democratic market economies and US allies, but their relationship has been strained at times over disputes related to Tokyo's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean peninsula.

Ties have been particularly frosty under outgoing South Korean president Moon Jae-in, noted Daniel Sneider, a lecturer in East Asian Studies at Stanford University. Moon "is going to leave office without ever having made an official visit to Japan, and without ever



TOKYO: This handout picture shows Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (4th R) receiving a letter from Chung Jin-suk (4th L), deputy speaker of South Korea's National Assembly and the head of a delegation sent by South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol to Japan, at the prime minister's office in Tokyo. —AFP

having hosted a Japanese prime minister," he told AFP.

"That's remarkable, as a sign of truly one of the worst downturn periods in Korea-Japan relations." But cooperation between the two nations and the United States is back into focus after Yoon won the last month's presidential election promising a more hawkish policy on nuclear-armed North Korea. Members of the South Korean delegation led by conservative lawmaker Chung Jin-suk also met Monday with Japan's foreign minister and other top officials. The incoming Korean administration "clearly wants to improve relations with Japan" and this represents a "moment of opportunity", Sneider said.

accused of accepting a bribe of \$600,000 cash and gold bars, had been scheduled for Tuesday, said a source close to the case.

But the hearings were "adjourned" without a verdict, which is now scheduled for Wednesday, the source added. Suu Kyi has already been sentenced to six years in jail for incitement against the military, breaching COVID-19 rules and breaking a telecommunications law—although she will remain under house arrest while she fights other charges.

Journalists have been barred from attending the special court hearings in the military-built capital Naypyidaw and Suu Kyi's lawyers have been banned from speaking to the media. Suu Kyi is facing a total of 10 corruption charges—each with a possible 15-year jail term. She is also on trial for breaching the official secrets act, where she is accused alongside detained Australian academic Sean Turnell. More than 1,700 people have been killed and over 13,000 arrested in a crackdown on dissent since the coup, according to a local monitoring group. —AFP

test-firing a slew of banned weapons this year while ignoring US offers of talks—as analysts warn of a likely resumption of nuclear tests.

Dressed in a white military uniform trimmed with gold brocade, Kim watched as tanks, rocket launchers and his largest ICBMs were paraded through Pyongyang late Monday for the founding anniversary of North Korea's armed forces, state media reported. Kim vowed to "take measures for further developing the nuclear forces of our state at the fastest possible speed," according to a transcript of his speech at the event published by the official Korean Central News Agency.

"The nuclear forces, the symbol of our national strength and the core of our military power,

should be strengthened in terms of both quality and scale," he said. Repeated negotiations aimed at convincing Kim to give up his nuclear weapons programmes have come to nothing, and he warned Monday that he could use his atomic arsenal if North Korea's "fundamental interests" were threatened.

"The fundamental mission of our nuclear forces is to deter a war, but our nukes can never be confined to the single mission of war deterrent," he said, according to the KCNA transcript. North Korea had paused long-range and nuclear tests while Kim met then-US president Donald Trump for a bout of doomed diplomacy, which collapsed in 2019. —AFP



NAYPYIDAW: File photo shows Aung San Suu Kyi (C) and Myanmar's military chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (R) arrive for a handover ceremony at the presidential palace in Naypyidaw. Myanmar junta court on April 26, 2022 postponed giving its first verdict in the corruption trial of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi. —AFP

Myanmar court to give verdict in Suu Kyi trial

YANGON, Myanmar: A Myanmar junta court will hand down a verdict in the corruption trial of Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday, according to a source with knowledge of the matter, in a case that could see the Nobel laureate jailed for 15 years. Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since a military coup ousted her civilian government in February last year, ending the country's brief period of democracy.

She has since been hit with a raft of criminal charges, including violating the official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud, and she faces more than 150 years in jail if convicted on all counts. A verdict in the corruption trial, in which Suu Kyi is

Kim vows to boost North Korea's nuclear arsenal

SEOUL: North Korea will rapidly accelerate the development of its nuclear arsenal, leader Kim Jong Un said while overseeing a vast military parade showcasing his most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles, state media reported Tuesday.

Despite biting sanctions, North Korea has doubled down on Kim's military modernisation drive,

News in brief

Iran jails 2 students

TEHRAN: Two Iranian students have been sentenced to 16 years' jail on charges including sabotage and collaboration with outlawed anti-regime groups, judicial authorities in the Islamic republic announced Tuesday. Local media named them as Ali Younessi and Amir-Hossein Moradi of Tehran's Sharif University of Technology, and said they had been under arrest since April 2020. They received 10-year terms for "destruction of public installations", five years for plotting against national security and "cooperation with hostile groups", and another for propaganda against the Islamic republic, judiciary spokesman Zabihollah Khodayian told state television. —AFP

26 missing off Canary Islands

MADRID: At least one person drowned and 26 were missing after a boat carrying migrants capsized in the Atlantic Ocean off Spain's Canary Islands, the Spanish coastguard said Tuesday. The boat departed from Cap Boujdour in Western Sahara with 61 people on board and rescuers overnight only found 34 alive, a spokeswoman for the coastguard said. Two minors and 10 women were among the survivors rescued off the island of Gran Canaria and transported to safety, she added. —AFP

Bali to deport man for dancing naked

DENPASAR: A Canadian actor and self-proclaimed wellness guru is facing deportation from Indonesia's Bali island after a video of him dancing naked at a sacred mountain went viral. Jeffrey Craigen posted a video of himself doing the Haka—a ceremonial dance in New Zealand's Maori culture—while nude on top of Mount Batur, a volcano considered holy by many Balinese. He was detained and questioned on Monday following a deluge of complaints from social media users accusing him of disrespecting Balinese religious values. Craigen is currently awaiting deportation—but authorities say airlines are reluctant to help because he is not vaccinated against COVID-19. —AFP

Iran arrests 3 suspects

TEHRAN: Iranian police have arrested three suspects in the recent gun murder of two Sunni Muslim clerics, the head of the judicial authority of the northern province of Golestan said Tuesday. Investigators had found that the three, also Sunnis, had "no connection with terrorist groups," the official, Heydar Asyabi, was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency. The two clerics were shot dead on April 2 outside a seminary in the town of Gonbad-e Kavus, local media reported. "Less than a month after the crime, the killer of two Sunni clerics and his two accomplices have been arrested," Asyabi said, without naming the suspects, adding that the crime had been motivated by a "personal conflict". A search of the home of one of the accused uncovered four guns, Asyabi said. —AFP

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2022

Gulf Bank records KD 15 million in net profit for first quarter of 2022

Jassim Boodai: Bank enjoys a strong financial position

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. ("Bank") announced its financial results for the first quarter ending 31 March 2022. The bank reported a net profit of KD 15 million, an increase of KD 3.1 million or 26 percent compared to 2021 first quarter net profit of KD 12 million.

Subsequently, the bank's return on assets improved from 0.8 percent in the first quarter of 2021 to 0.9 percent in first quarter of 2022 and return on equity grew from 7.6 percent to 9.2 percent. Gulf Bank recorded an operating income of KD 41.5 million for the first quarter 2022, and an operating profit before provisions of KD 21.7 million for the same period.

The increase in the net profit was mainly driven by a 4 percent or KD 0.4 million increase in non-interest income, a decline of (3 percent) or KD 0.7 million in operating expense, and a decline of 30 percent or KD 2.6 million in total provisions.

As for asset quality, the non-performing loans (NPL) ratio stood at 1.0 percent as of 31 March 2022, lower than the prior year level of 1.5 percent. Additionally, the bank continues to have significant non-performing loans coverage ratio of 548 percent including total provisions and collaterals.

Total credit provisions as of 31 March 2022 reached KD 296 million whereas IFRS 9 accounting requirements (ie, ECL or expected credit losses) were KD 180 million. As a result, the bank has very healthy excess provision-



Jassim Mustafa Boodai

ing level of KD 116 million, above and beyond what is required by the IFRS9 accounting requirements. Compared to first quarter 2021, total assets increased by 4 percent to KD 6.5 billion, gross loans and advances to customers climbed by 7 percent to KD 4.8 billion, and shareholders' equity increased by 4 percent to reach KD 662.2 million. Customer deposits reached KD 4.3 billion, an increase of 2 percent compared to the prior year.

The bank's regulatory capital ratios remained strong as the Tier 1 ratio of 14.1 percent was 3.6 percent above the regulatory minimum of 10.5 percent and the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of 16.3 percent was 3.8 percent above the regulatory minimum of 12.5 percent. Worth noting that the capital ratios regulatory minimum has been partially restored in comparison to 2021 and will be in place during the year 2022 as instructed by the Central Bank of Kuwait.



Tony Daher

Future growth

Commenting on the results, Jassim Mustafa Boodai, Gulf Bank's Chairman said: "Building on the positive momentum generated last year, I am pleased to announce that Gulf Bank has started 2022 strong, with an increase of 26 percent in net profit during the first quarter compared to the same period last year. Our asset quality profile and solid balance sheet fundamentals positions us very well to achieve our strategic aspirations. We continue to enjoy a strong financial position that enables us to deliver sustainable returns for our shareholders while supporting the future growth of the Bank." Boodai added.

Boodai concluded his remarks by stating: "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our shareholders for their ongoing trust, and our employees for their commitment and dedication. I would also like

to thank the Central Bank of Kuwait for their continuous support. Last but not least, I want to thank our clients for their loyalty, and reiterate our commitment to offering them the best banking experiences."

Viability upgrade

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its creditworthiness and financial strength internationally. During the first quarter of the year, Fitch Ratings has upgraded Gulf Bank's Viability Rating to 'bbb-' from 'bb+' and affirmed the bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a Stable Outlook.

Commenting on Fitch's credit rating announcement, Tony Daher, Gulf Bank's Chief Executive Officer said: "The upgrade of Gulf Bank's Viability Rating and the affirmation of its Long-term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with 'Stable' outlook by Fitch Ratings is a testament on the Bank's leading market position strong balance sheet, and earnings momentum, both of which supported the implementation of our strategy that is based on domestic organic growth and digital transformation."

In addition to Fitch Ratings' recent Viability Rating upgrade and affirmation of its Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a 'Stable' Outlook, Gulf Bank has a Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of 'A+' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Capital Intelligence Ratings and a Long-Term Deposits rating of

'A3' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Moody's Investor Services.

Strategic milestones

During the quarter, Gulf Bank continued achieving notable milestones of its 2025 digital transformation strategy. Daher commented: "We continue to support the momentum of this dynamic transformation, delivering a strong financial performance while making significant progress towards our vision of becoming the Bank of the Future." Daher continued: "As part of our ongoing digital transformation journey, we are proud to announce that we have successfully launched our new mobile application that provides fast, easy and safe customer experience. The new app features a friendly interface and new features such as 'Pay link' with a bill split option. In addition to launching phase I of our upgraded contact center towards the end of 2021, we aim to move forward with completing Phase II of the upgrade during this year."

Recognition

In recognition of its role to deliver seamless, secure, and convenient payments, Gulf Bank was awarded with "Most Rewarding Prepaid Card" by Mastercard for its Mastercard "MOU" Cashback Prepaid Card during the first quarter of 2022. The Bank had launched the "MOUJ" Cashback Prepaid Card in partnership with Mastercard back in 2021.

HSBC profits slide as Ukraine war worsens inflation

HONG KONG: HSBC profits slid in the first quarter, the Asia-focused bank announced Tuesday after it was hit by bad debts as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent inflation rocketing further. Net profit dropped more than a quarter to US\$2.8 billion from the first three months of 2021, London-headquartered HSBC said in an earnings statement.

Pre-tax profit fell by a similar proportion to \$4.2 billion. HSBC said "the Russia-Ukraine war has exacerbated inflationary pressures, and increased uncertainty on the forward economic outlook, contributing to higher expected credit loss" for the bank in the first quarter.

The lender reported a credit loss of \$600 million, which compared with the release of bad debt provisions totalling \$400 million one year earlier as the economy began to recover from the pan-

demic-induced slump. HSBC said its business in Russia is "on a declining trend", adding that further restrictions could make its operations in the country "untenable".

"This could generate additional losses which are not currently provided for in the balance sheet," the bank warned. HSBC said its Russia unit principally serves multinational corporate clients headquartered in other countries and is not accepting new business.

Chief executive Noel Quinn added that group profit was hit also by market impacts on wealth management revenue. And the bank pointed to China's property slowdown being a drag.

"Although the economic outlook remains uncertain, the continued upward path of interest rates since our full-year results has further strengthened our confidence" on future performance, Quinn said. Banks are benefitting from higher interest rates on loans which they've passed onto customers in the wake of tighter borrowing costs from central banks.

Nevertheless, HSBC revenue dropped four percent in the first quarter to \$12.5 billion. "Despite a tougher

set of operating conditions this quarter, the fundamentals of our strategy are unchanged—revenues driven by growing volumes and higher rates and tight cost discipline," chief financial officer, Ewen Stevenson, told a conference call. HSBC has carried out a massive restructuring program during the pandemic, slashing 35,000 jobs to refocus on its most profitable areas in Asia and the Middle East.

On Tuesday, the bank noted that renewed lockdowns in key markets China and Hong Kong have "further aggravated global supply chain disruptions".

'Inflation risk'

HSBC said "inflation, driven in part by supply chain constraints caused by the pandemic, risks being made worse by higher commodity prices as a result of the war in Ukraine".

It added that "higher inflation presents risks to growth as real incomes are squeezed by rising costs. "This will present an additional risk as central banks tighten policy to bring inflation back towards target."

HSBC's share price was down 3.6



HONG KONG: People commuting on a tram past the HSBC bank headquarters in Hong Kong. —AFP

percent on London's rising FTSE 100 index in reaction to the earnings update. Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor, described the return of loss provisions as "an unfortu-

nate highlight". "Overall, the group has been hampered by and inevitably subject to wider geopolitical and economic pressures," he added. —AFP

Twitter has long been more talk than money

NEW YORK: Billionaire Elon Musk is capturing a social media prize with his deal to buy Twitter, which has become a global stage for companies, activists, celebrities, politicians and more. Despite its reach and impact, the San Francisco-based one-to-many messaging platform has struggled to generate the kind of revenue seen by social media peers such as Facebook and TikTok.

Since its founding in March of 2006, Twitter has amassed 217 million daily active users, more than 80 percent of them outside the United States.

Twitter did not taste profit until the end of 2017, and the following year was its first to finish financially in the black. Twitter reported a loss of \$221 million last year.

While often associated with the giant Silicon Valley social media platforms, to the extent that co-founder and then-chief Jack Dorsey has been grilled by US legislators, it is vastly eclipsed by its peers when it comes to profit and share value.

A challenge that has vexed Twitter since its inception is how to weave in ads or other money-making tactics into the real-time flow of posts by users without ruining the experience people love on the platform. The fleeting nature of tweets has meant that marketing messages in posts may not spend much time in the spotlight for Twitter users to see.

An added challenge is how to make sure ads, sometimes in the form of tweets promoted to the tops of feeds, do not wind up next to vitriol, misinformation or other troubling content that brands do not want to be associated with. However, politicians, institutions and marketers

have learned how to turn Twitter to their advantage with clever or controversial posts that get shared as "retweets." But while these can spark viral online conversations, they do not necessarily result in Twitter directly making money from them.

Town square?

Some have opined that Twitter, while hard to squeeze money out of, has become an internet version of the "town square," and is so important that it should almost be considered a public utility and come with free speech protections. Twitter was the preferred method of communication during former US President Donald Trump's four years in office, as opposed to press briefings at which he would face questions from reporters. Investors had essentially steered clear of Twitter stock, which prior to Musk's uninvited takeover bid launched three weeks ago was worth 12 percent less than it was priced when the company's shares first went public more than eight years ago.

Twitter last year introduced a "Blue" subscription tier offering exclusive content and features, and Musk has made it clear he is a fan of such models at the platform.

There is a risk though, that if Musk follows through on his vow to let people say pretty much anything they want on Twitter, moderate users will not want to pay subscriptions to be in a platform turned hostile, said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter.

Money over mindfulness?

Musk taking Twitter private will provide more room to maneuver, but will not guarantee success, according to analysts. As a private company, Twitter will be free to make changes that might irk shareholders or take longer than they like to pay off.

Musk and his partners buying Twitter will be able to focus more intently on the financial side of the business, and not fret over issues such as diversity that might be important to shareholders at a public firm. —AFP

Japan unveils \$48bn package to ease rising price pain

TOKYO: Japan unveiled a \$48.6-billion economic package on Tuesday that includes handouts for low-income families to help cushion the impact of rising prices and energy costs on households. "We must avoid at all costs letting surging oil and prices sabotage our efforts for the recovery of economic and social activity from the coronavirus pandemic," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in unveiling the 6.2 trillion yen package.

Soaring energy costs linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and other price rises are squeezing Japanese consumers and businesses, and the decision to unleash more spending comes ahead of a July parliamentary election. At the heart of the package is a plan to distribute cash handouts of 50,000 yen (\$391) per child to low-income households.

It is also expected to include measures such as expanded fuel subsidies and the extension of a zero-interest loan program. The spending will be financed by tapping into reserve funds allocated for emergency spending, and with money from other budgets already put together this year.

That makes it "misleading" to describe the entire package as new spending, Takahide Kiuchi, executive economist at Nomura Research Institute, said in a note. Some analysts warn the package could have a relatively limited impact



TOLYO: Japanese households and businesses are being squeezed by rising prices and surging energy costs. —AFP

because the measures are short-term and will reach a relatively small number of households. Kiuchi estimates it will shore up GDP by 0.06 percent, while Japan's government says the state funds paired with private sector investment will have an economic impact equivalent to 13.2 trillion yen.

Japan's core consumer prices rose at the fastest rate in over two years in March, though the 0.8 percent increase year-on-year remains far below inflation in many other developed economies.

It is also well short of the target 2.0 percent viewed as necessary to turbocharge the world's third-largest economy. The package comes with the yen weakening to its lowest level against the dollar in 20 years, as the gap widens between Japan's ultra-loose monetary policy and US tightening.

Though the weak currency benefits Japanese exporters, it is a concern given Japan's dependency on energy imports, though the government has so far ruled out direct intervention. —AFP

Business

stc reports KD 76.8m revenues, KD 7.7m net profit for Q1 2022

EBITDA increased by 7.4% to reach KD 20.3 million

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its financial results for the three months period ended 31 March 2022, highlighting the most significant achievements, financial and operational performance in addition to the social initiatives made by the company during the first quarter of 2022.

Commenting on the announcements of these results, Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman, stc's Chairman, stated: "stc achieved a number of operational achievements during the first quarter of 2022 which was reflected in the company's financial performance. The company was able to achieve these results in the view of the competitive telecommunications and ICT industries in Kuwait, especially with the increased demand for the digital communications and information technology services. Since the onset of 2022, stc was keen to provide its individual and enterprise customers with the latest integrated technical solutions to meet their needs and exceed their expectations".

He pointed out: "stc sees a promising future in the individual and enterprise sectors, whereby the latter is based on the digital services and the developed integrated technologies in the ICT field. Thus, stc ensured developing its corporate strategy focused on expanding the company's operations in line with the latest regional trends in order to meet customer needs and add value to our shareholders".

With regards to stc's CSR framework, Dr Abdulrahman commented: "Q1 2022 witnessed several community targeted and interactive initiatives following the return to full capacity across all sectors and activities. In line with the Company's integrated CSR program, stc launched a series of campaigns and initiatives in collaboration with various charitable organizations, as well as institutions in the government and private sectors respectively. The objective of these various initiatives was to make effective and positive contributions in the society that spread awareness on important causes that impact the community.

stc's CSR program focused on supporting and driving the Kuwaiti society, empowering the Kuwaiti youth, and contributing towards overcoming the challenges triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has provided the Company with an opportunity to enhance its outreach to the local community with a primary focus on health, the environment, entrepreneurship, sports, and education.



Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman

Eng Maziad bin Nasser Al-Harbi

Additionally, stc has been keen to deliver on its commitment to maintain its pioneering position as part of the social fabric in Kuwait. This approach follows the Company's corporate values by contributing to various community-driven initiatives, which fall in line with the Company's extensive CSR program.

Commenting on stc's financial position as of March 31, 2022, Dr Abdulrahman said: "stc's total assets reached KD 423.9 million by the end of March 2022, while total shareholders' equity increased by 7 percent reaching KD 214.9 million. Whereby, stc has a strong solvency position among its peers in the Middle East. Commenting on stc's major milestones during the first quarter of 2022, Eng Maziad Bin Nasser Al-Harbi, stc's CEO stated: "In the first

quarter of 2022, stc was able to enhance its financial and operational performance, as well as improve its customer service with the dedication and commitment of its employees to implement the Company's digital transformation strategy with the highest quality. In this regard, stc was also capable to provide the most efficient service delivery within the telecommunications and information technology sector.

Driven by its refreshed strategy, promising outlook for the enterprise segment in Kuwait and in line with the latest rapid global developments in the ICT field, stc was eager to improve its efficiency and internal capabilities in this sector. Accordingly, stc has expanded its presence in the ICT sector through a number of transactions represented by

its acquisition of Qualitynet (solutions by stc) in May 2019 and its latest acquisition of e-portal Holding Company in April 2022. Thus, stc is keen to capture the investment opportunities in this field and leverage the expertise of its subsidiaries to provide its customers with the latest and most advanced services in the field of telecommunications, information technology, and digital services".

Commenting on the announcement of company's financial results for the three months period ended March 31, 2022, Eng. Maziad bin Nasser Al-Harbi said: "stc managed to generate good financial results that meet shareholders' expectations in light of the increasing demand for the most advanced global technologies as well as the regional competition in general and in Kuwait specifically. Whereby, stc's total revenue reached KD 76.8 million in the first three months of 2022 with growth rate of 10 percent compared to KD 69.8 million in the previous year. This increase is attributed to stc's services and smart packages designed to cater the demands of most segments of our individual customers. Not to mention stc's emphasis on the providing digital services to the enterprise segment and delivering integrated technical solutions to the private companies and the government sector in addition to driving its operations into new

areas of sustainable growth through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at improving its operational efficiency, delivering the best services and products that meet its customer's needs, as well as supporting the company's advanced infrastructure with the best and widest 5G coverage".

Al-Harbi added: "These outcomes resulted in a growth of EBITDA by 7.4 percent to reach KD 20.3 million in the first quarter of 2022 compared to KD 18.9 million in the same period of 2021. Whereby, EBITDA margin reached 26 percent during the three months ended in 2022 compared to 27 percent in the same period of the previous year. As a result, the company's net profit during the three months period ended 31 March 2022 reached KD 7.7 million (earnings per share 8fils). stc's customer base reached approx. 2.1 million customers at the end of March 2022".

Al-Harbi noted: "at stc, we strive to adhere to effective operational and financial plans, as well as a balanced financial policy, with the goal of reaching optimal and more cost-efficient levels to achieve the required financial and operational results. By restructuring its capital expenditure in the latest periods of the COVID-19 economic crisis, stc managed to maintain the liquidity of its cash flow".

- Revenue increased by 10 percent to reach KD 76.8 million the first quarter of 2022
- stc launched advanced as well as distinct products and services backed by 5G technology
- stc demonstrated its ability to overcome the challenges to keep up with the business operations and strengthen the digital transformation strategy
- stc developed its corporate strategy to support its operational performance and create an added value to its shareholders and customers

The financial results for the three months period ended 31 March 2022	
Revenues	KD 76.8mn
EBITDA	KD 20.3mn
Net Profit	KD 7.7 mn
Earnings per share	8fils per share
Assets	KD423.9 mn
Shareholders' equity	KD 214.9 mn
Book value per share	215fils per share
Customer base	2.1 mn customers



UK cuts tariffs on Ukraine, bans more exports to Russia

LONDON: Britain said it has dropped tariffs on all goods from Ukraine while slapping a ban on some technology exports to Moscow to help Kyiv in its fight against the Russian invasion. Responding to a direct request from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, the UK's international trade department said Monday it had reduced "all tariffs on goods imported from Ukraine", including key exports such as barley, honey and poultry.

"The UK will continue to do everything in its power to support Ukraine's fight against Putin's brutal and unprovoked invasion," international trade secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said in a statement. At the same time, Britain announced it would prevent the export of "products and technology that Russia could use to repress the heroic people of Ukraine", including possibly surveillance and interception equipment.

Last week, Britain boosted its sanctions regime against Russia, targeting army chiefs and adding import bans on silver, wood products and caviar. The invasion has triggered an outburst of support from both sides of the Atlantic, with Western nations implementing a raft of financial penalties and funneling weapons into Ukraine to help Kyiv beat back Russian troops.

The latest UK measures come as Russia warns the conflict-now in its third month-risks escalating into World War III. For months, Zelensky has been asking allies to do more-including sending artillery and fighter jets-vowing his forces could turn the tide of the war with more firepower.

Meanwhile, UK annual borrowing tumbled by more than half after costly emergency COVID measures were withdrawn, official data showed Tuesday. Public sector net borrowing sank to £151.8 billion (\$193.4 billion, 180.5 billion euros) in the year to the end of March, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. — AFP

Total Revenues

76.8

KD Million

The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc) is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the company has achieved a net profit of 7.7 million for the three months ended 31 March 2022.

Q1 - 2022

EBITDA

20.3

KD Million

Q1 - 2022

Net Profit

7.7

KD Million

Q1 - 2022

EPS

8

Kuwaiti Fils

31 March 2022

Subscribers

2.1

Million

Business

Asian region facing 'stagflationary outlook' amid Ukraine war: IMF

Growth forecast for Asia cut to 4.9%, impacted by China slowdown

WASHINGTON: Asian nations, like the rest of the world, are being battered by countervailing forces such as the war in Ukraine that are raising prices while holding back growth, the IMF said Monday.

"The region faces a stagflationary outlook, with growth being lower than previously expected, and inflation being higher," said Anne-Marie Gulde-Wolf, acting director of the IMF's Asia and Pacific Department. The regional outlook, which follows the World Economic Outlook released last week, shows the growth forecast for Asia was cut to 4.9 percent, impacted by the slowdown in China, which is having ripple effects on other closely-linked economies.

Inflation is now expected to rise 3.2 percent this year, a full point higher than expected in January, she said. "Despite the downgrade, Asia remains the world's most dynamic region, and an important source of global growth," Gulde-Wolf said in remarks prepared for delivery to a press briefing.

But the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Western sanctions on Moscow have driven up food and fuel prices worldwide, while major central banks are raising interest rates to combat inflation, which will pressure countries with high debt loads. A larger-than-expected slowdown in

China due to prolonged or more widespread COVID-19 lockdowns or a longer-than-expected slump in the property market presents "a significant risk for the region."

"This is a challenging time for policymakers as they try to address pressures on growth and tackle rising inflation," the IMF official said, noting that the headwinds will exacerbate the damage from the COVID-19 pandemic. Outlooks vary within the region, depending on countries' reliance on imported energy and links to China, with growth in Pacific island nations slowing sharply, while Australia saw a slight upgrade, she said.

Governments will need strong responses, starting with targeted aid to poor families most harmed by higher prices, the IMF said. Many will need to tighten monetary policy amid rising inflation, while those with high debt loads may have to cut spending and even seek debt relief, the fund economists said in a blog post.

"Slower growth and rising prices, coupled with the challenges of war, infection and tightening financial conditions, will exacerbate the difficult policy trade-off between supporting recovery and containing inflation and debt," the blog said. —AFP



WASHINGTON: A poster advertises the Spring Meetings at the International Monetary Fund headquarters in Washington, DC on April 21, 2022. —AFP

NBK-Kuwait Airways Visa credit cards 'Fastest Growing in the Market'

KUWAIT: Visa International has honored National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and Kuwait Airways for the success of their co-branded cards NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit Cards as "the Fastest Growing Cards in the Market". On this occasion, NBK held a special ceremony in which Visa presented honorary shields to NBK and Kuwait Airways' employees in appreciation of their role in the success of NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit Cards.

The ceremony was attended by Mohammed Al-Othman, GM- Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, Meshal Al-Mutairi, Director, Commercially Important Persons at Kuwait Airways, and Ankush Devadason, Country Manager, Visa Kuwait, as well as a number of the employees of NBK Consumer Banking Group and Kuwait Airways who received the honoring.

NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit Cards offer customers a wide range of benefits including earning Oasis Club Miles when using the card, redeeming earned miles for tickets on Kuwait Airways, upgrading to Business or First Class, as well as many other benefits.

The cards also allow customers to enjoy more privileges that make travelling a lot more comfortable and enjoyable, such as access to airport lounges worldwide, travel insurance and special assistance at airports, as well as earning points with NBK Rewards Program that can be redeemed at more than 900 participating outlets. On this occasion, Mohammed Al-Othman, GM- Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We are delighted with this honoring which comes in recognition of our efforts and commitment to meet all our customers' needs and to keep always in touch with them to identify their expectations and strive to provide top-notch services and exceptional offers and rewards that enrich their banking experience."

"NBK always seeks to cooperate with leading institutions in all sectors, and Kuwait Airways is on the top of those institutions, as we have a solid relationship of long-standing strategic cooperation which always yields the best to our customers and helps us constantly develop our products and services," he added. "The massive interest in our credit cards, especially NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit Cards, reflects the exclusive benefits and exceptional rewards they offer to customers," he noted.

Al-Othman extended thanks to CBG team, saying:

Toyota committed to 'sustainable and practical' mobility solutions

KUWAIT: The first-ever United Nations MENA Climate Week was held from 28 to 31 March in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for key stakeholders to take the pulse of climate action in the region, discuss climate challenges, and explore opportunities. One of the companies at the forefront of global efforts on climate action, particularly in achieving carbon neutrality within the mobility sector, is Toyota. Long-recognized as a pioneer in the development of eco-friendly vehicles, Toyota has adopted a multi-faceted approach that emphasizes 'Sustainable and Practical' solutions.

Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, says: "Carbon neutrality is a goal with many paths. At Toyota, we understand that eco-friendly solutions can contribute to the environment only when their use becomes widespread. There is no 'one size fits all' answer to today's climate challenges, which is why we focus on developing and implementing a diverse range of technologies." In 1997, Toyota launched the Prius, the world's first mass-production Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV). Today, the company has sold more than 19 million electrified vehicles worldwide and has invested in the development of a full range of innovative Hybrid Electric Vehicles (HEVs), Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs), Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs), and Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles (FCEVs). Toyota's commitment to pursuing electrification from all directions comes as part of its strategy to respond flexibly to the global demand for diverse mobility solutions.

Fujita explains: "We know the ways our customers use their vehicles vary from one person to another. Drivers also have to contend with diverse road and climate conditions around the world, from rough roads and desert environments to freezing

"Maintaining our leading position in the market and excellence in providing everything new to our customers are mainly thanks to your dedication, loyalty, responsibility, as well as innovative ideas and unwavering passion to provide the best to our customers."

Meshal Al-Mutairi, Director, Commercially Important Persons at Kuwait Airways, said: "We are always keen to cooperate with NBK, being the leading institution in the Kuwaiti banking sector, due to our confidence that Visa Oasis Club credit cards provide cardholders with premium services and rewards during their flights onboard Kuwait Airways."

Al-Mutairi stressed that Kuwait Airways is committed to provide a distinguished travel experience for passengers onboard its flights, noting that NBK Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Cards represent a valuable addition to the aviation and travel package provided to travel lovers. "NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Cards allow customers to enjoy more privileges that make travelling a lot more comfortable and luxurious, such as access to major airport lounges, travel insurance and special assistance at airports, as well as earning points with NBK Rewards Program, which can be redeemed at 900+ participating outlets," he added.

"Kuwait Airways offers generous hospitality for travelers on its diversified fleet with hand-picked menus and utmost luxury for passengers, offering all means of comfort that passengers feel during their direct flights to the destinations set by the company based on customers' choices, which makes us, as the national carrier, stand out," he continued. Al-Mutairi concluded: "We are also pleased to facilitate service options, whether through our website or Call Center on 171, for booking or issuing tickets or travel package offers through KAC Holidays at any hotel of choice at competitive prices. We always aspire to be the preferred airline of choice for all travelers by adding more benefits to cater to their needs and expectations."

On his part, Ankush Devadason, Country Manager,



Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait unveils 'East Meets West' brunch and dinner for Eid

KUWAIT: Four Seasons Hotel, Kuwait at Burj Alshaya has unveiled details of an exclusive brunch and dinner event that offers the perfect way to spend an unforgettable Eid Al-Fitr with family and friends. The Hotel promises a dining delightful experience for guests and their loved ones as they come together to share precious moments during the traditional celebrations to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Taking place on the Hotel's 21st floor, the 'East Meets West' themed brunch and dinner combines the dynamic Italian culinary art of Dai Forni with the modern Asian cuisine of Sintoho. Featuring a spectacular menu highlighting signature dishes from both restaurants, the event will see the two award-winning dining destinations unite to deliver a festive feast that will delight fans of authentic Italian cuisine and Asian food lovers alike.

Guests can sample Dai Forni's exquisite pizoli, succulent tomahawk steak, a dedicated seafood bar with oysters, and an Italian cheese corner, together with much-loved Italian desserts such as handmade cannoli, tiramisu and gelato. Meanwhile, Sintoho will offer diners a tantalizing selection of modern Asian delicacies including sushi, dim sum, and Asian French toast, together with live cooking stations serving meat from the robata grill, steamed bao dumplings, and teppanyaki cuisine.

Visitors can also enjoy refreshing mocktails inspired by Asian culture including the Samurai Mojito and Tokyo Night, as well as a free-flowing Green Matcha Chocolate Fountain. Adding to this exceptional culinary journey, the Hotel is setting a festive mood for the celebrations with live performances from Zack Mousawi during brunch and an in-house DJ creating the perfect ambience for a memorable evening dinner.

Thierry Papillier, Executive Chef at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya, says: "At Four Seasons, we believe that a good meal is about creating opportunities for people to connect and enjoy time spent in each other's company. It is truly a pleasure and privilege to bring diners together and deliver an unforgettable experience as Dai Forni and Sintoho team up for this unique culinary celebration. We are looking forward to welcoming guests to share special moments this Eid and make beautiful memories with those closest to them."

Visitors who are planning to celebrate Eid in Kuwait with family and friends can spend more time experiencing the city with the Kuwait Getaway offer, which gives guests who book two or more nights' stay a 15 percent discount on their room rate. For locals who are looking to book a staycation, the Hotel also offers a generous Kuwait Residents package. Meanwhile, guests who wish to enjoy an extra touch of luxury this Eid can indulge in the comfort of a spacious suite and receive a 25 percent discount with the Suite Dreams offer.



A group photo



KUWAIT: Mohammed Al-Othman (left), Meshal Al-Mutairi (right) and Ankush Devadason, during the honoring ceremony by Visa International.

Visa Kuwait stated: "In our cooperation with National Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Airways, we are committed to offer a range of travel benefits to our cardholders, as part of endeavors to explore new opportunities to provide our high-value products and exclusive options in the travel domain."

"We are pleased to offer NBK and Kuwait Airways customers the opportunity to enjoy the high level of security, flexibility and convenience of Visa payment products, in addition to the various rewards awaiting them," he added. National Bank of Kuwait always strives to provide new and outstanding services to its customers, and seeks to identify their expectations and design services to meet their needs and expectations. In this context, NBK Credit Cards provide the best payment method, given the exclusive benefits they provide, including NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Credit Cards, which give travel lovers unlimited services and rewards.



RAV4 HEV

Prius, we have accumulated data and steadily refined our technologies to develop a wide range of products." In December 2021, Toyota announced its strategy for Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs). The company plans to launch 30 models in the passenger and commercial segments by 2030, and aims to achieve 3.5 million annual global vehicle sales before the end of the decade. With the launch of its 'Environmental Challenge 2050' roadmap in October 2015, Toyota outlined its commitment to reducing the environmental impacts of manufacturing and driving vehicles across the globe, with the goal of achieving carbon neutrality throughout its operations. The company has set a series of ambitious targets inspired by key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), placing its current and future strategy firmly in alignment with the MENA Climate Week event taking place this month in Dubai.

Fujita concludes: "Our adoption of 'Sustainable and Practical' solutions for diverse circumstances around the world is exactly what the phrase 'think globally, act locally' means to me. I sincerely believe this is the most effective way to reduce the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere in the quickest time possible, a goal that is imperative if we are to safeguard our planet for future generations."

Business

KIB reports KD 2.45 million in net profits for 1Q 2022

21% growth in total assets • Financing portfolio exceeding KD 2.4 billion

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) continues to cement its footprint as a leading organization in the banking and financial sector, maintaining its growth across its key financial indicators and preserving the stability of its financial returns by achieving sustainable results - while strengthening its financial position. The bank has announced its financial results for the first quarter of 2022, achieving KD 2.45 million of profit attributable to the shareholders and EPS of 2.31 fils.

Commenting on these results, KIB Chairman Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah stated that the financial statements have registered 21 percent growth in the Bank's assets, reaching KD 3.40 billion, compared to KD 2.81 billion at the end of March 2021. This growth was the result of an increase in the size of the financing portfolio by KD 426 million to reach KD 2.42 billion by end of March 2022, compared to almost KD 2 billion at the end of March 2021, achieving a growth of 21 percent.

Additionally, KIB's investment securities portfolio grew (mainly high-level sukuk) by KD 98 million, reaching to almost KD 300 million by end of 1Q 2022, compared to KD 201 million during the first quarter of 2021. Al-Jarrah noted that this has con-

tributed to achieving some of KIB's strategic objectives, related to the development and expansion of its financing and investment activities on local, regional, and international levels.

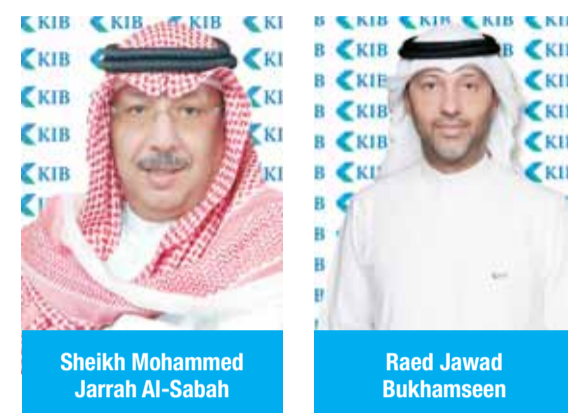
Al-Jarrah also mentioned that KIB's executive leadership succeeded in adopting an integrated strategy for the next four years, which aims to build a more advanced and fully developed business model. "Our corporate vision to become the Islamic bank of choice in Kuwait is based primarily on adapting to the rapid changes in the local and regional markets, while promptly responding to its everchanging requirements and predicting its future developments. We also strive to stay customer-focused at all times, utilizing every resource to meet and/or exceed client expectations," added Al-Jarrah.

In this context, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO of KIB, said that the financial results achieved by KIB from January to March 2022 reflects on the successful performance of its Executive team and the employees in implementing the Bank's strategic initiatives and plans. Referring to Fitch's latest credit ratings, Bukhamseen reiterated that KIB's Long-term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) has been affirmed at 'A', and viability rating

(VR) at 'bb-', with a stable outlook.

Commenting on the interim financial statements for the first quarter of 2022, Bukhamseen pointed out that in addition to the growth in total assets, financing portfolio, investments securities and net profits, the KIB's depositors' accounts also witnessed a remarkable growth grew by KD 418 million, a growth of 24 percent to reach KD 2.15 billion by 31 March 2022, compared to KD 1.73 billion by 31 March 2021, while the shareholders' equity reached to KD 258 million.

Bukhamseen also stated that KIB was able to continue maintaining adequate level in regards capital adequacy ratio in accordance with Basel 3 standards, which was reflected in the capital adequacy ratio to reach 17.85 percent by end of Q1 2022, exceeding the minimum levels required by the Central Bank of Kuwait. Bukhamseen continued to affirm KIB's commitment to providing an exceptional banking experience, offering financial services and products in accordance to the highest of industry standards. "The Bank has been keen on strictly adopting modern financial technologies, aiming to digitize most of its operations - based on its advanced technological infrastructure. We seek to constantly offer financing and banking solutions



Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah

Raed Jawad Bukhamseen

driven by innovation within all of our sectors - including retail, corporate, real estate, as well as SME's" he added. Concluding their statements, both Al-Jarrah and Bukhamseen lauded their team's dedicated efforts and their contribution in achieving these optimal results. They also expressed their appreciation to board members, as well as the executive team for their continuous support and guidance in order to advance the presence of the KIB brand further, locally and regionally.

Musk-ruled Twitter: Users left to fight trolls and misinformation?

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk's vow to let everyone say whatever they want on Twitter after his takeover of the social media giant could put the onus on users to combat bullying and misinformation on the platform, experts say.

Details of Musk's plans for Twitter were slim after his deal to buy the tech firm was announced Monday, but the Tesla chief portrays himself as a free-speech absolutist.

But the privatization of Twitter with Musk as its master has raised concerns from analysts and activists that the site will be capriciously ruled by the world's richest man, with more focus on attention and profit than on promoting healthy online conversations, which has been a priority at the service.

For Syracuse University assistant professor of communications law Kyla Garrett-Wagner, Musk's takeover of Twitter is not a free speech rights victory. "What we have done is put even more power into fewer hands," she told AFP.

"If Elon Musk decides tomorrow that he wants to shut Twitter down for a week, he can do that."

She noted the US Constitution's first amendment only bars governments from gagging what citizens say-leaving the billionaire entrepreneur the power to decide what can and cannot be posted on the private entity of Twitter. "This is not the street corner," Garrett-Wagner said. "This is the proverbial Wild West but owned by a minority elite that doesn't represent minority voices."

GM to make electric Corvette

WASHINGTON: US car maker General Motors announced Monday that it is developing an electric version of its Chevrolet Corvette. "We will offer an electrified Corvette as early as next year," said the Detroit-based auto manufacturer in a statement. "Details and names to come at a later date."

"Yes, in addition to the amazing new Chevrolet Corvette Z06 and other gas-powered variants coming, we will offer an electrified and a fully electric Corvette in the future, Mark Reuss, GM president

said on the professional site LinkedIn. The announcement comes as traditional automakers are in a race to produce more electric vehicles to compete with Tesla.

GM has set a goal of overtaking Tesla in electric vehicle sales, and to achieve that, it plans to invest \$35 billion in electric and autonomous vehicles by 2025.

Although very popular with major manufacturers, electric vehicles currently only represent a small percentage of total car sales worldwide. In the electric sector, GM collaborates with Japanese car maker Honda. At the beginning of April, they announced that they would co-develop a new line of electric vehicles at "affordable" prices, with production due to begin in 2027. —AFP



WASHINGTON: This file photo taken on April 13, 2022, shows the World Bank headquarters. —AFP

oil crisis when the OPEC group of oil-producing countries declared an embargo. Amid the war and Western sanctions on Moscow, the price of Brent crude is expected to average \$100 a barrel this year, the highest since 2013, the report said.

European natural gas prices are expected to be double what they were in 2021 and-along with coal-hitting record levels, it added. Prices for grain, of which Russia and Ukraine are large producers, and fertilizers have seen the biggest price jumps since 2008, with wheat prices reaching an all-time high this year. Overall, non-energy commodity prices, including agriculture and metals, are projected to jump 20 percent this year before easing, but will remain above their five-year average, according to the World Bank. —AFP

World faces biggest energy shock since 1970s: World Bank

WASHINGTON: Energy prices have surged since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, along with other commodities, are likely to remain at "historically high" levels through 2024, endangering economic growth, the World Bank warned Tuesday. "This amounts to the largest commodity shock we've experienced since the 1970s," said Indermit Gill, the World Bank's vice president for equitable growth, finance and institutions.

The shock-which is expected to push energy prices up 50 percent this year-is being aggravated by trade restrictions and rising prices for food, fuel and fertilizers. "These developments have started to raise the specter of stagflation," Gill warned in a statement on the World Bank's Commodity Markets Outlook report.

Echoing the call from other officials at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in recent days, he urged governments to "take every opportunity to increase economic growth at home and avoid actions that will bring harm to the global economy." The report said the increases in energy prices in the past two years have been the largest since the 1973

'The trolls take over'

Musk's promised hands-off approach to content is a particularly thorny matter when it comes to high-profile cases like that of former US president Donald Trump, who was banned from Twitter after an assault on the Capitol by his supporters. "Musk says he is going to turn Twitter into a social media platform with no moderation; there have been several of those and they don't work," said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group. "The trolls take over, they get too hostile and drive people away from the platform."

Musk has said he is averse to banning people from Twitter due to misbehavior, prompting speculation that he would lift Trump's ban. But Trump on Monday said he would not be returning to Twitter even if his account were reinstated, saying he would stick to his own site, Truth Social.

App store trouble?

If Musk pulls back on policing content at Twitter, advertisers would also have to take the lead to ensure their messages were not associated with toxic content, according to advocates and academics. "Accountability now rests with Twitter's top advertisers, who need to make it clear that if Twitter becomes a free-for-all of hate, extremism and disinformation, they will walk," said Media Matters for America chief Angelo Carusone.

"It is also critical that Google and Apple hold Twitter to the same standards they applied to other apps like Parler," he added, referring to a social network popular among conservatives.

The tech giants would need to reiterate that "Twitter will not get special treatment and that a violation of their terms of service will result in the platform being removed from the app stores," according to Carusone. Musk will also face tough judgment in the court of public opinion, with Twitter users apt to turn away from the platform if it becomes hostile and flooded with misinformation, Garrett-Wagner said. Some of Musk's own tweets



Elon Musk

have raised eyebrows, as he once mocked a Tesla whistleblower and in 2018 called a rescue worker who criticized a plan to save children from a flooded cave in Thailand "a pedo guy."

While Musk has talked about ridding Twitter of software "bots" that fire off spam, actually confirming that users are living people could prove challenging, Baird analyst Colin Sebastian told investors in a note.

Sebastian noted that Musk's idea of charging for coveted blue check marks that verify users' identities is a "no-brainer," but it is likely only a small minority of people would pay for the status.

Musk has also said he believes anyone should be able to scrutinize the software behind the service. But that kind of transparency could come with the unintended consequence that it will just be exploited by "bad actors" who find ways to game the system to promote their posts, analysts have warned.

"The rhetoric around transparency is that it will lead to an epiphany and people will change," Garrett-Wagner said. "It's a misleading comfort to think everything will be okay if we know how it is working." —AFP



A Corvette Z06 on display at the New York International Auto Show in April, 2022 in New York City; GM says it will start offering an electric version of the car in 2023

European stock markets rebound, oil extends losses

LONDON: European equities staged a relief rally Tuesday, one day after tanking on fears over the COVID outbreak in China and rising interest rates in the United States. London's benchmark FTSE 100 index rose 0.9 percent overall in late morning deals, though HSBC bank shares slid 3.6 percent on news of falling first-quarter profits.

In midday eurozone deals, Frankfurt won 1.2 percent and Paris gained 1.0 percent.

Global investor sentiment also won a shot in the arm from Elon Musk's vast \$44-billion (41-billion-euro) agreed purchase of Twitter. The European single currency hit a two-year low against the dollar, which was boosted by its haven status amid Ukraine turmoil. World oil prices nudged lower to extend recent losses on stubborn fears over weaker Chinese demand.

"European markets are enjoying a modest relief rally... after Monday's sharp sell-off, lifted by some positive momentum into the US close last night," said Victoria Scholar, investment head at Interactive Investor. Asian indices diverged as investors scrambled to recover from Monday's global rout, but fears lingered over China's COVID lockdowns and the US Federal Reserve's rate-hiking plan. —AFP

Coal still top threat to global climate goals

PARIS: The number of coal-fired power plants in the pipeline worldwide declined in 2021, according to research released Tuesday, but the fossil fuel most responsible for global warming still generated record CO2 emissions, threatening Paris climate goals.

Since the 195-nation treaty was inked in 2015, coal power capacity under construction or slated for development has dropped by three-quarters, including a 13-percent year-on-year decrease in 2021 to 457 gigawatts (GW). Globally, there are more than 2,400 coal-fired power plants operating in 79 countries, with a total capacity of 2,100 GW.

A record-low 34 countries have new coal plants under consideration, down from 41 in January 2021, according to the annual Global Energy Monitor report, Tracking the Global Coal Plant Pipeline.

China, Japan and South Korea-all historical backers of coal development outside their borders-have pledged to stop funding new coal plants in other countries, though there remain concerns about possible loopholes in China's commitment. And yet the worldwide operational fleet of coal-fired power grew in 2021 by 18 GW, and as of December an additional 176 GW of coal capacity was under construction-about the same as the year before.

Most of that growth is in China, which accounts for just over half of new coal-fired power in the pipeline. South and Southeast Asia are responsible for another 37 percent. Three-quarters of the new coal power plants that broke ground last year were in China, where newly commissioned capacity offset coal plant retirements in all other nations combined.

Coal-free

"The coal plant pipeline is shrinking, but there is simply no carbon budget left to be building new coal plants," said Flora Champenois of Global Energy Monitor. "We need to stop, now."

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Energy Agency have warned that having a fighting chance of capping global warming at liveable levels means no new coal plants and a rapid phase-out of existing ones. Rich countries must do so by 2030 and most of the rest of the world by 2040, they said.

Many emerging economies-India, Vietnam, Bangladesh-have cut back on plans for new coal-fired capacity. "In China, plans for new coal-fired power plants have continued to be announced," said Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst for the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air and a co-author of the report. By far the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, China has vowed to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and become carbon-neutral by 2060.

In the United States, efforts to curtail coal use have slowed, the report showed. The amount of US coal capacity retired in 2021 declined for the second year in a row, from 16.1 GW in 2019, to 11.6 GW in 2020, to an estimated 6.4 to 9.0 GW last year. To meet its own climate goals, the United States would need to retire 25 GW annually between now and 2030.

The European Union retired a record 12.9 GW in 2021, including 5.8 GW in Germany, 1.7 GW in Spain and 1.9 GW in Portugal, which became coal-free in November 2021 — nine years before its target phase-out date. —AFP

FRANCE'S SISTER ANDRE CLAIMS TITLE OF WORLD'S OLDEST PERSON



118-year-old French catholic nun Andre Randon speaks to the press at the Saint-Catherine-Laboure nursing home where she lives in Toulon, southern France.



In this file photo taken on February 10, 2021 Sister Andre, Lucile Randon in the registry of birth, the eldest French and European citizen, prays in a wheelchair, on the eve of her 117th birthday.

A French nun who recently celebrated her 118th birthday with her traditional port-and-chocolate cocktail is now the world's oldest known person, following the death announced Monday of a Japanese woman one year her senior. Lucile Randon, known as Sister Andre, was born in southern France on February 11, 1904, when World War I was still a decade away. She now lives at a nursing home in Toulon along the Mediterranean coast, beginning every day with breakfast and then a morning mass, though her eyes can no longer see.

"She's happy, she likes very much this attention," said the home's communications director David Tavella, adding that a short press conference would be held Tuesday morning. "But it's just another step, because her real goal is to overtake Jeanne Calment," a French woman who was reportedly 122-years-old when she died in 1997. This year Sister Andre got a handwritten New Year's greeting from President Emmanuel Macron, among the many letters and boxes of chocolates sent by well-wishers.

"I was always admired for my wisdom and intelligence, but now people could care less because I'm

stubborn," she jokingly told an AFP in an interview for her 118th tour around the sun. "I thinking of getting out of this business but they won't let me," she said. She worked as a governess in Paris—a period she once called the happiest time of her life—before taking her religious vows with the Daughters of Charity.

Previously the person deemed the world's oldest by the International Database on Longevity (IDL) and Guinness World Records was Kane Tanaka, whose death in Japan on April 19 was announced Monday. With her death, "Sister Andre indeed

becomes the oldest, and by far, since the next oldest is a Polish woman who is 115," said Laurent Toussaint, a computer scientist and amateur tracker for the IDL as well as the French institute of demographic studies (INED).

Most centenarians are found in the world's so-called blue zones, where people live longer than average, such as Okinawa in Japan or on the Italian island of Sardinia. But France, while not considered a blue zone, nonetheless has 30,000 centenarians, according to statistics institute Insee, with around 40 of them 110 or older. —AFP



Sister Andre, Lucile Randon

'SPEAKING OUT': RUSSIAN MUSICIANS TOUR FOR UKRAINE REFUGEES



In this file photo US President Donald Trump looks on during a ceremony presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to wrestler Dan Gable in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC.—AFP

Murdoch launches TalkTV channel with Trump trashing Harry and Meghan

Media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's "TalkTV" launched in Britain on Monday, entering a crowded news market but leveraging his star interviewer's familiarity with trash-talking former US president Donald Trump. The network started airing at 7:00 pm (1800 GMT), with Tom Newton Dunn, the former political editor at Murdoch's The Sun daily, welcoming viewers to "a bold new channel, straight talking and straight reporting starts here". News reports and discussions were to be followed by outspoken journalist Piers Morgan interviewing Trump for the program "Uncensored".

During the interview, Trump talked about his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin during his tenure at the White House. "I threatened him like he has never been threatened before," he said. But a promotional clip appeared to show the former US president storming off after being challenged about his claims the 2020 US election was "stolen" from him.

Trump, in a statement, claimed Morgan had tried to "unlawfully and deceptively edit his long and tedious interview with me". But the journalist said "it will all be there" when broadcast. The apparent flap, which might not hurt ratings, echoed Morgan's own storming off an ITV set in Britain when he was challenged by a colleague on-air about his repeated attacks on Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. According to excerpts released by The Sun newspaper, Trump agreed with Morgan's claim that Harry was controlled by Meghan, and said the couple would eventually split up.

TalkTV is airing on regular television in Britain and on streaming platforms, as well as YouTube. Morgan's show will also be shown on Fox Nation in the United States and Sky News Australia, both of which are part of Murdoch's global media empire. TalkTV uses a stable of journalists from Murdoch's News UK operation, including The Times and The Sun, and will show video broadcasts of the group's existing TalkRadio. The company launched another radio station, Times Radio, in June 2020 as an alternative to the BBC's news and current affairs station Radio 4. —AFP



Fans stand in line to enter the venue of an anti-war concert of Russian musicians for more than a thousand fans, mainly Ukrainians and Belarusians, in Warsaw, Poland. —AFP photos



Spectators hold up posters against the war in Ukraine during an anti-war concert of Russian musicians for more than a thousand fans, mainly Ukrainians and Belarusians, in Warsaw, Poland.

Russian rapper Noize MC bounds onto the brightly lit stage in Warsaw to the screams of hundreds of adoring fans at his anti-war concert. After an emotional speech denouncing the Kremlin's sweeping military operation in Ukraine, he flashes a peace sign with his fingers to the mostly Ukrainian but also Russian and Belarusian audience. "I will be making this sign until my hands are tied behind my back," Noize MC told the crowd, alluding to alleged Russian atrocities in Ukrainian towns such as Bucha, where bodies were found with their hands bound behind their backs.

Noize MC, 37, real name Ivan Alexeyev, is one of two Russian pop acts who have teamed up to perform in the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to raise money for the more than 5.2 million Ukrainians forced to flee the conflict. He and his touring partner—electronic music star Monetochka—have so far raised more than 200,000 euros (\$214,000) for a Polish charity helping refugees with their "Voices of Peace" concert series. "I wanted to find a way where I can be most effective in speaking out," Monetochka told AFP in an interview before her set. When she did take the stage, it was against projections of ballerinas from the Russian ballet Swan Lake, which is highly symbolic in Russia as a byword for Soviet decay and regime collapse.

'Talking about war'

Wearing a white dress—her hair, as always, in two buns—Monetochka delighted the crowd with a percussive poem mocking Russia's attack before a set of electro-pop hits. "We found a way where we can really make a difference and for a second forget about the feeling of guilt," said the softly spoken 23-year-old—whose real name is Liza Girdimova. Born just before Russian President Vladimir Putin took power, Monetochka is part of a generation that has known only his rule. Her lyrics used to reflect concerns about Russia's trajectory "hidden in metaphors." The last two months have changed that.

"I'm talking about war without synonyms," she told AFP, defying a Kremlin order that Russians can refer to the fighting only as a "special military operation." At the same time,



Fans stand in line to enter the venue of an anti-war concert of Russian musicians for more than a thousand fans, mainly Ukrainians and Belarusians, in Warsaw, Poland.

she says, she's wary of ostracizing fans who remain in Russia and who are sympathetic to the Kremlin's narrative. "I try with all my strength not to scare people that are on the fence, but to bring them towards us instead."

The series in Europe is a far cry from previous tours—even after fighting erupted in 2014 after Ukrainians ousted their Moscow-backed government and the Kremlin annexed Crimea from Ukraine. After that, she said, Russian artists still performed in Ukraine and there was little practical difference between a gig in Saint Petersburg and Ukraine's now war-scarred city of Kharkiv. "We could go there and sing in our Russian language, our Russian songs and nobody did anything to us," she said. "People there knew our songs by heart." The singing by heart, at least, hasn't changed. Hundreds of her fans in Warsaw sang along, Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians standing shoulder to shoulder.

'There is hope'

"I'm happy there are some Russian people who aren't indifferent and who help us," said 25-year-old Evgenia Korzhelaya whose parents still live in Ukraine's heavily



Spectators cheer during an anti-war concert of Russian musicians for more than a thousand fans, mainly Ukrainians and Belarusians, in Warsaw, Poland.

shelled southern town of Mykolayiv. Liza Daviskiba, a 26-year-old Russian project manager who lives in Finland, said she was surprised to see such crowds for Russian artists. "There is hope that there won't be this aggression between our people," she said. "I'm so happy to see this kind of initiative. It's a statement that things aren't good in Russia and that we Russians are with Ukrainians."

Like tens of thousands of Russians horrified by events in Ukraine, Monetochka scrambled to leave Russia within days. And like many Russians who fled, she doesn't know when she will go back. In the meantime, the concerts offer a degree of stability. She derives hope that most of the donations on their concert website—which also go towards helping refugees—come from Russia. And, she said, the shows let her and Alexeyev briefly "forget about the fate of the country." It hasn't all been smooth sailing and she says she has encountered "anger" from Ukrainians and some Europeans. "They have a right to this," she said. For now, with more performances planned in Scandinavia, the shows help with the uncertainty of the moment. The gigs "keep me afloat," she said. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

'SPIDER-MAN' SEQUELS AND BAD BUNNY KICK OFF BUOYANT CINEMA CON SUMMIT



General coordination, operation and execution of CinemaCon Mitch Neuhauser speaks on stage ahead of Sony Pictures Entertainment exclusive presentation of its upcoming releases during CinemaCon at the Caesars Palace Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP photos



US filmmakers Phil Lord and Chris Miller speak during the Sony Pictures Entertainment exclusive presentation of its upcoming releases during CinemaCon.

Hollywood bosses showcased new "Spider-Man" sequels and brought rap superstar Bad Bunny on stage to kick off a bullish meeting of movie theater industry leaders in Las Vegas Monday. The CinemaCon summit draws Tinseltown executives to giant casino ballrooms each year, where owners of theaters-from global chains to tiny independents-are treated to never-before-seen footage and A-list appearances. After a subdued edition last August, big-screen operators were back in a buoyant mood, with box office hauls now recovering from successive COVID-hit years-not to mention news that streaming juggernaut Netflix recorded its first subscriber loss in more than a decade.

"What are you doing here? Everyone said you're dead, everyone said you're finished," joked Tom Rothman, chairman of Sony Pictures, to cheers from theater owners. Theaters have particularly been encouraged by hits like Sony's recent "Spider-Man: No Way Home"-the third-biggest US box office success of all time, grossing \$1.9 billion worldwide. Phil Lord and Chris Miller, directors of Oscar-winning 2018 animation "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse," unveiled unfinished footage from the first 15 minutes of their sequel "Across the Spider-Verse," out next summer. It featured various male and female Spidey heroes hopping between dimensions-and will be followed by another animated sequel, the newly

announced "Beyond the Spider-Verse," in 2024. In its opening-night presentation, Sony also presented footage from Brad Pitt action thriller "Bullet Train," based on a Japanese novel and out in July. Early scenes showed Pitt's wise-cracking hitman pacing through neon-lit Tokyo streets before brawling with music superstar-turned-actor Bad Bunny on a train.

"That's not my first fight," joked the chart-topping Puerto Rican rapper, who was also unveiled as the first Latino to lead a live-action Marvel superhero film-"El Muerto," out in January 2024. Viola Davis appeared on stage to accept the event's inaugural "trailblazer" prize-while plugging her upcoming film "The Woman King," a historical epic about the female warriors of the west African kingdom of Dahomey, out in September.

"I wanted to be a producer who championed those stories with people with a history that looked like me," said the "Fences" Oscar-winner. She called the new film-in which she also stars-her "magnus opus." Reese Witherspoon appeared by video to introduce her adaptation of best-selling novel "Where the Crawdads Sing," a creepy drama set around a murder in the North Carolina marshes, out this summer. The presentation also confirmed new "Ghostsbusters" and "Venom" sequels, and ended with a video message from boxing great George Foreman ahead of a new biopic about his career.

'Zeitgeist'

This year's CinemaCon brings A-listers back in-person to Las Vegas, with Robert De Niro, Rachel McAdams and director David Cronenberg among those due to attend. The stars stayed away last year when anxiety was high over the latest Covid-19 wave, and the mood was gloomy as Hollywood studios released films directly on streaming platforms, bypassing theaters. Major studios have since cheered theater owners by largely reverting to an exclusive "window" when movies can only be seen on the big screen-albeit for 45 days or less, down from around 90 days pre-pandemic.

Appearing by video, "Dune" director Denis Villeneuve said he was still "worried about the theatrical window getting shorter and shorter," and called for a return to longer windows to keep the movie-going experience "unique" and "precious." Villeneuve spoke from Budapest, where preparation for his sci-fi epic sequel "Dune: Part Two" was going "full speed ahead," with the film due October 2023. The Canadian director said he was "sad, horrified and worried" about the war in Ukraine, which led to Hollywood pulling films from Russian screens. Warner Bros international chief Andrew Cripps said pirated copies of "The Batman" were playing at Russian theaters despite the embargo, but added that "we've all learnt to live with uncertainty



CinemaCon Trailblazer of the Year US actress Viola Davis speaks during Sony Pictures Entertainment exclusive presentation of its upcoming releases during CinemaCon.

in recent years." Warner, which merged with Discovery this month to create Hollywood's newest giant, will present its upcoming films Tuesday, before Disney-which skipped last year's event-follows Wednesday. CinemaCon concludes Thursday, when Paramount will present the first full screening of long-awaited sequel "Top Gun: Maverick." —AFP

'Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra' to play in flagship BBC Proms

A newly formed orchestra comprising Ukrainian musicians from across Europe will feature as the world's biggest classical music festival resumes in full after the COVID pandemic, the BBC said Tuesday. The Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra will play in London's Royal Albert Hall on July 31 as part of the eight-week BBC Proms festival, which was heavily curtailed in the past two years, the broadcaster said. The televised performance will be part of the orchestra's debut tour of Europe and the United States, after it was formed with musicians who are now war refugees, as well as Ukrainian members of European orchestras.

Led by Canadian-Ukrainian conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson, the orchestra's London program will include pieces by Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin and Valentin Silvestrov, Ukraine's foremost living composer. "This tour is an expression of love for their homeland, and to honor those who have died and have suffered so much," Wilson said.

The Ukrainian orchestra was added to the Proms line-up "at the 11th hour" to celebrate "the power of music to cross divides", festival director David Pickard said. Russian musicians can perform as long as they are not on record as supporting President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, he said. "I think if there were somebody to express those views, to be putting it bluntly, there would be no place for them at the Proms," Pickard added that being able to plan a full Proms season was "fantastic for us all" after an "immensely challenging" period during the pandemic.

The season starts on July 15, with 84 concerts featuring more than 3,000 musicians, the BBC said. The first-ever "gaming Prom" will trace the sounds of video games from the 1980s to today, including a premiere from Icelandic composer Hildur Gudnadottir, whose score to the film "Joker" won an Oscar in 2020. The last night of the Proms in September traditionally climaxes with full-throated renditions of British patriotic anthems. The BBC reversed a decision in 2020 to axe the singing after coming under fierce attack from the Conservative government and right-wing press. —AFP



118 year-old French catholic nun Andre Randon is presented to the press at the Saint-Catherine-Laboure nursing home where she lives in Toulon, southern France. —AFP photos

AMBER HEARD LAWYERS WRAP UP CROSS-EXAMINATION OF JOHNNY DEPP



Actor Johnny Depp testifies that a actress Amber Heard threw, hit him there, in the courtroom at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia.

—AFP photos



Lawyers for Amber Heard on Monday ended their marathon grilling of Johnny Depp at his defamation trial against his former wife by playing audio recordings of heated arguments between the couple. "Shut up fat," the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star is heard telling Heard in one recording played for the seven-member jury hearing the case in Fairfax County Circuit Court. In another audiotape, the 36-year-old Heard, who had a starring role in the movie "Aquaman," accuses Depp of throwing a "swing" at her. Depp has denied ever being physically abusive towards Heard and has claimed repeatedly at the trial that she was the one who was frequently violent.

Depp filed a defamation suit against Heard over a column she wrote for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse." Heard never named Depp but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. The Texas-born Heard countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands.

'Hit pieces'

Depp, a three-time Oscar nominee, and Heard met in 2009 on the set of the film "The Rum Diary" and were married in February 2015. Their divorce was finalized

two years later. Heard's attorneys have alleged that Depp would become a physically and sexually abusive "monster" when he was drunk or on drugs, and pressed him extensively about his drug and alcohol use during his three days of cross-examination on the witness stand. "If anyone had a problem with my drinking, at any time in my life, it was me," Depp said. "The only person I've ever abused in my life is myself."

Heard's lawyer Ben Rottenborn also sought to convince the jury that the accusations against Depp pre-dated the Washington Post column that Heard wrote. Rottenborn noted that Heard had filed a temporary restraining order against Depp in Los Angeles in May 2016, citing abuse, and quoted headlines from a number of newspaper articles.

"These are all hit pieces," Depp replied. Depp also played down some of the harsh language he used to describe Heard in text messages to various friends, including one that said "I can only hope that karma kicks in and takes the gift of breath from her." "It's just irreverent and abstract humor," Depp said, and he was "ashamed that this has to be spread on the world like peanut butter."

Severed finger

After Depp finished testifying, his attorneys called as a witness Ben King, an Englishman who managed the home where the couple stayed in Australia during

the 2015 filming of the fifth installment of the "Pirates" franchise. Much of the testimony at the trial has revolved around an incident that occurred there in which the tip of the middle finger of Depp's right hand was severed.

Depp told the jury it happened when Heard threw a bottle at him, smashing the finger against the edge of a bar in the house. Heard's lawyers suggested that Depp cut it with a knife in the kitchen. King's testimony appeared to back up Depp's account.

The house manager said he found the severed fingertip in a tissue on the floor of the bar along with a broken bottle of Stolichnaya vodka. He said a "big chunk" of the marble bartop had been broken off. King said that while he had witnessed frequent arguments between the couple during their stay in Australia, and another in London, he had never seen them be violent.

Testifying last week, Depp said the allegations that he was a "drunken, cocaine-fueled menace who beat women" have cost him "everything." The actor said that a "couple of days" after the Post column appeared, Disney announced he would no longer appear as Captain Jack Sparrow in the blockbuster "Pirates" franchise Depp filed the defamation complaint in the United States after losing a separate libel case in London in November 2020 that he brought against The Sun for calling him a "wife-beater." —AFP

Sports

stc crowns Dawri stc champions, concludes sponsorship for the year

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, celebrated the champions of Dawri stc 2021-2022 and concluded its sponsorship activities for the year. This marks the 8th consecutive year in which stc has sponsored the league, which falls in line with the Company's commitment towards empowering young athletes and supporting the local sports community.

Dawri stc ended this year after a thrilling season that led to Kuwait SC emerging as champions of the 60th edition of the league where it marked the 17th time Kuwait SC has won the league equaling the record of both Al Qadsia SC and Al Arabi SC.

stc, as well as members of the Kuwait Football Association (KFA), crowned Kuwait SC as winners of Dawri stc during the league's closing ceremony. Engineer Maziad Alharbi, CEO of stc, and Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwait Football Association, presented the Kuwait SC with the season's trophy with the attendance of the Public Authority for Sports General Director, Hmoud Flayteh. stc's participation in the ceremony comes in support of the league as well as the various activities organized by the KFA such as the Amir Cup, Crown Prince Cup, Super Cup, and Federation Cup.

Commenting on the successful season, President of the KFA, Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, thanked stc for sponsoring the league as well as the activities organized by the KFA for the 8th consecutive year. Al-Sabah expressed his excitement in welcoming back fans to the stadiums, which added to the excitement and thrilling action witnessed this season.

Al-Sabah said, "On behalf of the KFA, I would like to congratulate the Kuwait SC for their victorious win this season, as well as all the teams who participated in this year's championship. I would also like to extend my appreciation to stc for their continuous support in the numerous functions that

the KFA has held throughout the past several years as part of our strategic partnership. We look forward to more collaborative opportunities with stc that will assist us in supporting players in all aspects of football and work hand in hand towards a better future in sports.

stc mentioned in its statement that this year marked the return of fans to the stadiums since the onset of the pandemic. stc corporate communications team has prepared a set of interactive and engaging activities and surprises throughout this season to the attending fans under "Fan Zone" that was built specifically to interact with the fans in many competitions throughout the season.

In his role, Eng. Maziad Alharbi expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the KFA for organizing a successful 2021-2022 season, especially following the impacts and restrictions of the pandemic. stc has been committed throughout the past several years in supporting the sports community in Kuwait under its CSR program.

He added, "Our participation in the different activities organized by the KFA stems from our support towards the Kuwaiti community and the local sports scene. We believe in the importance of backing and empowering young athletes as they pursue their athletic careers. Sports has been one of the key pillars under our extensive CSR program at stc and that is mainly due to the positive impact that sports have on our community."

Alharbi said, "Upon concluding our sponsorship with the closing of the 2021-2022 Dawri stc season, we would like to thank the KFA and all participating football clubs for an exciting and exhilarating season. We were proud to witness the teams perform outstandingly as they competed for the winning title, and in this regard, we would like to congratulate the Kuwait SC for winning the Dawri stc title for the 17th time in the club history."

Alharbi concluded, "As leading pioneers within our industry, we believe in the importance of playing a considerable role within our community. One



KUWAIT: Kuwait SC players celebrate with the Dawri trophy.

of our key objectives is to provide our valued customers with solutions and rich experiences that go beyond telecom services. This is a factor that we greatly consider when participating in different events to enrich the lifestyles of our customers."

Regarding sponsoring the activities of the Kuwait Football Association, Alharbi expressed that stc was keen to participate and sponsor the 2021-2022 season due to the positive impact the championship generates to both individuals and the community. The sponsorship came as a continuation of stc's collaborations with the KFA, which were initiated in 2013. He expressed that through

the highly experienced team at stc, the Company is proud to witness Dawri stc maintain its glorified reputation in the local sports scene, side by side with the KFA.

stc through its influential and supporting role in the local sports scene aims to be actively engaged in activities that encourage individuals of all ages and nationalities to adopt a healthier lifestyle. This dynamic runs parallel to the Company's social responsibility pillars which focus on promoting health awareness, educating and empowering the younger Kuwaiti generation, and practicing environmentally conscious behaviors.

Dhawan hits 88 as Punjab prevail in tense IPL finish

MUMBAI: Shikhar Dhawan smashed an unbeaten 88 for Punjab Kings who withstood a batting blitz from Chennai Super Kings' Ambati Rayudu to seal an 11-run victory in a hard-fought IPL match on Monday. Dhawan, playing his 200th match in the Indian Premier League, smashed nine fours and two sixes in his 59-ball knock to guide Punjab, who were put in to bat first at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, to 187-4.

Holders Chennai slipped to 40-3, but Rayudu took on the chase in his 39-ball 78, studded with six sixes, before being bowled by Kagiso Rabada who returned figures of 2-23. Rayudu smashed three straight sixes and a four off Sandeep Sharma to raise hopes of a victory in a 23-run 16th over. Skipper M.S. Dhoni attempted to repeat his pyrotechnics of the previous match when he scored 16 off the final four balls but this time 27 runs from the 20th over proved too big as Chennai closed 11 short.

"I think he (Rayudu) was batting brilliantly but we could have restricted them under 170-175," said Chennai skipper Ravindra Jadeja. "I think not getting a good start in the first six (overs), we're not putting runs on the board in the first six. So we need to improve on that and come back strong."

Medium-pacer Rishi Dhawan, wearing an unusual mask to protect his face in the event of getting hit by the ball, kept his nerve in the final over to have Dhoni caught at midwicket by Jonny Bairstow. Punjab bounced back from two straight losses while four-time champions Chennai slumped to their sixth loss in eight matches.

Earlier Shikhar Dhawan lost his opening partner and skipper Mayank Agarwal for 18 after a slow start before adding 110 for the second wicket with fellow left-hander Bhanuka Rajapaksa, who made 42. Sri Lankan Rajapaksa survived two dropped chances on one and five and finished with two fours and two sixes in his 32-ball knock. — AFP

Buttler tons to Kohli ducks: Hits and misses of the IPL so far

NEW DELHI: The 15th edition of the Indian Premier League has passed the half-way mark after a month of high-octane action in the world's richest Twenty20 cricket tournament. AFP Sport looks at five talking points from the first half of the season.

Smiling assassin

Jos Buttler has smiled his way to the top of this season's batting chart with three sparkling centuries for Rajasthan Royals. The softly-spoken Englishman has been a bowler's nightmare with 491 runs in seven matches to take Royals into the top four of the 10-team table. His latest 65-ball knock of 116 against Delhi Capitals puts him in with a chance of chasing Virat Kohli's 2016 record of 973 runs in a season. "Jos has a cheat code for batting," England fast bowler Jofra Archer tweeted.

Kohli flops

The former India captain and national superstar Kohli has been struggling with the worst slump of his stellar career after two successive golden ducks for Royal Challengers Bangalore. Kohli has managed just 119 runs from eight matches, following his lackluster recent form for his country with the prolific run scorer unable to manage an international century for more than two years. Disbelief after dismissal, a wry smile and a dejected walk back to the pavilion have been familiar sights for "King Kohli" this IPL season. Batting great Sunil Gavaskar said it is "anxiety" to get going that is playing on the star batsman's mind.

Powerhouses tumble

Mumbai Indians and defending champions Chennai Super Kings have won nine of the 14 IPL titles since the league was launched. But the powerhouse teams are languishing at the bottom of the



MUMBAI: A pedestrian walks past the bus of Indian Premier League's (IPL) Delhi Capitals on March 24, 2022. — AFP

standings with Mumbai winless and Chennai managing just two victories from eight. Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma, who has made just 153 runs, blamed his batsmen, including himself, after the latest loss to Lucknow Super Giants when failing to chase down 168. Fans have backed a turnaround and Rohit has acknowledged their "faith and undying loyalty to this team so far".

Titanic debut for Gujarat

IPL debutants Gujarat Titans have been the team to beat this year and sit on top of the table with six wins out of seven matches. All-rounder Hardik Pandya has led from the front with 295 runs and four wickets off his pace bowling. Afghanistan spin wizard Rashid Khan has also shone with the ball, and a match-winning batting blitz, while South African David Miller made an unbeaten 94 to stun Chennai. Gujarat have also shocked two-time champions

Kolkata Knight Riders and former India opener Wasim Jaffer called them a "surprise package".

Umpires get Pant fuming

Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant almost called his batsmen from the field to protest against an umpire's call against Rajasthan Royals during an ill-tempered match last week. The drama happened on the third ball of the final over when Obed McCoy bowled a high full toss that Delhi believed should have been called a no-ball for being above the waist.

Pant and assistant coach Pravin Amre, who walked on to the pitch, were both fined 100 per cent of their match fee. Amre was also suspended for one match. Umpiring controversies are not new to IPL. Mahendra Singh Dhoni walked onto the field in 2019 to protest at a no-ball call and was docked 50 percent of his match fee. — AFP

Raducanu set for fourth coach after cutting Beltz loose

LONDON: US Open champion Emma Raducanu is set to appoint her fourth coach in a year after ending her association with Torben Beltz after just five months, she said on Tuesday. The 19-year-old is due to play in the Madrid Open this week as she builds up to the French Open but said she felt she required a "new training model". The Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) head of women's coaching, Iain Bates, will work with Raducanu this week.

She will bid to build on her run to the Stuttgart quarter-finals last week where she lost to world number one and eventual champion Iga Swiatek. "I want to thank Torben for his coaching, professionalism and dedication over the last half a year," said Raducanu, who on Monday rose to her highest world ranking of 11. "He has a huge heart and I have enjoyed our strong chemistry during the time together. I feel the best direction for my development is to transition to a new training model with the LTA supporting in the interim."

Beltz previously coached former world number one and fellow German Angelique Kerber when she won the Australian Open and US Open titles in 2016. Raducanu has gone through a number of coaches in the past year since she first made her



Emma Raducanu

mark in reaching the last 16 at Wimbledon, even before she had received her final school exam results.

She replaced Nigel Sears with Andrew Richardson after Wimbledon, but Richardson's contract was not renewed despite Raducanu's stunning success at the US Open. Raducanu could turn towards Italian Riccardo Piatti, who has coached among others France's former world number seven, the mercurial Richard Gasquet, and 2016 Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic. He is available after cutting ties with compatriot Jannik Sinner, who he guided into the men's world top 10. Raducanu trained at his academy prior to embarking on her clay court campaign earlier in April. — AFP

Mickelson seeks PGA release for Saudi backed series opener

LOS ANGELES: Phil Mickelson sparked intrigue about his possible return to golf on Monday after applying for a release to play in the first event of a lucrative Saudi Arabia-backed golf tour in June. Mickelson's management company confirmed in a statement that the 51-year-old six-time major winner was seeking approval to play in the June 9-11 LIV Golf Invitational outside London - but stressed he had not yet confirmed his participation.

The former world number one has not played since triggering uproar in February following publication of his remarks made last year to author Alan Shipnuck concerning the new Saudi-funded venture. Mickelson described the Saudi financial backers of the proposed league as "scary" with a "horrible record on human rights" but said he was willing to deal with them in order to gain leverage to "reshape" the US PGA Tour.

Mickelson, the reigning PGA champion, subsequently apologized for the comments and announced he was taking some "desperately

needed time away" from golf. However his eventual return could conceivably feature participation at the LIV Golf event at Centurion Golf Club outside London. Steve Loy, co-president of Sportfive management, said in a statement Mickelson was registered to play in both next month's PGA Championship, where he will be defending his title, as well as the June 16-19 US Open, which takes place the week after the LIV London event.

"Our client Phil Mickelson is officially registered to play in the PGA Championship as well as the US Open," Loy said. "We have also filed a request on his behalf for a release to play in the first LIV Golf Invitational in London, June 9-11. This request complies with the deadline of April 25 set forth by the PGA Tour to compete in a conflicting tour event. "Phil currently has no concrete plans on when and where he will play. Any actions taken are in no way a reflection of a final decision made, but rather to keep all options open."

Mickelson's possible return comes amid intense speculation about other players who may opt to take part in the Saudi-backed venture. The money-spinning series will offer purses of \$25 million per tournament - making every leg of the series more lucrative than the richest event on the PGA Tour, and roughly more than double the prize money on offer for each of golf's four majors. Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper meanwhile reported on Monday that European Ryder Cup stars Sergio Garcia, Ian Poulter and Lee Westwood were all considering playing in the event. —AFP

Sports

Harayda navigates from Olympic setback to sailing's toughest race

PARIS: James Harayda, displaying the natural steeliness of a sailor, picked himself up from the disappointment of his Olympic dream being dashed and is bidding to become the youngest competitor in the 2024 Vendee Globe. The 24-year-old Singaporean-born yachtsman may never have experienced sailing in the Southern Ocean but history-making female mariner Dee Caffari, who competed in the 2009 Vendee Globe, believes he has the qualities to thrive in perhaps the toughest challenge in yachting.

Caffari - the first woman to sail non-stop around the world westwards, against the prevailing winds and currents, in 2006, and the first female to sail solo around the world in both directions three years later - has been competing with Harayda in the Double-Handed Offshore class. They have been crowned British champions twice, but their aim to compete in the 2024 Paris Olympics ended when the IOC decided last year to remove the event from the program.

Instead Harayda is aiming to take on the grueling challenge of the Vendee Globe, in which half of all contestants fail to finish due to masts snapping, rudders smashing or capsizing. "There is a reason why people sail the right way round the world," Caffari told AFP. "Stepping into the Vendee Globe you are transformed from being an adventurer to a professional sailor. "It is a very big step but I had experience as I had spent loads of time on my own in the Southern Ocean. The most sensible step when you are out there is to remember each experience day by day and to be able to pass that on and learn from my mistakes - and I use that to guide James to a successful campaign."

The idea of taking on the Vendee Globe came from

Harayda, who created his own Gentoo Sailing Team in 2020 - and as Caffari says, there is no "harm in trying otherwise you will never know what might have happened". "You need certain characteristics such as resilience, tenacity and the fortitude to overcome a challenge and face adversity," she said. "Mother Nature always sends you a few surprises and you need an element of luck. I have seen those characteristics in James."

'Nowhere to hide'

Caffari says it is Harayda's eagerness to sweep up the tasks he is set and to learn that gives her confidence he will be up to the task. "He is very self-sufficient and for instance the jobs list we had set for next week he has done half of them already. "He is pretty calm when things are tricky although he has a tendency for natural excitement. However, I have helped him to tone down that a lot. Every day of the Vendee you have a series of challenges to overcome and being calm in your approach it sets you up to do a good job. There is nowhere to hide when you sail solo."

Harayda - who has competed in the challenging Sydney-Hobart race - jokes Caffari has made him blush but believes he is up to the task of qualifying through a series of races. He will compete in a new IMOCA 60 racing yacht, a 60-foot, hydro foiling boat. "It is definitely a big step up," he said of sailing solo. "Yesterday was a good example. I went up the mast carrying the tools required in a basket. Halfway up I was thinking to myself how on earth can I do that in the Southern Ocean on my own? After all here I am in a marina with calm water. In the course of a few hours things become real! It is



CAGLIARI: This handout photograph released on April 19, 2022 shows Britain's James Harayda and Dee Caffari as they compete in WOLD Sardinia 2020 sailing event off the coast of Sardinia on Aug 18, 2020. —AFP

very easy sitting on your sofa at home and it sounds like a cool challenge but halfway up the mast it might not be as cool as I thought."

Whilst Harayda faces weeks of eating freeze-dried food - his favorite is kebab stew - Caffari also recommends finding time for oneself when on the boat as it is "important to strike a balance". Caffari and Harayda may have taken to the water with aplomb but in nei-

ther case does it stem from a family tradition of seafaring. Harayda was more attracted to football and basketball in his school days, and Caffari said: "My mother prefers baths to showers as she hates the thought of water going over her head. "She still joined me for the end of the Vendee Globe and by half two in the morning she was dancing on a table and I had gone to bed." —AFP

Palace stalemate keeps Leeds in relegation danger

LONDON: Leeds held on for a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace that did little to ease their fears of being dragged deeper into the Premier League relegation battle on Monday. Jesse Marsch's side survived a second half barrage from a Palace team inspired by Wilfried Zaha after he was accused of diving by the visitors. Leeds are five points clear of the relegation zone, but third bottom Everton have a game in hand to close the gap to two points.

With Leeds' next three games coming against Manchester City, Arsenal and Chelsea, there could yet be a nerve-jangling conclusion to the season for the Yorkshire club. Leeds have taken 11 points from seven games since hiring American boss Marsch to replace the sacked Marcelo Bielsa. But despite that solid run, Burnley's second successive win, against Wolves on Sunday, has lifted them out of the relegation zone above Everton, in the process dragging Leeds into the scrap for survival.

"It wasn't our best night, but it's a recipe of not losing and finding a way to pick up points. We will take the positives," Marsch said. "We

need to find ways of being a bit more dangerous, but a clean sheet and a draw is a big positive. The (relegation) pressure was always going to be big no matter what."

Marsch and Palace boss Patrick Vieira met nine times in the United States during their spells in charge of New York Red Bulls and New York City FC respectively. None of those previous encounters can have been quite so crucial to Marsch as this one as Leeds tried to climb away from the relegation dogfight. England midfielder Calvin Phillips was making his first Leeds start for nearly five months after a hamstring injury, but at times the frenetic tempo left him struggling to keep up.

Jean-Philippe Mateta almost gave Palace the perfect start when he raced onto Conor Gallagher's long pass and clipped his shot past Leeds keeper Illan Meslier, but the burly striker's effort drifted just wide. Palace dominated the early stages and Mateta missed another good chance as he stretched to shin Jordan Ayew's cross wide from close-range. After a rocky start, Leeds defender Liam Cooper's header forced Vicente Guaita to make his first save.

Mateta tested Meslier with a powerful header before Palace forward Zaha earned Marsch's wrath. Zaha's theatrical tumbles raised the temperature on the touchline as Marsch took issue with the Ivorian, who then shoved Raphinha in the face to make the atmosphere even more feisty. The bad blood spilled over into the second half as Daniel James was



LONDON: Crystal Palace's Zaire-born Belgian striker Christian Benteke vies with Leeds United's Spanish defender Diego Llorente and Leeds United's German defender Robin Koch during their English Premier League match at Selhurst Park on April 25, 2022. —AFP

booked for a crude foul on Joel Ward that sparked another melee.

Zaha appealed for a penalty after Luke Ayling's challenge sent him sprawling, but his protest was waved away. Undeterred, Zaha took the attack to Leeds again as he cut inside the area for a shot that Meslier held well. Gallagher smashed a half-volley just over from the edge of the area before Meslier twice saved with his legs from a pair of Zaha strikes. —AFP

Chiellini to say 'ciao' to Italy after Finalissima

MILAN: Giorgio Chiellini will bring down the curtain on his international career this summer after Italy face Argentina in the so-called 'Finalissima' at Wembley, the site of his greatest career triumph. The 37-year-old was one of the key figures of the Azzurri's Euro 2020 victory, captaining his country to a dramatic win over England at the iconic stadium where he will lead out his countrymen on June 1.

The Finalissima is a new match which pits the European and South American champions against each other in a one-off encounter. "I'll say goodbye to the national team at Wembley, where I reached the highest point of my career by winning the Euro," he told DAZN after Juventus' 2-1 Serie A win at Sassuolo on Monday night. "I'd like to say goodbye to the Azzurri with a nice memory. It will definitely be my last game for Italy."

Chiellini, who has been capped 116 times, was hoping to take part in one more World Cup before saying 'ciao' to fans, but Italy missed out on the 2022 tournament in Qatar, hastening the centre-back's departure from the international game. He has had a mixed Italy career, reaching the Euro 2012 final - where Italy were outclassed by Spain losing 4-0 - but had a difficult time at World Cup finals.

Italy exited in the group stage both in 2010 - when they were the defending champions - and 2014 before slumping to a historic play-off defeat to Sweden in 2017 which cost them a place in the 2018 tournament. Chiellini also suffered the ignominy of being bitten by Luis Suarez as Italy exited behind Uruguay and Costa Rica in 2014. Roberto Mancini's side have to wait until at least 2026 to take part in football's global showpiece after being knocked out of the 2022 edition in Qatar by North Macedonia, again in the play-offs, last month. —AFP

Late Kean strike gives Juventus important win

ROME: Moise Kean's late goal gave Juventus a hard-fought 2-1 win at Sassuolo in Serie A on Monday, allowing them to close the gap on third-placed Napoli to one point. Sassuolo had done more than enough to claim a share of the points when Kean struck two minutes from fulltime. A long ball out of defence from Leonardo Bonucci ended with Kean, a 67th minute substitute for Alvaro Morata, turning Vlad Chiriches and firing the ball between goalkeeper Andrea Consigli's legs at the near post.

The last-gasp win keeps Juve in fourth place, eight points adrift of leaders AC Milan but, perhaps more significantly, eight points clear of Roma, who are chas-

ing them for the final Champions League spot. It was a frustrating loss for Sassuolo who were the better team for most of the game, posing problems from the outset when Davide Frattesi's header at the near post from a Domenico Berardi corner kissed the crossbar on its way over.

Gianluca Scamacca was also sharp, forcing Juventus keeper Wojciech Szczesny into a fine save. Juve's first real attack almost brought reward when Paulo Dybala thought he had found the net, only for Frattesi to block at the last moment. Sassuolo broke the deadlock for a deserved lead in the 39th minute. Morata lost possession in midfield and Berardi produced a delightful backheel to send Giacomo Raspadori clear.

Raspadori's powerful shot gave Szczesny no chance, but Juve were level on the stroke of half-time. Dybala made light of an awkward angle to thrash the ball into the roof of the net despite Sassuolo's claims that Morata fouled Giorgos Kyriakopoulos in the build-up. That set the stage for Kean's last-gasp heroics as Juve consolidated their place in the top four. —AFP



REGGIO EMILIA, Italy: Juventus' Italian defender Leonardo Bonucci fights for the ball with Sassuolo's Italian forward Gianluca Scamacca during their Italian Serie A match between at the Citta del Tricolore stadium on April 25, 2022. —AFP

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, Ralston Gaynor Mendes, resident of India, have changed my son's name from Michael Mendes to Michael Jay Mendes vide Gazette no. 1561, dated 21/11/2021. (C 1445) 27-4-2022

I, Nalakat Anwar , S/o Mohamed Nalakat, Parasseri, P.O. B.P. Angadi, Malappuram District, Kerala. (Indian Passport No. 52388731) have changed my name and address: Nalakat Anwar, S/o Mohammed, Nalakat House, Parasseri, P.O. B.P. Angadi, Talakkad, Malappuram District, Kerala - 676102 (C 1444)

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NEW YORK: Andre Drummond #40 of the Brooklyn Nets and Al Horford #42 of the Boston Celtics battle for the opening tipoff to start Game Four of the Eastern Conference First Round Playoffs against the Boston Celtics at Barclays Center on April 25, 2022. — AFP

Celtics sweep Nets as Raptors, Mavs romp

NEW YORK: Jayson Tatum scored 29 points as the Boston Celtics completed a 4-0 series sweep to eliminate the Brooklyn Nets from the NBA playoffs on Monday. Kevin Durant delivered a towering 39-point display for the Nets, but it was not enough to stop the powerful Celtics' line-up from sealing a 116-112 victory at Brooklyn's Barclays Center.

Boston's balanced offense and battle-hardened defense once again proved too much for Brooklyn, who trailed from start to finish as a late rally from the home side came up just short. "We knew who we were facing, we knew how talented they were, and we knew it was going to be a dogfight," said Tatum, who endured a nervous final two minutes after fouling out as the Nets chipped away at the Celtics lead.

"It was 4-0 but each game was back and forth and tough. We just believed in ourselves. We took it one game at a time and didn't get too far ahead of ourselves," Tatum added. Tatum was one of five Celtics players in double figures, with Jaylen Brown also coming up big with 22 points and point guard Marcus Smart adding 20 points with 11

assists. Grant Williams delivered four three-pointers off the bench in a 14-point haul while Al Horford added 13.

Second seeds Boston will now face either the defending NBA champions Milwaukee or Chicago in the Eastern Conference semifinals. The Celtics' clean sweep of Brooklyn - tipped as championship contenders before the season - is all the more remarkable given Boston's indifferent early season form. As recently as February, Boston were languishing in ninth place in the Eastern Conference, well outside the automatic playoff places.

"It took us a minute, but when we got our full team, we were right there," Tatum said. "We stayed composed, we stayed together, we didn't lose sight of what we were trying to accomplish and we haven't looked back since." The Nets will go back to the drawing board after a season that promised so much ended in a first-round exit from the playoffs.

While Durant delivered his best performance of the postseason, Kyrie Irving was restricted to 20 points and just five assists while Seth Curry added 23 points. "Give credit to the Celtics, they're an

incredible team. They've got a chance to do incredible things in the rest of the playoffs," Durant said afterwards. "There's a lot of stuff that may factor in to why we lose, but they were just a better team."

Raptors, Mavs romp

In other playoff action, Toronto stunned the Philadelphia 76ers to keep their series alive while Dallas thrashed Utah to take a 3-2 lead. Toronto dropped the first three games of their series with the Sixers but are now just one win from tying it up and forcing a game seven after Monday's 103-88 victory. Sixers talisman Joel Embiid clearly looked to be struggling with the thumb injury that has been diagnosed as a ligament tear.

Embiid once again failed to impose himself, finishing with 20 points, well below his season average of more than 30 points per game. Sixers star James Harden was also kept quiet with just 15 points while Tyrese Maxey finished with 12 points.

Instead it was Toronto who dominated, jumping into an early first-quarter lead which they never

relinquished during a composed performance. Pascal Siakam led the Toronto scoring with 23 points while O.G. Anunoby and Gary Trent Jr. both had 16 points apiece. Toronto will now be brimming with confidence as they head into game six in Canada on Thursday.

No team has ever come back from a 3-0 deficit in an NBA playoff series. Toronto head coach Nick Nurse played down suggestions that momentum was now with his team. "I mean, maybe, but it doesn't really matter," Nurse said. "The ball goes up on Thursday, everybody's got to fight like heck."

In Dallas, Luka Doncic put on a shooting clinic with 33 points as the Mavericks thrashed Utah 102-77 to take a 3-2 lead in their series. The Mavericks led from start to finish against an overwhelmed Jazz, leading by as much as 33 points at one stage in the second half before completing a blowout win. Doncic hauled in 13 rebounds and five assists with support from Jalen Brunson (24 points) and Dorian Finney-Smith (13 points). Jordan Clarkson led the Utah scoring with 20 points off the bench. — AFP

Independent regulator to oversee football in England

LONDON: The British government on Monday set out plans to radically reform the governance of football, pledging to establish an independent regulator to deliver financial sustainability across the game. Ministers have given their formal support to 10 key recommendations set out in a fan-led review launched after last year's failed European Super League project.

The most eye-catching move is the planned introduction of a regulator with statutory powers to sanction clubs as part of its remit to tackle the most pressing issues affecting the game in England. Other recommendations include a new owners' and directors' test to ensure "only good custodians and qualified directors" can run clubs, and greater consultation with fans via shadow boards.

The government said there was a widespread culture of clubs operating unsustainable financial practices, placing the pursuit of success over sound financial management. The Premier League has been warned it must move swiftly to redistribute cash or risk a transfer levy and other tougher terms being imposed on it.

Sports minister Nigel Huddleston said: "The message to the Premier League is quite clear - they need to act sooner rather than later because, other-



LONDON: Chelsea's French-born Senegalese goalkeeper Edouard Mendy jumps to gather the ball from a deflected shot during an English Premier League match between Chelsea and West Ham United at Stamford Bridge on April 24, 2022. — AFP

wise, (a settlement) will be forced on them through the regulator." One of the most controversial recommendations of the fan-led review, led by former sports minister Tracey Crouch, was a transfer levy on English top-flight clubs. Huddleston said such a solution was "potentially in the mix depending upon what the Premier League and others come up with".

The Premier League is currently committed to providing £1.6 billion (\$2 billion) in funding to clubs

outside the top-flight over the next three seasons. Chief executive Richard Masters has previously said it would be "a disaster" if the request from the English Football League, which runs the second, third and fourth tiers of the game, for a 25 percent cut of broadcast revenues were met. The Premier League said in a statement on Monday that it accepted the need for reform but that a "statutory-backed regulator" was not necessary. — AFP

Whyte slams champ Fury's 'dirty' tactics

LONDON: Dillian Whyte has accused Tyson Fury of "dirty" tactics during the WBC heavyweight champion's victory at Wembley on Saturday. Fury retained his world title with a sixth round stoppage against Whyte, the British star ending the bout with a devastating upper cut. However, Whyte believes the referee should have penalized Fury for shoving him before his head thumped against the canvas.

"I was buzzed but obviously I was trying to regather my senses and he proper pushed me and I fell over and hit my head on the canvas, which is ille-

gal," Whyte told Sky Sports on Monday. "This isn't wrestling, this is boxing. I should have been allowed extra time to recover and then carried on fighting. I got caught, no doubt about it. I got caught by a good shot. I was hurt, I was trying to get my senses together and he full on, two-handed pushed me. It wasn't like a one-armed thing. I should have had time to recover, time to go back to my corner, but Tyson Fury gets away with a lot of things."

Whyte claimed Fury headbutted him after he sustained a gash over his right eye, the first time the Briton had sustained a cut in 31 professional fights. "He kept on leaning down to the side and putting the head in and stuff like that," he said. "He leans down and he put the head in, he clashed with me and I got the cut and obviously the ref started telling me off."

"The fight spiraled a bit, until he started punching me in the back of the head. I started doing it to him and then his corner started throwing water and



Dillian Whyte

stuff like that, which was a bit crazy. I kept on getting all the blame. He was the one that was holding, he was the one that was headbutting and being dirty in the fight." — AFP

Footballers recruited for dementia study

LONDON: Researchers are seeking to recruit 120 former professional footballers to help with a new study to investigate how to reduce the risk of dementia. The BrainHOPE study will be led by consultant neuropathologist Willie Stewart, whose previous research showed ex-professionals were 3.5 times more likely to die from neurodegenerative diseases than the general population.

The new project, jointly funded by the Football Association and world governing body FIFA, will use a range of tests to compare brain health in former footballers between the ages of 40 and 59 with the general population, and explore whether there are ways to reduce the risk.

"This is an incredibly important study, and we are grateful to the FA and FIFA for their support to allow it to proceed," said Stewart, an honorary professor at the University of Glasgow. "Our findings from the Field study show there is reason to worry about lifelong brain health in former footballers. BrainHOPE is designed to identify tests that might detect problems early on and, more importantly, possible ways to try and reduce dementia risk for former footballers."

Several members of the 1966 England World Cup-winning squad, including Jack Charlton and Nobby Stiles, were suffering from dementia at the time of their deaths. In 2002, an inquest recorded a verdict of death by industrial disease in the case of former West Brom striker Jeff Astle caused by repeated heading of the ball. Stewart carried out a new examination on Astle's brain in 2014 which concluded that the 59-year-old had died from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

English football chiefs last year introduced guidance saying that footballers should engage in a maximum of 10 "higher force" headers during training in any one week. Charlotte Cowie, head of performance medicine at the FA, said: "The launch of the BrainHOPE study is another important step in building our understanding of the long-term health of former professional footballers. "Forming part of the wider Prevent Dementia study, this research will help us further understand the links between the game and neurodegenerative diseases and also potential early interventions which could help reduce risk or speed of developing dementia." — AFP