



**2** MOI inspects security posts at mosques



**8** Boursa Kuwait records 60.67% jump in profit



**16** Liverpool closing in on Champions League final



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	03:43
Shurooq	05:05
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:22
Isha	19:46

VOLVO

# Cash-strapped Lebanon runs out of passports

## Lebanon undergoing massive population exodus



BEIRUT: Lebanese protesters rally against the draft law on capital control, outside the parliament building in downtown Beirut. — AFP

BEIRUT: The agency in charge of issuing passports in Lebanon said Thursday it has stopped taking appointments for renewals because of a rush that has depleted stocks of new passports. Since 2020, requests for passport renewals have been ten times higher than in previous years, which has piled pressure on passport centers and "affected available passport stocks," General Security said in a statement.

Grappling with its worst-ever financial crisis, Lebanon has undergone a massive population exodus that is only worsening as politicians fail to chart a path towards recovery. Lebanese authorities have yet to pay for more passports to be produced "at a time when the available amount of passports has started to run out," the agency added. "Accordingly, General Security was forced to stop work on the passport appointment platform as of 27 April," it said, clarifying that those with pre-existing appointments are still eligible for new travel documents.

The suspension will last until funds are paid to the company contracted to issue new passports, it said, meaning those without existing appointments are left with no idea as to when they might get a new passport. Even those able to gain appointments have often had to wait months. According to an Arab Barometer survey published this month,

around half of Lebanon's population is looking to exit the country.

Lebanon is grappling with an education "emergency," a United Nations official said, as years of economic collapse weigh heavily on students and teachers. "We are now in an emergency situation. Education in Lebanon is in crisis because the country is living in crisis," Maysoun Chehab of the UN education and culture body (UNESCO) told AFP.

She spoke on the sidelines of an event Monday celebrating the completion of a \$35-million UNESCO project to rehabilitate 280 education centers damaged by a 2020 blast. The explosion caused by haphazardly stored fertilizer at Beirut port killed more than 200 people, destroyed swathes of the capital and disrupted the education of at least 85,000 youths.

UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay visited Beirut weeks later, driving efforts to restore heritage sites and damaged schools. Students and teachers now have brand new classrooms but they are still suffering from the twin effects of an unprecedented economic crisis in Lebanon and the coronavirus pandemic. Since late 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost over 90 percent of its value, pushing most of the population into poverty.

Continued on Page 6

Ramadan Kareem

## Power of positive thinking in Islam

By Atiyab Al-Melhem

In the tough times we are currently living in, it is very easy to get swept away by the wave of stressful news and negativity. A pandemic affects us physically and psychologically as well. However, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged us to be optimistic and hopeful.

And perhaps during this challenging time, I have realized the importance of it, not only for the individual, but for the society as a whole. Just as stressful news and negativity is draining, positivity and optimism is contagious. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged us to spread happiness wherever we go, and to spread optimism because it affects individuals and society as a whole.

Sometimes it is difficult to avoid all the negative and stressful news these days, from social media, peers, television, etc. News is everywhere. I have tried to delete social media and isolate myself from the world for a few days. Undoubtedly, doing this has huge benefits, but the negativity will come up sooner or later. It is the understanding of depending on and surrendering to Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) that creates the difference.

In stressful times, this verse is very comforting: "Say, 'Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us. He is our protector' and in Allah let the believers put their trust" (Surah Al-Tawba Verse 51). It is during the pandemic I realized that an individual plays a big role in either spreading calmness or spreading fear. One post could be reposted and viewed by many, impacting the society as a whole with just one click of a button.

In the beginning, I tried letting people know that I have no interest in hearing the news or anything that creates panic. But then I realized I cannot change people nor control what they say or post. So, I make sure to only post positive and optimistic posts whenever possible.

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KUWAIT: Muslim men pray at a mosque in Kuwait City just before daybreak, during Laylat Al-Qadr or Night of Destiny, during the holy month of Ramadan on early on April 28, 2022. Laylat Al-Qadr, marks the night Muslims believe the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) through the archangel Gabriel. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Faithful throng mosques on night of 27th Ramadan

By Shakir Reshamwala

KUWAIT: Thousands of worshippers thronged mosques across Kuwait early Thursday to spend the night of the 27th of Ramadan in prayer and supplication, praying freely after two years of restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. But the Grand Mosque, the epicenter of qiyam ul-layl or special nightly

prayers, remained shut this year too. As on other nights of the last 10 days of Ramadan, eight rakaats of tahajjud were performed in most mosques, followed by three rakaats of witr.

Many believe 'Laylatul Qadr' (Night of Power or Decree) falls on night of the 27th of Ramadan, but this is not a confirmed fact, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructed Muslims to hunt for this night on the odd-numbered nights of the last ten days of Ramadan. Qiyam ul-layl prayers are therefore held during these nights at mosques all over Kuwait.

Laylatul Qadr holds great significance for Muslims, and the last ten nights of Ramadan are spent in prayer and meditation. Ubaadah bin Saamit (RA) reports that he asked the Prophet (PBUH) about Laylatul Qadr.

Continued on Page 6

## Iran executions rise 25 percent

PARIS: Executions in Iran rose by 25 percent in 2021, a report by two leading NGOs said Thursday, expressing alarm over a surge in the numbers executed for drug offences and also the hanging of at least 17 women. The rate of executions in Iran also accelerated after the June election of hardline for-

mer judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi to the presidency, said the report by Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) and France's Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM).

The report urged world powers negotiating with Iran on reviving the deal on its nuclear program to put use of capital punishment in the Islamic republic - which executes more people annually than any nation other than China - at the centre of the talks. At least 333 people were executed in 2021, a 25-percent increase compared to 267 in 2020, said the

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Op-Ed

## EU proposal for visa-free travel

By Dr Cristian Tudor



On 27 April, the European Commission proposed to lift visa requirements for nationals of Kuwait and Qatar. Under the proposal, Kuwaitis and Qataris holding biometric passports would no longer need a visa when travelling to the EU for short stays of up to 90 days in any 180-day period for business, tourism or family purposes.

After an assessment of the criteria set in the EU rules on visa requirements, the Commission concluded that Qatar and Kuwait present low irregular migration risks and are increasing cooperation on security issues with the EU. They issue biometric passports, which is a precondition for visa-free travel to the EU, and have undertaken reforms in the area of human rights. Kuwait and Qatar are also important economic partners for the European Union, in particular in the area of energy.

European Union Ambassador to Kuwait and Qatar HE Dr Cristian Tudor said: "I congratulate Kuwait and Qatar for this important achievement. Both countries have proven to be key partners for the European Union. A few days before the official announcement by the European Commission, we noticed misleading information circulating on social media indicating that Kuwaiti and Qatari nationals no longer require visa to travel to the Schengen area."

It is important to note that while this proposal is a major recognition of our strong partnership with Kuwait and Qatar, it is nevertheless only a first step in a multi-phased legislative process that will result eventually in a visa-free travel agreement. Until we reach that final milestone, Kuwaitis and Qataris still need to apply for visa for traveling to the Schengen area."

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## Local

# Kuwait Heritage Library tells story of country's rich history

## Biggest personal library in Kuwait with over 120,000 books

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Many people are still interested in history and heritage, including old books. At the quaint Youm Al-Bahaar village on the seaside, visitors can find the Kuwait Heritage Library that was launched in 2008. The books here are for both reading and sale.

The owner of the library, Saleh Al-Misbah, is also the owner of the biggest personal library in Kuwait, with over 120,000 books. Misbah is a researcher in Kuwait history and collector of rare publications including books, magazines, newspapers and videocassettes. He is an author and co-author of several books, a consultant at Al-Fanar Kuwait Center for Documenting Humanitarian Work, and was a board member of different societies and associations and editor-in-chief of Al-Bayan magazine.

"I have over 50,000 books at home. I have also rented a storage place, where I have over 60,000 books. I also have 120 cartons of magazines and videocassettes. This is my passion," he told Kuwait Times. "This hobby started in 1975 when I was a student in secondary school, after I visited the Islamic Books Exhibition. In the same year, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters held the Arabic Book Fair, which has been held annually since that year. After I graduated from college in 1981, I started collecting literature works, as this was my field of study. Later, I graduated from the

College of Education at Kuwait University, and started collecting poetry books," Misbah said.

### Inspiration

In 1984, he got inspired for a totally new collection. "I read an interview about a British man who was a collector of first-issue English magazines. This inspired me to start collecting the first issue of Arabic magazines. I started collecting magazines of different colleges of Kuwait University. Then I went to the newspaper area in Shuwaikh seeking the first issue of newspapers and magazines, but unfortunately most of them didn't have it," he pointed out.

"This was my biggest challenge - to find the first issue of all the magazines and newspapers. The first Kuwaiti magazine 'Al Kuwait' was published in 1928, and I received this issue as a gift. After I read this magazine, I found there is a book with the same information written by Abdulaziz Al-Rsheid, who travelled to various countries," added Misbah.

Misbah is specialized in Kuwait and Arabian Gulf publications. "I was only collecting rare books, but many other collectors do that. So, I started collecting the first issue of the magazines and newspapers. If I find a rare copy of a book or magazine, I will buy more than one, to have a reserve copy for exchanging with other collectors. Now I have over 6,000 first copies of mag-

azines from around the world," he told Kuwait Times.

Misbah mainly focuses on Kuwaiti publications in both Arabic and English, then Arabic-only publications. He is also interested in international publications written by Kuwaitis. "Sometimes I buy many books in a compendium, then only choose one or two books out of it. Some books I sell or donate to countries in Africa. I also give away some books as gifts. People also always bring me books as gifts," he added.

### Exhibition

In 1989, Misbah participated in an exhibition for the first time. "This was the 'Teachers' Hobbies Exhibition', as I was a teacher at that time. They interviewed me on radio, and from that point, people started knowing me, as my hobby was something new. This encouraged me to continue collecting. People start calling to sell, give or exchange books with me. Sometimes I buy cartons of books from individuals who collect books discarded from some ministries," said Misbah.

The value of his books ranges from KD 1 up to KD 2,000. "For instance, the value of 'Kuwait History' by author Abdulaziz Al-Rsheid in two parts is KD 2,000. As I had a huge quantity of books, I decided to launch this library to relieve pressure on my house. I allow people to read the books or buy them. I also have an account on Instagram for the



KUWAIT: Saleh Al-Misbah poses with some of his books in the Kuwait Heritage Library. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

library: @kuwait\_heritage\_library. My daughter also has a different account on Instagram: @Bookgardenkw."

Misbah gets his books from different sources including local auctions held in diwanis and online from various international websites. His library is specially categorized in a way not seen in other libraries. His personal account on Twitter and Instagram is: @Saleh\_Misbah. The Heritage Library is open daily from 5:00

pm to 10:00 pm.

Another heritage library - Abdulaziz Al-Sanad - is located in Kaifan and opened in 2021. It includes books on Kuwait and Gulf countries. But the books are only for reading and not for sale. It opens daily from 12 pm to 4:30 pm. The third heritage library is at the Kuwait Heritage Society, which includes rare Kuwaiti publications, also for display and reading only. It opened in 2017. It is open every Tuesday from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm.

## Palestine's envoy congratulates Kuwait on Eid

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub released the following statement on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr: "I am honored on behalf of the Palestinian community in Kuwait and myself to convey congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown



Rami Tahboub

Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr, may Allah bring it back with more blessings and security for all, and more prosperity for our beloved Kuwait under the leadership of HHI the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and HHI the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah."



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah tours a security post at a mosque on Wednesday. — KUNA

## Kuwait MoI inspects security posts at worship places

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah made an inspection tour of

the security posts deployed at mosques on Wednesday. He was accompanied by Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas, Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic Affairs and Operations Maj Gen Jamal Al-Saygh and Assistant Undersecretary for Public Security Affairs Maj Gen Farraj Al-Zo'abi as well as other senior security officers, according to a statement by the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media. — KUNA

## India's envoy congratulates Kuwait on Eid

KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George released the following statement on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr: "On the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, on behalf of the Indian community in Kuwait, I extend my greetings to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh



Sibi George

Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait and to the government and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait. I extend my warm greetings to all my Indian brothers and sisters in Kuwait. "Eid Al-Fitr is a special occasion as we reaffirm our resolve to abide by the universal values of peace, prosperity, compassion, commitment to the welfare of society, spirit of sacrifice and universal brotherhood. It is a festival to work together for unity and fraternity in an inclusive society. This occasion is also an important reminder for all of us that no matter who you are, we are all equal in humanity. I pray that this festival strengthens our belief in charity, our faith in fraternity and our commitment in compassion.

"Eid Al-Fitr is a special festival in India, a land with abundant diversity of religions and beliefs, with more than 1.3 billion people from different socio-cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds living in complete harmony. India, which has the second largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia, celebrates this occasion with great fervor and enthusiasm. In complete consonance with India's age-old beliefs and values, people from different religions and faiths come together on this special day to celebrate this occasion.

Here in Kuwait, this Eid is indeed a special occasion as it comes after the difficult period of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. I am happy to partake in the Ramadan-related unique traditions of Kuwait and also celebrations of Eid with the warm and generous people of the State of Kuwait. Once again, Eid Mubarak to all Indian nationals and friends of India in Kuwait. May you all be safe and stay blessed."

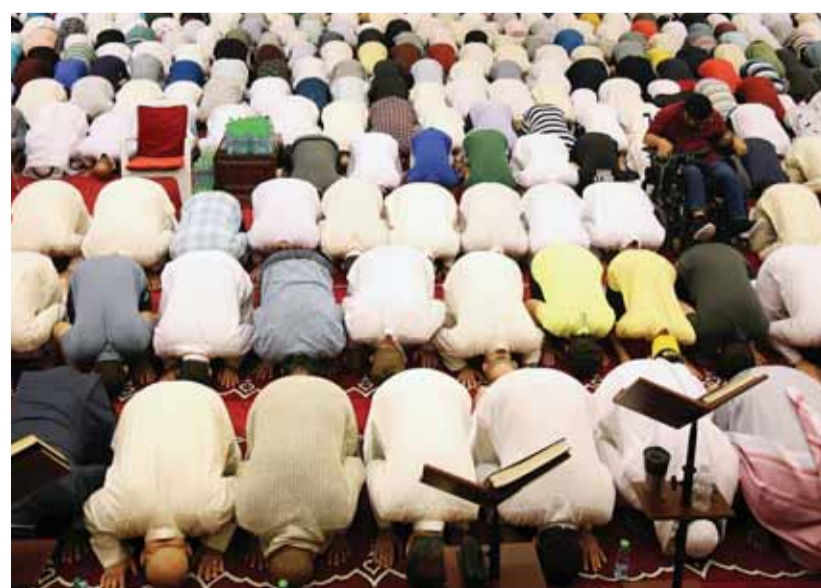
## Bangladesh's envoy congratulates Kuwait on Eid

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Bangladesh Md Ashikuzzaman released the following message on the occasion of the advent of Eid Al-Fitr: "On behalf of the Bangladesh community and my own behalf, let me have the honor and privilege to extend our heartfelt Eid greetings to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah,



Md Ashikuzzaman

the Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government and brotherly people of the State of Kuwait on the holy occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. I wish and pray that His Highness be blessed with continued good health and peace. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the friendly and welcoming residents of the State of Kuwait and its further prosperity, good fortune, peace and happiness under His Highness's leadership and for the solidity and stability for the State of Kuwait. I look forward to continually working with the government of the State of Kuwait to carry forward the traditional friendships and relationships that exists between Bangladesh and the State of Kuwait. I am extremely happy to see that after almost two years we are able to celebrate the festival of Eid Al-Fitr in Corona free situation. We pray to Almighty Allah for His continuous blessings and mercy upon all of us. May this joyous Eid Al-Fitr bring peace, happiness and prosperity to all of us."



KUWAIT: Muslims pray at a mosque in Kuwait just before daybreak, during Laylat Al-Qadr or Night of Destiny, during the holy month of Ramadan on early on April 28, 2022. Laylat Al-Qadr marks the night Muslims believe the first verses of the Holy Quran were revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) through the archangel Gabriel. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Local

# Ticket prices soar ahead of restriction-free Eid holiday

## Istanbul, Cairo, Dubai and London among top destinations

By Ali Ghanim and Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Aviation demand is bouncing back to pre-pandemic levels, with prices of tickets soaring ahead of the Eid holidays. Also, arriving passengers are not required to present a PCR test result or vaccination certificate, and unvaccinated people can freely enter the country. Countries such as Turkey, United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates are the top destinations during Eid, in addition to some Asian and Arab countries.

Kuwait Times spoke with several travel and tourism agents to learn more about the most in-demand destinations among citizens and expats during the Eid holidays. Travel agent Ghassan Saleem said Istanbul, Cairo, Dubai and London are the top destinations for travelers this Eid, adding ticket prices have increased compared to last week by up to 40 to 50 percent. Saleem said airfares to these destinations have increased, where return tickets to Turkey have reached KD 350, Cairo KD 300 and Dubai KD 200, while tickets to London cost KD 500 to 550 in economy class and KD 1,600 for business class.

Another agent Lee Nueva told Kuwait Times the top destinations during the Eid holidays are India, Philippines and Bangladesh. Nueva revealed that citizens and expats have made bookings for the top des-

tinations to spend the holiday with their families after being in lockdown during the pandemic. She said prices of tickets have been rising, where tickets to Manila have reached up to KD 300.

Turkey is one of the most attractive destinations for people in Kuwait, said Michael, who works at a travel and tourism office. "Bodrum and Istanbul are the top cities booked by travelers for Eid. Flights to Dubai are increasing day by day, as prices jumped from KD 80 to KD 140 this week. A big exodus to Turkey is expected for the next two weeks, as travelers from different backgrounds are going to spend Eid Al-Fitr holiday outside Kuwait," he added.

Alaam Al-Khaiat, a salesman at a travel agency, said the number of tickets offered by airlines does not meet the demand of travelers. "One of the most in-demand destinations is London, with direct flights now fully booked for Eid, while demand for other destinations increased by 60 percent," he said. He said Istanbul, Dubai and London are the top destinations for Eid, pointing out that the cost of a ticket to Istanbul has now risen to more than KD 350, while airfares to Dubai range from KD 180 to KD 200.

Meanwhile, travel agent Shadi Ibrahim revealed travel by citizens to Turkey has exceeded 200 percent. He indicated there is also great demand for travel to destinations such as Tbilisi, Baku, London,



**KUWAIT:** This July 15, 2021 file photo shows travelers lined up to board their flights while adhering to COVID-19 restrictions at Kuwait International Airport. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Dubai, Cairo and others. Ibrahim noted that prices are cheaper and flexible on days after Eid, but prices are double during the holidays, ranging between KD 250 and 400.

Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced the movement of passengers to

and from Kuwait International Airport is expected to reach 352,140 passengers during the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, with 207,760 departing and 144,380 arriving. DGCA noted that up to 2,800 flights will be operated during the period from April 28 to May 7, with 76 additional flights on Eid.

## US removes Kuwait from intellectual property watch list

**KUWAIT:** The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has announced its decision not to list Kuwait in the 2022 Special 301 Report as a result of its continued and significant progress on concerns that stakeholders identified with intellectual property (IP) enforcement and transparency.

Kuwait is removed from the Watch List this year due to its increased enforcement against the sale of counterfeit goods and the establishment of online portals at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Copyright Office for respectively streamlining the submission of trademark and copyright violation reports. Kuwait also increased engagement and transparency through meetings of the United States-

Kuwait Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Intellectual Property Working Group.

"This is a big steppingstone in expanding US business opportunities in Kuwait," said Charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy in Kuwait Jim Holtsnider. "Intellectual property rights incentivize creators, like engineers, artists, and designers, to develop new products and technologies for the market. The strong application of IP laws assures investors that their innovations are sufficiently protected. Kuwait's removal from the Watch List of the Special 301 Report is a major step towards attracting foreign direct investment."

The Special 301 Report is an annual report released by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) on the adequacy and effectiveness of US trading partners' protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights. The report details USTR's findings on international trading partners after significant research and enhanced engagement with stakeholders.

## Visa-free entry to Korea for Kuwaitis starting May 1

**KUWAIT:** The government of the Republic of Korea has announced that it will resume visa-free entry for Kuwait nationals. Starting May 1, 2022, Kuwaiti nationals will be able to visit the Republic of Korea by applying for K-ETA (Korea Electric Travel Authorization), a travel permission granted to foreign nationals intending to enter the Republic of Korea without a visa.

Kuwaiti citizens intending to enter the Republic of Korea without a visa are required to apply for the K-ETA by providing personal and travel-related information through the K-ETA homepage website or the mobile app at least 72 hours before boarding the flight.

- Website URL: [www.k-eta.go.kr](http://www.k-eta.go.kr)
- Mobile App: [m.k-eta.go.kr](https://m.k-eta.go.kr)

Through the application of the K-ETA, Kuwaiti nationals can visit the Republic of Korea without a visa for duration of up to 90 days if the purpose of the trip is for tourism, treatment, business meeting, attendance at a conference, or visiting families or relatives.

The K-ETA will be valid for up to two years from the date of obtainment and available for multiple trips during their period of validity as long as the uploaded personal information are not changed. Additionally, travelers with the K-ETA will be exempt from submitting arrival cards enabling them to go through entry immigration swiftly. Applicants can receive the results by e-mail within 72 hours after completing the applications. We believed that the newly introduced system will further promote personal exchanges between the Republic of Korea and the State of Kuwait.



**KUWAIT:** Awarding the participants.

## Zain awards participants of Shaheed Ramadan Challenge

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, concluded its main sponsorship of Shaheed Ramadan Challenge in partnership with Suffix Sports Management. The unique sports initiative aimed at encouraging people of all ages to take on a healthy and active lifestyle during Ramadan, continuing throughout the holy month at Al-Shaheed Park - first phase.

Zain's support to this unique initiative came in line with its corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy towards sports and health sectors. Zain regularly intensifies its efforts to encourage the community to adopt a healthier and more active lifestyle throughout the year, and especially during the holy month of Ramadan. The company partners with public and private sector institutions in order to contribute to elevating the local health and sports scenes.

Shaheed Ramadan Challenge continued throughout Ramadan, offering the community a great opportunity to participate by speed-walking or running at Shaheed Park at their own time and pace. Participants signed up on the website and headed on to Shaheed Park to collect their smart chips from



**Zain recognized for supporting the initiative.**

a specially installed machine at the park. The smart chip tracked and registered each participant's steps, distance, and progress, allowing everyone to compete and collect the biggest number of points.

Shaheed Ramadan Challenge also featured many unique sports activities and programs throughout the holy month, including a treasure hunt, intense exercises in collaboration with local fitness clubs, exercises for children, Zain girgiana celebration, and much more. The initiative mainly aimed at shedding light on the importance of keeping fit and adopting a healthy and active lifestyle during fasting.

Zain is always keen on supporting the various sports programs and competitions with the aim of elevating the Kuwaiti sports scene. The company strongly believes in the vital role played by the private sector in progressing sports and youth initiatives, and it makes this belief a reality by shouldering similar events.

distributed to needy families in Kuwait approved by KRCS, in order to help them. The recipients will buy clothes from shops designated to cover the needs of children, orphans and the elderly, he added. KRCS will not stop helping the poor and will provide health, relief along with educational support for them, as KRCS has been distributing humanitarian aid to needy families throughout the year, with the distribution of vouchers as part of the help provided by the association annually, he explained. KRCS allocated a volunteer team at its headquarters to serve deprived families to distribute vouchers, food baskets and health supplies, he stated, thanking the volunteers for their humanitarian role in community service. — KUNA

## KRCS distributes 1,070 vouchers for Eid

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced Thursday the distribution of 1,070 vouchers worth KD 50 per voucher to needy families on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. Director of KRCS' Public Relations and Media Department Khaled Al-Zaid said, on the sidelines of this event, that these vouchers were

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## Local

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## News in brief

## Kuwait, Iran Foreign Minister talk ties

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossien Amir-Abdollahian discussed over a phone call the bilateral ties between the two friendly countries. During the call, the two sides also touched on the latest regional and global developments.

## FM congratulates Pakistani counterpart

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah congratulated over a phone call Pakistan's newly appointed Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on the new post. During the call, both sides also touched on the bilateral ties between the two friendly countries and ways of boosting them in various fields, said the Kuwaiti foreign ministry Thursday.

## Kuwait condemns Karachi explosion

**KUWAIT:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed sincere condolences to the victims of the recent suicide bomb attack on the University of Karachi's Confucius Institute. Kuwait profoundly assures its stance against such hateful acts of violence and terrorism, urging the international community to bolster their efforts against such activities. The ministry's statement offered condolences to the state and people of Pakistan and China and wished a swift recovery for those injured.

## KSR distributes food in Palestine

**RAMALLAH:** The Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) has funded the distribution of food baskets to 94 Palestinian families in Qalqilyah city, the West Bank. The campaign, which targeted unfortunate families, was carried out in cooperation with a local society.

## Kuwait crude oil jumps to \$107.58 pb

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti crude oil price rose by \$3.39 to \$107.58 a barrel during Wednesday's trading session, compared with \$104.19 pb the previous day, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent crude went up by 33 cents to reach \$105.32 pb and West Texas Intermediate rose by 32 cents to \$102.02 pb.

## OPEC basket settle at \$105.33 pb

**VIENNA:** The price of the OPEC crudes went up by \$2.39 to settle at \$105.33 per barrel on Wednesday as opposed to \$102.94 pb Tuesday, said the international oil cartel on Thursday. According to the OPEC bulletin, the average oil price of the OPEC basket in 2021 was at \$69.89 per barrel. The OPEC Reference Basket of Crudes (ORB) is made up of the following: Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Meray (Venezuela).

## Kuwait Heritage



**KUWAIT:** A traditional coffee shop, which is considered an important part of Kuwait's history and served as the main forum for people. (Source: Photo album of the KOC in 1970s. Prepared by Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, heritage researcher at the Ministry of Information).

# Turkish market gateway for consumers seeking cheap prices

## Market offers cheap prices on near-expired goods

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** With the high cost of living along with food price hikes due to the Russian war on Ukraine and the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, Kuwaitis and expatriates head to buy foodstuff from Souq Turki (Turkish market) in Shuwaikh. After two years of the coronavirus pandemic, people are more careful about their spending.

Vendors told Kuwait Times that people in Kuwait try to minimize the impact of any price increases due to external factors by buying groceries, snacks, disposables and cleaning and personal care prod-



People try to minimize impact of price increases



**KUWAIT:** A view of the Turkish market in Shuwaikh. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ucts from the Turkish market because of the cheap prices as the goods are near expiry.

Mohammad Sobhy, who has been working at the market for six years, told Kuwait Times shops in the market have witnessed high demand lately, especially since prices went up in supermarkets. He added the market was crowded two weeks ago because of girgian, noting that many Kuwaitis and expats bought chocolate, sweets and nuts for their girgian events.

Vendor Abu Mohammad said many items are sold here for less than their original prices. "For example, this evaporated milk can is sold in the co-op for 450 fils, but here it is sold for 50 fils because

it's near expiry," he said. "Our prices are cheaper than co-ops and supermarkets. Low-income families are struggling, especially during Ramadan, due to the high prices of items. Here you can find a variety of cooking oils, spices, pasta, sugar and salt at very cheap prices," he explained.

Joyce, a customer who was buying a box of chocolate, said: "My friends and I come here to buy foodstuff, chips and chocolates that we send to the Philippines. Usually, we choose items with more than three months of validity. The prices here are cheaper than the offers in supermarkets. It is nice when you are traveling to your home country to take choco-

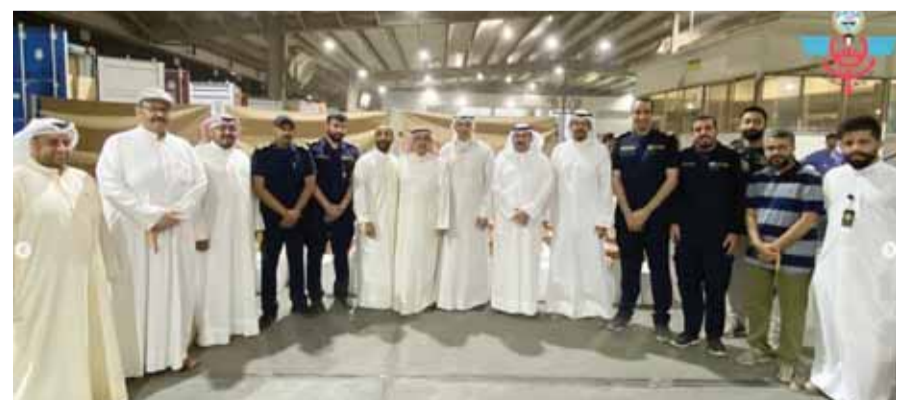
lates, and here you have plenty of choice."

Um Othman told Kuwait Times she is a regular at Souq Turki. She has her own small business, where she cooks and uses a lot of spices. "The spices here are sold in large quantities for a reasonable price. I also buy plastic cutlery for preparation," she said. Jalal Samer said he buys daily staples - instead of buying one item, he buys several at the same price. "A bottle of oil is sold here for half a dinar, while it costs at least KD 1.500 at cooperatives or other supermarkets. I buy items I know I can use right away. They are not expired yet and can be consumed immediately."

## Customs foil attempt to smuggle 14,720 liquor bottles into Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait customs foiled an attempt to smuggle 14,720 bottles of liquor into the country, a few days before the start of Eid Al-Fitr. Customs officers grew suspicious of a utensils container that arrived from a Gulf country. The container was searched carefully, and customs officers found nearly 1,240 cartons containing a total of 14,720 liquor bottles hidden inside, the Kuwait General Administration of Customs said in a statement.

Separately, a pickup truck driver died, and another person was injured in an accident reported on King Fahad Road. Firemen rushed to the scene in response to an accident between a pickup truck and a public transport bus. The bus passengers were evacuated while firemen used hydraulic equipment to free the driver's body and the injured passenger from the wrecked pickup truck.





Clashes in Sudan's West Darfur killed over 210: Governor

## Colombian soldiers confess murders to victims' families

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BORODIANKA, Ukraine: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (3R) walks during his visit in Borodianka, outside Kyiv, on April 28, 2022. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres arrived to the town of Borodianka outside Kyiv where Russian forces were accused of having killed civilians, an AFP journalist on the scene reported. —AFP

# UN chief condemns war in Ukraine

'UN is fully mobilised to help save Ukrainian lives, assist those in need'

**BUCHA, Ukraine:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday visited sites of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine, decrying war as "an absurdity in the 21st century" and urging Russia to cooperate with an international investigation into atrocities. Making his first visit to Ukraine since Russia launched a full-scale invasion on February 24, Guterres toured several towns and villages outside Kyiv where Russian forces are accused of killing civilians.

"I imagine my family in one of those houses that is now destroyed and black. I see my granddaughters running away in panic," the UN chief said in Borodianka, a ruined town north-east of the Ukrainian capital. "The war is an absurdity in the 21st century. The war is evil," he added. In neighbouring Bucha, where dozens of bodies in civilian clothes, some with their hands tied behind their backs, were discovered this month after a Russian withdrawal, Guterres backed an International Criminal Court investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine.

"I appeal to the Russian Federation to accept, to cooperate with the ICC," he implored the Kremlin. The UN head will later meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. On Tuesday, he met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, repeating calls for both Moscow and Kyiv to work together to

set up "safe and effective" humanitarian corridors in war-torn Ukraine.

A UN representative to Ukraine said Thursday she was preparing for a "hopeful" evacuation from the encircled port city in south-eastern Ukraine, where Kyiv says civilians and injured fighters are trapped. "The UN is fully mobilised to help save Ukrainian lives and to assist those in need," UN in Ukraine Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator Osnat Lubrani wrote on Twitter.

**'Difficult weeks'**  
With the war, now into a third month and claiming thousands of lives, Kyiv has admitted that Russian forces are making gains in the east, capturing a string of villages in the Donbas region. The first phase of Russia's invasion failed to reach Kyiv or overthrow Zelensky's government after encountering stiff Ukrainian resistance reinforced with Western weapons.

The campaign has since refocused on seizing the east and south of the country while increasingly using long-range missiles against west and central Ukraine. Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov conceded the country faces "extremely difficult weeks" as Moscow tries "to inflict as much pain as possible". Russia's defence ministry said Thursday its forces had destroyed two arms and ammunition depots in eastern and

southern Ukraine overnight with "high-precision missiles".

Its air force targeted 67 Ukrainian military sites while air defence systems destroyed a Ukrainian fighter jet in the Lugansk region, the ministry added. Russia has also in recent days targeted Western-supplied arms, as the United States and Europe increasingly heed Zelensky's call for heavier firepower. In a defiant speech Wednesday, Putin said if Western forces intervene in Ukraine and create "unacceptable threats", they will face a "lightning-fast" military response.

**'Threaten security'**  
"We have all the tools for this, that no one else can boast of having," he told lawmakers, implicitly referring to Moscow's ballistic missiles and nuclear arsenal. The Kremlin reiterated the warnings Thursday, calling Western arms deliveries dangerous for European security. "The tendency to pump weapons, including heavy weapons into Ukraine—these are the actions that threaten the security of the continent, provoke instability," spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Western allies remain wary of being drawn into war with Russia but have stepped up military support as Ukraine has maintained its fierce resistance. US President Joe Biden is set to deliver remarks Thursday on "support for

Ukrainians defending their country and their freedom against Russia's brutal war", the White House said.

In London late Wednesday, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss made a fresh call for arms deliveries to Ukraine, including heavy weapons, tanks and planes, while demanding "the whole of Ukraine" must be liberated. Responding to Putin's latest threats aimed at Kyiv's Western allies, UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace argued he was "rolling the pitch" for a major announcement to mark Russia's World War II "Victory Day" celebration on May 9. In its economic standoff with the West, Russia cut gas supplies to Bulgaria and Poland, both EU and NATO members, Wednesday.

Brussels warned it will not waver in its support for Kyiv, accusing the Kremlin of attempted "blackmail". Bulgarian and Poland are now receiving gas from EU neighbours, as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen vowed an "immediate, united and coordinated" response.

With the 27-member bloc, which has depended on gas from Russia, scrambling to diversify its energy sources, she declared: "The era of Russian fossil fuels in Europe will come to an end". European powers have imposed massive sanctions on Russia since Putin's invasion, while shipping weapons to Ukraine's defenders. —AFP

## Malaysian facing execution in Singapore wins reprieve

**SINGAPORE:** A Malaysian man set to be executed in Singapore for drug trafficking was granted a reprieve on Thursday, campaigners said, a day after the hanging of a mentally disabled man sparked an outcry. Datchinamurthy Kataiah was scheduled to be hanged on Friday after several years on death row in the city-state, which has some of the world's toughest anti-drugs laws.

But the 36-year-old won a bid to get the execution postponed because he has another case pending before the courts, activists said. That case, with other death row prisoners, relates to correspondence allegedly being copied and sent to authorities without their consent, anti-death penalty campaigner Kirsten Han said.

There are hearings related to the case taking place next month. "This is a great relief, but not the end. Stays of execution are only temporary," said Han. Datchinamurthy was arrested in 2011 for allegedly trying to traffic about 45 grams (1.6 ounces) of heroin into Singapore. On Wednesday a mentally disabled Malaysian, Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, who had been convicted of trafficking heroin into the city-state, was hanged.

His case sparked a storm of criticism, with the United Nations, European Union and British billionaire Richard Branson among those condemning it. Supporters say he had an IQ of 69, a level recognised as a disability, and was coerced into committing the crime. But authorities have defended pressing ahead with the execution.

The city-state's Central Narcotics Bureau said on Wednesday that Nagaenthran "knew what he was doing" and that the Singapore courts had found he did not have an intellectual disability. Singapore resumed executions last month after a hiatus of more than two years, and activists fear authorities are set to embark on a wave of hangings.

Singapore insists capital punishment is an effective deterrent against crime and credits it for helping keep the city-state one of Asia's safest places. The cases have sparked rare demonstrations in Singapore and on Monday, hundreds attended a protest against the hangings. —AFP

## Paris officer charged over fatal election night shooting

**PARIS:** A French policeman has been charged with involuntary manslaughter after shooting dead a driver who sought to evade police and a passenger in Paris Sunday, hours after Emmanuel Macron celebrated reelection nearby, a judicial source said.

The 24-year-old officer used his assault rifle to try to stop the car as it hurtled towards his colleagues on the picturesque Pont Neuf bridge, later claiming that he acted in self-defence. But he was immediately taken in for questioning by the police's internal investigations

agency, and prosecutors determined it was more likely that the officer had responded with excessive force.

Around a dozen rounds were fired, with "five or six shots hitting the occupants," according to a police report of the incident seen by AFP. The officer was presented before a judge who decided late Wednesday to charge him with involuntary manslaughter for the death of the driver, the legal source said.

Lesser charges of "wilful violence by a person in authority" were issued over the death of the front-seat passenger, and the injury of a person in the back seat. He was ordered to turn in his gun and prohibited from all police duties involving contact with the public.

The decision was slammed as "unacceptable" by the right-leaning Alliance police officers' union, which called for a demonstration to defend "the presumption of legitimate defence" in front of the historic Paris courthouse on Monday. The police report said the car was parked the wrong way with its haz-

ard lights flashing on the banks of the Seine, prompting the five-person foot patrol to investigate, according to the police report.

When confronted, the driver suddenly sped off towards one officer who managed to jump out of the way. The two occupants who were killed had extensive criminal records, including for drug charges. While police in France went unarmed while on routine patrols for years, authorities began issuing assault rifles after the mass jihadist terror killing in Paris on November 13, 2015, which were followed by a wave of other deadly Islamist attacks.

Security forces have been on high alert since the marathon trial for the November 2015 attacks, France's worst post-war atrocity, opened in September. The 20 defendants include Salah Abdeslam, the only surviving attacker, who after years of silence claimed in testimony this month that he had a last-minute change of heart and decided not to set off his explosive vest. —AFP

## Pakistan PM Sharif heads to Saudi for first foreign visit

**ISLAMABAD, Pakistan:** Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif begins his maiden foreign trip Thursday to Saudi Arabia, seeking financial support from a country where he spent years in exile.

The kingdom has long been an intelligence partner for Pakistan as well as a regular source of relief for its struggling economy. "Today I am embarking on a visit to Saudi Arabia to renew & reaffirm our bonds of brotherhood & friendship," Sharif said on Twitter Thursday, adding that the country "has a special place in all our hearts".

Sharif was sworn in earlier this month after parliament ousted his predecessor Imran Khan in a no-confidence

vote. He inherited crippling national debt, galloping inflation and a feeble rupee, but has vowed to use "Pakistan speed" to hurry along development projects and jumpstart an economic recovery.

His delegation was expected to include Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the 33-year-old scion of Pakistan's most influential political dynasty who was appointed foreign minister on Wednesday.

Talks are expected to focus "on advancing economic, trade and investment ties and creation of greater opportunities for the Pakistani workforce in Saudi Arabia", according to a statement from Pakistan's foreign ministry. Saudi Arabia hosts more than two million Pakistanis, the statement said.

### Family ties

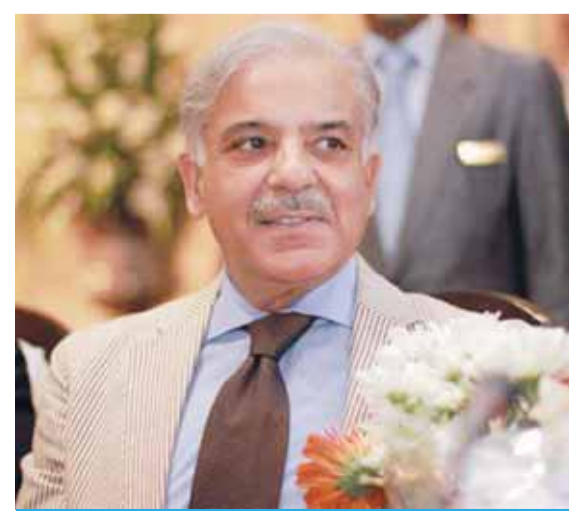
Sharif is the younger brother of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, and the family has close ties to Saudi royals. Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif, along with other relatives, went into exile in Saudi Arabia in 2000 after a coup ousted Nawaz the previous year.

They did not return to Pakistan until 2007. "The Sharif family have traditionally had very good relations with the kingdom and this visit serves (Shehbaz Sharif's) interest" in showing that to his domestic audience, said Saudi political analyst Ali Shihabi.

Yet those connections may have less value as power in Saudi Arabia consolidates under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, said Arif Rafiq, an expert on Pakistan and president of the Vizier Consulting risk advisory firm. "I think a basic aim of this visit by Sharif would be to reset relations with (Prince Mohammed) and establish the terms of what is probably going to be a much more transactional partnership," Rafiq said.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, already supports Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and has established a mechanism for selling oil to Pakistan on deferred payment, he said.

"The Pakistanis might ask Riyadh for additional deposits in its central bank because its external account is under severe stress," he added. —AFP



Pakistan's PM Shehbaz Sharif

## International

## Colombian soldiers confess murders to victims' families

6,400 civilians were murdered in a 'systematic way' between 2002 and 2008

OCANA: Rural peasant Elicer Ortega was on his own at his farm when soldiers burst onto his property to first kidnap and then murder him. His wife, Eduvina Becerra, had to wait 15 years to hear his murderers confess and ask for forgiveness. It happened during a historic two-day hearing of a special peace tribunal set up in Ocana — a town in northeastern Colombia near to where the 43-year-old's husband was killed.

Ortega, a local rural leader who was known for his personality and thick moustache, was one of 120 civilians, mostly men aged 25 to 35, who were murdered in cold blood between 2007 and 2008 by Colombian soldiers and then presented as far left guerrilla fighters killed in combat in the area, a bastion of illegal drug crops.



'My life completely collapsed'

In an unprecedented event, 10 former members of the military, including a general and four colonels, publicly admitted their responsibility in the crimes to the families of their victims. The most senior of them, general Paulino Coronado, who retired in 2008, said that even though he acted "by omission, I assume this legal responsibility... so that the Colombian people never again, never live again, these abominable moments."

He denied having ordered the killings in his area of responsibility, but admitted to "not having acted diligently" in the oversight of his men. "How can you say that your responsibility is by omission if you gave the order to your soldiers... and the whole army was aware of what they were doing?" said Zoraída Muñoz,



OCANA: Relatives of victims attend a hearing organized by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) in Ocana, Colombia, on April 27, 2022. For the first time, a Colombian army general was indicted for the murder of more than 100 civilians by soldiers under his command who presented the victims as guerrillas killed in combat. — AFP

mother of Jonny Soto, a 22-year-old who dreamed of becoming a soldier before being kidnapped and killed by the military.

According to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), some 6,400 civilians were murdered in a "systematic way" between 2002 and 2008 in areas of Colombia where far-left rebels operated. In return, the soldiers were given bonuses, promotions and other material advantages.

Known as "false positives" it is the biggest scandal ever to engulf the Colombian military. The soldiers took advantage of Ortega's solitude "so that no-one realized they were going to take him away," Becerra told AFP.

sives against rebel strongholds. KST has recorded some 600 clashes in the last year, compared with 400 over the previous 12 months. "ADF rebels have been hunted down at numerous bastions from where training, indoctrination and attacks against army and civilians' positions were organised," said captain Anthony Mualushayi, army spokesman for the Beni region of North-Kivu.

In late November, the Ugandan army entered the DR Congo to join in the hunt for the ADF, considered by the Islamic State extremist group as its central African affiliate, and accused of massacres in Uganda during the 1990s and recent jihadist attacks there.

But the army's optimism is not shared by all. "Instead of containing the violence, the operations by the Congolese and Ugandan armies have had the effect of broadening the sphere of actions by the ADF which now runs from the Ugandan border to the west of national highway 4," said Miviri.

Besides their usual zone in the Beni region, the ADF has also massacred civilians in the territories of Djugu and Irumu in Ituri. Militiamen from CODECO, a political-religious sect, have attacked people already displaced by the killings as well as humanitarian workers.

And rebels from the M23 movement, which had been routed in 2013, have regrouped to take on the army in North-Kivu. "It's been three months since the strikes by the Ugandan and Congolese armed forces against ADF positions stopped," Beni resident Jules Masumbuko told AFP.

Armed groups have taken advantage of the lull to "reorganise themselves and take back areas they have lost, because there's a problem with numbers within the Congolese army," said Miviri. The army says more than 20,000 troops have been deployed to the volatile eastern zones. — AFP

Like others at the hearing, she was wearing a black T-shirt with the words "WHO GAVE THE ORDER?" emblazoned on it.

## 'My life collapsed'

Becerra's husband was 38 when he disappeared in October 2007. She said that she had gone to town to buy groceries, when soldiers took him from his farm where he grew yucca, coffee and pineapples and managed his community work while. After two days of searching in vain, his "disfigured" corpse appeared in a cemetery in Ocana.

Becerra recognized him by his moustache and a sil-

ver ring on his finger. In his wallet there were two photos, one of his wife and the other of his son, Yesid, who at the time was 10 years old. "My life completely collapsed," she said. In fear, the mother and son fled their village. During the JEP hearing, former captain Daladier Rivera admitted "responsibility for the acts" and said he had provided the weapons that his men placed alongside corpses to pass them off as rebels.

Becerra sobbed uncontrollably as she listened to the confessions. "You feel relief because our family name has been cleared to the world," she later told AFP. Ortega "was not a fighter or a guerrilla as they said," but a simple loving father "devoted" to his son.

## Riddled with bullets

The "Mothers of Soacha" collective, the most well-known family members of "false positives" victims, traveled to Ocana for the hearing. Many of their children, living in Soacha on the outskirts of Bogotá, seduced by false promises of work, were taken aboard army trucks more than 600 kilometers (370 miles) to Ocana where they were murdered.

Beatriz Mendez, a member of the collective, still does not know who killed her son Weimar Castro or her nephew Edward Rincon in 2004. Their murders were not covered by this hearing. Although it "breaks the heart" she hopes one day to find out the truth.

Castro and Rincon were both 19 and unemployed when they went outside never to be seen alive again. A relative heard on the radio that two "guerrillas" had been killed by the military in the mountains. The two youths' bullet-ridden bodies were later found "disguised" in military fatigues.

Mendez has a tattoo of her son's face on her left arm and still remembers him dancing to Colombian cumbia and reciting poetry. She believes the military killed him with help from right-wing paramilitary groups. "I want to know the truth and I want to see them (the murderers) face-to-face," she said. — AFP

## Death toll soars under year of Congo's 'state of siege'

KINSHASA, DR Congo: The Democratic Republic of Congo imposed a "state of siege" a year ago to try to restore order in two violence-wracked provinces, but the civilian death toll has nearly doubled and lawmakers are voicing growing anger. Between April 2020 and May 2021, 1,374 people were killed, said analyst Reagan Miviri from the respected Kivu Security Tracker (KST) that monitors the bloodshed.

The attacks are blamed mainly on the notorious rebel groups Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO), which terrorise North-Kivu and Ituri. From May 2021 to April 2022, at least 2,563 civilians have been killed in the two provinces, says KST.

They were put under a state of siege on May 6 last year, a stringent measure that gave the army and police full powers to run the administration and wage war on the hundred or so armed groups that have rampaged through eastern Congo for more than a quarter of a century.

For Prime Minister Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, the siege and the army operations have "reduced the zone of action for negative forces". As a result, he told France's RFI radio station on Tuesday, the authorities are considering altering the area covered by the siege, "given that the exactions take place in specific areas".

The siege has seen the army lead multiple offen-



ITURI, DR Congo: File photo shows militiamen, including alleged children, of the armed group URDP/COCODECO (Union des Revolutionnaires pour la Defense du Peuple Congolais/Cooperative pour le Developpement du Congo) from the Lendu community stand guard during a meeting with former warlords - from the 1999-2003 Ituri War - taking place in the village of Wadda. — AFP

## Somalia elects speaker, paves way for presidential vote

MOGADISHU, Somalia: Somalia's parliament elected a veteran politician as speaker of the lower house in a drawn-out process that concluded in the early hours on Thursday, as the fragile nation edges closer to holding a delayed presidential vote. The election is more than a year behind schedule, with the process marred by deadly violence and a power struggle between the current president and the prime minister.

Following the election of the upper house speaker on Tuesday, lawmakers in the lower house chose Sheikh Adan Mohamed Nur, better known as Sheikh Adan Madobe, as speaker in a process that extended into two rounds of voting. The vote took place in a tent inside Mogadishu's heavily-guarded airport complex under tight security, following a spate of attacks in recent weeks by Al-Shabaab jihadists who have been waging an insurgency against the government for over a decade.

Madobe, 66, secured 163 votes out of the 252 ballots cast by lawmakers. He had previously served as speaker between 2007 and 2010. He is not known to be allied with either President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed or Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble, who have been sparring bitterly in recent months over the election process and security matters. — AFP

## EU proposal for visa-free travel...

Continued from Page 1

It is now for the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union to examine the proposal and decide whether to grant visa-free travel to the EU. First, the Parliament will vote by a simple majority. After the Parliament has adopted its position, the Council may decide to accept Parliament's position, in which case the proposal is adopted, or it may adopt a different position and communicate it to Parliament for a second reading.

Neither the Parliament nor the Council are subject to any time limit by which it must conclude its first reading and the entire process could take up to three readings. If the proposal is adopted by the

European Parliament and the Council, the EU Commission will negotiate a visa waiver agreement with Kuwait and Qatar, respectively, to ensure full visa reciprocity for EU citizens.

Visa-free travel to the EU for nationals of Kuwait and Qatar will start applying once the visa waiver agreement enters into force. Considering the complexities of EU legislative procedures, it is hard to estimate how long the entire process could last.

The EU Ambassador added that "while we all eagerly await the finalization of visa-free travel, I invite all friends of Europe in Kuwait to join me and 17 Ambassadors of European Union countries represented in Kuwait to celebrate Europe Day at Al-Shaheed Park, Phase 2, Multi-purpose Hall, from 8.00 pm to 10.30 pm on 9 May. This will be a great opportunity and open to the general public to see live music performances and discover cultures and traditions of European Union countries."

IHR director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam expressed concern that there was "less scrutiny" on Iran's rights record as powers focused on bringing the nuclear negotiations to a positive conclusion. "There will be no sustainable (deal)... unless the situation of human rights in general and the death penalty in particular, are central parts of the negotiations," he said.

The report said at least 17 women were executed in 2021, compared to 9 in 2020. Twelve were sentenced for murder and five on drug-related charges. There has been growing concern over the numbers of women executed on charges of murdering a husband or relative who activists believe may have been abusive.

It noted the case of one woman, Zahra Esmaili, who shot her husband dead in 2017. It said she was executed in February 2021 and may have had a heart attack before being hanged after watching others suffer the same fate before her. In another case, Maryam Karimi was convicted for the murder of her husband and was hanged in March 2021, with her daughter personally carrying out the execution by kicking away the stool as is allowed under Iranian law. — AFP

## Faithful through mosques on night...

Continued from Page 1

He replied: "It is in Ramadan, during the last ten days, on the unevenly numbered nights, either the 21st 23rd, 25th, 27th, 29th or the last night of Ramadan. Whosoever stands in 'ibaadah' (worship) on this night, with sincere faith and with genuine hopes of gaining reward, his previous sins will be forgiven.

"Among the signs of this night is that it is a serene,

## Power of positive thinking in...

Continued from Page 1

I try my best to follow the steps of our beloved Prophet (PBUH) and spread optimism in the midst of a stressful time.

We're humans and it's easy for us to be affected by everything around us, but it is important for us to remember that although our Prophet (PBUH) had the

## Cash-strapped Lebanon...

Continued from Page 1

Daily power cuts lasting more than 20 hours and soaring petrol prices mean many students can neither afford to reach their classes nor study from home. "Schools do not have enough funds to operate as they should, teachers do not have sufficient

quiet, shining night, neither hot, nor cold but temperate as if a moon is shining clear, and no meteors are shot at the devils on that night; it lasts until the break of the dawn. Another sign is that at morn, the sun rises without any radiant beams of light, appearing rather like the moon in its fullness. On that day, Allah prohibits the devils from rising up with the sun."

Laylatul Qadr could thus fall on any night, but the night of the 27th is believed by most to be the one, and millions of Muslims around the globe spend this night in prayer. The Holy Quran says Laylatul Qadr is better than a thousand months, and Allah's blessings and angels descend on earth on this night. Laylatul Qadr is also the night that Allah first sent down the first verses of the Holy Quran via Archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

biggest burdens, he still remained hopeful, and his smile always radiated optimism. "Make things easy for people, and do not make things difficult. Give glad tidings and do not repel people." - Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Courtesy of the TIES Center: As one of the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue, TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

salaries to live in prosperity, students do not have transportation means due to high fuel prices," said Chehab, UNESCO's education chief for Lebanon. "This is all affecting the quality of education."

The minimum wage once worth \$450 is now valued at \$28. The crisis has forced students to quit school or university to make ends meet. Enrolment in educational institutions slumped from 60 percent last year to 43 percent in the current academic year, a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) report found. The cash-strapped state has been unable to enact substantial reforms, a requirement to access billions of dollars from international lenders. — AFP

## International

## 50 years on, the ghost of the 1972 massacres haunts Burundi

## 1972 massacres seen by some as the darkest chapter in Burundi's history

**GITEGA, Burundi:** She is 60 years old, but Laetitia Ngendakumana still cries like the 10-year-old girl she was in 1972 when her father disappeared in a wave of ethnic massacres in Burundi now been classified as genocide by a government commission. Like thousands of others, Ngendakumana's world collapsed half a century ago when Burundi's Tutsi-dominated government arrested her father, a Hutu banker in the country's largest city, Bujumbura.

"We never knew where they took dad. What I know is that we lost everything we had," she said, wringing her hands during an interview with AFP at her home surrounded by lush banana trees near Gitega, Burundi's political capital. Neither her marriage to a teacher nor the birth of their 14 children — 12 survived — nor an end to the bloodletting erased her pain, which feels as fresh today as it did in 1972.

For a long time, the massacres were a taboo subject in the public sphere, with Burundians referring to the period between the end of April and June 1972 as "ikiza" ("the scourge" in Kirundi, the country's official language). But in 2019, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) set up by the authorities announced a plan to reopen mass graves to count and possibly identify the victims.

Ngendakumana immediately reached out to the commission. Identifying human remains after five decades was a near impossible task, but the farmer clung to a single hope: Her father's dentures.

"My father had had an accident and lost his teeth. He was wearing gold prostheses," she said. The tip about the metal dentures led the investigators to discover her father's remains, which were found on a wooded hillside, just a few kilometres (miles) from her home near Gitega.

**'The state killed its people'**

Since independence in 1962, hundreds of thousands

of Burundians have lost their lives to ethnic violence between the Hutu and the Tutsi, and to a civil war. The 1972 massacres—seen by some as the darkest chapter in Burundi's history—began on April 29, when Hutu extremists attacked Tutsis living mainly in the country's south.

This was followed by reprisals that quickly escalated into massacres of the Hutu elite—including executives, teachers and school students.

An estimated 100,000 to 300,000 people died in the violence—the majority of them Hutu, who account for 85 percent of Burundi's population, with the Tutsi at 14 percent.

The killings engulfed the entire country, but Gitega was the epicentre, hosting a military camp where the victims were held in transit before being killed and dumped in pits. Out of the nearly 20,000 victims whose remains were exhumed across Burundi, an estimated 7,000 were found in nine mass graves in and around Gitega. Many graves have never been found. "When we say 7,000 victims, it is only in relation to the graves that we have already found, confirmed, exhumed," the TRC's chairman Pierre Claver Ndayicariye told AFP.

After a three-year investigation, the TRC last December published a provisional report saying that the killings amounted to genocide and crimes against humanity. "In 1972, the state killed its people," Ndayicariye said, emphasising the role played by then president Michel Micombero, an ethnic Tutsi, in orchestrating the massacres. "It is a genocide because the state planned, organised, carried out this genocide," he said.

**'Political agenda'**

But his views are not unanimous, with some observers accusing the current Hutu-dominated regime of exploiting the TRC to further its own aims. The TRC—whose members mostly belong to the ruling party—has faced allegations of bias for largely focusing its excavations on sites where Hutus were buried while ignoring the graves of Tutsi victims.

"There is actually a problem of political agenda in this story," historian Evariste Ngayimpenda told AFP, deploring the tendency of successive governments to play the ethnic card. "When the Tutsi were in power... the avoidance of the Hutu menace was a constant theme and today, it is the opposite, it is the avoidance of the Tutsi menace, which is also a constant theme."

According to the rector of the Bujumbura-based University of Lake Tanganyika, the TRC's efforts also exhibit "methodological shortcomings" with regard to the dating of graves and the absence of any recourse to international expertise, particularly

that of the United Nations.

As the 50th anniversary of the massacres approaches, skulls, bones and bags of tattered clothing found near Gitega lie piled up in a small dark room inside a government building, awaiting the day when they will become part of a public memorial.

Although the authorities have not announced any plans to mark the anniversary, Ngendakumana and her husband, Emmanuel Berakumenyo, hope their government will seize the opportunity to heal the country's painful past. "These are conflicts that may draw to an end little by little, but the administration must lend a hand," said Berakumenyo, a former teacher who survived the massacres. —AFP



**GITEGA, Burundi:** Participants listen during a seminar at the Grand Interdiocesan Seminar Saint John Paul II of Gitega, in Gitega, Burundi, on March 10, 2022. Since independence in 1962, hundreds of thousands of Burundians have lost their lives to ethnic violence between the Hutu and the Tutsi and to a civil war. —AFP

## South Asia wilts in heat as Delhi rubbish dump burns

**NEW DELHI, India:** Millions sweltered in an early summer heatwave across India and Pakistan on Thursday, leading to power and water shortages as annual furnace-like temperatures hit South Asia. In New Delhi, a burning rubbish dump choked residents for a third day with temperatures crossing 45 Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in parts of South Asia on Thursday—several degrees higher than normal—and forecasters warning that it will get even hotter this weekend.

Heatwaves have killed over 6,500 people in India since 2010, and scientists say climate change is making them harsher and more frequent across the region. "This is the first time I've seen such horrible weather in April. Usually, we're prepared for this in May and onwards," said 30-year-old Delhi housewife Somya Mehra, as she and her family thirstily searched for a cold drink.

"Today we stepped out because of our anniversary but otherwise I'm not stepping out at all. I've stopped sending my kid out to play". The Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh imposed power cuts on factories as consumption for air conditioning and fans skyrocketed.

## Clashes in Sudan's West Darfur killed over 210: Governor

**KHARTOUM, Sudan:** At least 213 people were killed in three days of violence between Arab and non-Arab groups in Sudan's West Darfur, the state governor said, giving the first official toll for recent clashes. West Darfur has been gripped by days of deadly fighting largely centred in Krink, a locality of nearly 500,000 people and mostly inhabited by the African Massalit tribe.

"This massive crime left around 201 killed and 103 wounded" on Sunday alone, said West Darfur governor Khomees Abkar in a video published late Tuesday. The violence first broke out on Friday and escalated when armed men attacked villages of the non-Arab Massalit in retaliation for the killing of two tribesmen, according to the General Coordination for Refugees and Displaced in Darfur, an independent aid group.

At least eight people were killed on Friday, Abkar said, confirming a death toll for that day already

reported by the aid group. The state governor blamed government forces tasked with securing Krink and its environs for "withdrawing without any justification" as the main attacks began early Sunday.

Krink town "was completely destroyed including government institutions," Abkar said. "It is a crime against humanity." The fighting on Monday spread to Geneina, the provincial capital of West Darfur.

Witnesses have accused the Janjaweed militia of orchestrating the violence. The Janjaweed was an Arab militia which gained notoriety for its role in the repression of an ethnic minority rebellion in Darfur in the early 2000s under then autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

According to rights groups, many of its members were later integrated into the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by General Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, now de facto deputy leader of Sudan.

The General Coordination for Refugees and Displaced in Darfur on Monday reported a combined death toll of 180 for the fighting around Krink and in Geneina, including four killed in the state capital on Monday. Abkar on Wednesday confirmed to AFP that four were killed on Monday, taking the total toll to at least 213.

On Tuesday, Doctors Without Borders, known by

the French acronym MSF, said several medical workers were killed in the fighting as hospitals were attacked. Consequently, "MSF teams have not been able to reach the health facilities we support nor conduct mobile clinic activities" in Geneina and cannot return to Krink, the aid group said in a statement. —AFP

the land. We cannot take it for granted—land is a finite resource that must be managed, not just exploited and mined. We have already reached a breaking point: there is no longer a balance between our needs and the capacity of the land to regenerate and produce."

**Q.** What are the key issues?  
"Two are especially critical. Droughts are hitting harder, and in more regions. No country is immune—look at the western United States. But when they hit communities that are vulnerable, it's a major disaster. We see it now in the Horn of Africa, or last year in Madagascar. Droughts have always existed, but with climate change they are becoming more frequent and

more severe."  
"The other critical issue is sustainable land management. If drought is a problem, land restoration is a solution. When you invest in land, you build resilience in your communities, and create opportunities to make land that would have otherwise been wasted or lost productive again."

"Restoring land is also fighting against poverty, and irregular immigration. Many studies have established the link between land degradation and migration—in Haiti, Afghanistan, Somalia, the Sahel and elsewhere. When people have no options they flee, whether to the next country or further afield." —AFP

## Earth's degraded land at 'breaking point', warns UN

**PARIS, France:** Decades of unsustainable agriculture have depleted soils worldwide and accelerated both global warming and species loss, according to the UN official spearheading efforts to reverse land degrada-



## Many graves have never been found



**ALLAHABAD:** Children take a bath from a roadside tap on a hot summer day in Allahabad on April 28, 2022. —AFP

incidents of fires in various places—in forests, important buildings and in hospitals—in the past few days."

In New Delhi, a 60-metre (200-foot) high rubbish mountain has been ablaze since Tuesday, which firefighting teams have been battling with lorry-loads of sand and mud. The inferno, belching toxic black smoke that engulfed nearby districts, was the fourth such incident at a landfill site in the megacity of 20 million people in less than a month. Pradeep Khandelwal, the former head of Delhi's waste management, said they were likely sparked by warmer temperatures speeding up the decomposition of organic waste. —AFP



**KHARTOUM:** A defendant looks on during the trial of Sudan's ousted president Omar al-Bashir (unseen) along with others over the 1989 military coup that brought them to power, at a courthouse in the capital Khartoum. —AFP

## News in brief

## Man faces four murder charges

**LONDON:** A 28-year-old man is due in court on Thursday to face four charges of murder after a family was found stabbed to death at a property in south London, police said. Joshua Jacques, who lives locally in the Bermondsey area where the bodies were found, was arrested after reports of a disturbance at the property in the early hours of Monday. London's Metropolitan Police said the victims included Jamaican-born healthcare worker Dolet Hill, 64 and her partner Denton Burke, 58. Hill's daughter, Tanysha Ofori-Akuffo, 45, and Ofori-Akuffo's daughter, Samantha Drummonds, 27, were also killed at the house. The investigation is being led by homicide detectives, indicating terrorism is not suspected, and the Met said they were not looking for anyone else. —AFP

## Sisi pardons journalist

**CAIRO:** Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has pardoned a journalist who was jailed for "spreading false news", as well as more than 3,000 prisoners, local media and officials said Wednesday. Hossam Moniss, who is also a prominent leftist organiser, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in November over the charge, which is frequently levelled against dissidents in Egypt. Local media reported Moniss's pardon on Wednesday, while Tarek al-Awady, a lawyer and member of the recently re-formed Presidential Pardon Committee, tweeted "congratulations, Hossam Moniss has been pardoned." The interior ministry said in a later statement that 3,273 prisoners convicted in criminal cases had received presidential pardons. —AFP

## Eight dead as workers clash

**TULA:** A clash between rival groups of workers at a cement plant in central Mexico left at least eight people dead and nearly a dozen injured on Wednesday, authorities said. The unrest broke out at an entrance to the site operated by Cruz Azul, a cooperative owned by workers, according to the governor of the central state of Hidalgo, Omar Fayad. "I strongly condemn the violent clashes that occurred at the Cruz Azul Cooperative in Tula, which have so far left eight dead, 11 injured and nine detained," he tweeted. Fayad said that he had given instructions to his officials to promote dialogue to prevent a repeat of the unrest, which was reported to have caused damage to facilities and cars. Workers were armed with sticks, rods and firearms, according to witnesses quoted by Mexican media. —AFP

# Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 2022

## Boursa Kuwait records 60.67% jump in its net profit for 1Q22

Net operating profit soars 65.67%, total operating revenue increases 29.76%

**KUWAIT:** In yet another testimony to the success of the private sector in enriching the stock exchange, one of the most important financial institutions in Kuwait, as well as its long-term strategy to develop Kuwait's capital market, Boursa Kuwait announced strong financial results for the first quarter of 2022, recording a significant jump of 60.67 percent in net profit (Attributable to the Equity Holders of the Parent Company) from KD

43.11 million to about KD 67.98 million. Additionally, the traded volume increased 0.71 percent from approximately 16.82 billion shares to around 16.94 billion shares, driven by Boursa Kuwait's continuous efforts and the support of the capital market apparatus to develop and enhance the market and ensure its adherence to the standards and practices of capital markets worldwide.

Commenting on the results, Boursa Kuwait

practices, making it one of the standout companies in the country today, and a leader in the Kuwaiti financial scene over the past few years. The company continues to introduce innovative products and services aimed at encouraging companies to list on the exchange, working with its local, regional and international partners across the investment



community.

Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi, also commented on the company's first quarter results, saying: "Boursa Kuwait's strategy to enhance the appeal of Kuwait's capital market is yielding tremendous outcomes and attracting investors from all over the world. Thanks to the rise of oil prices and the relative stability compared to Europe and the United States, institutional investors are flocking to this region's markets, with around KD 240 million net traded in the first quarter of 2022, which is a testament to the increasing confidence in Kuwait's capital market."

Al-Osaimi added, "The performance also reflects our commitment to adding value to shareholders, exemplified by the rising dividend growth over the past few years. Looking to the future with confidence, we have laid out a clear strategy to further drive profitability growth during the coming quarters." The Kuwaiti capital market saw marked increases in its main indices, as the "Premier" Market index recorded an increase of 18.62 percent while the "Main" Market index saw increase of 6.26 percent. Meanwhile, the "BK Main 50" index increased by 7.78 percent while the "All-Share" index improved by 15.67 percent. Furthermore, the market capitalization of Kuwait's capital market increased from KD 41.4 billion at the end of 2021 to KD 47.97 billion in the first quarter of 2022, an increase of around 15.88 percent.

Since its inception in 2014, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to create a thriving capital market that attracts local and foreign investors through a broad spectrum of new products and services, infrastructure upgrades, and market reform initiatives, as part of its multi-phase market development plans. The company was fully privatized in 2019, the first government entity in the country to successfully undergo the process, bringing about greater levels of efficiency. Boursa Kuwait also self-listed in September 2020 and has made great strides in sustaining its operations and business continuity in the face of uncertainties and challenges.

Over the past six years, the company has rolled out numerous market reforms and new initiatives as part of its comprehensive multi-phase market development (MD) plans. The company also showcases some of the stand-out listed companies and the investment



Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi

We are optimistic that the company will deliver superior performance through the remainder of the year on the back of strong momentum in the local and regional emerging markets



Mohammad Saud Al-Osaimi

The company's performance reflects our commitment to adding value to shareholders, exemplified by the rising dividend growth over the past few years

3.26 million in the first quarter of 2021 to KD 5.25 million in the first quarter of 2022. Meanwhile, the company's earnings per share recorded an increase of 60.67 percent from 16.26 fils in the first quarter of 2021 to 26.13 fils in the first quarter of 2022.

Total operating revenue for the period increased to KD 8.79 million, an increase of 29.76 percent from KD 6.77 million in Q1 2021. Operating profit soared 65.67 percent from KD 3.81 million to KD 6.32 million, while total assets amounted to KD 121.4 million, up 9.95 percent from KD 110.42 million a year ago.

Despite the challenges stemming from the uncertainties in the global economic scene, Boursa Kuwait recorded an exceptional performance this quarter, building on the tremendous growth in trading value, which increased by 60.31 percent from around KD 2.59 billion to around KD 4.15 billion, as well as the 57.68 percent increase in Average Daily Traded Value (ADTV) from around KD

Chairman Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi said: "The outstanding results of the first quarter demonstrate that Boursa Kuwait's strategy and its efforts to develop the market as per international standards are continuing to pay off. These initiatives have helped consolidate its reputation as a leading stock exchange in the Middle East and contributed to the country's transformation into a global investment destination, in line with the "New Kuwait 2035" vision and the State's National Development Plan. We are optimistic that the company will deliver superior performance through the remainder of the year on the back of strong momentum in the Kuwaiti capital market as well as the emerging markets in the GCC."

Guided by a belief in the private sector and its ability to develop a reliable and sound capital market with ever increasing liquidity levels, Boursa Kuwait has developed into a pioneering regional company that adheres to the best-in-class international standards and



GOTHENBURG, Sweden: This file photo taken on August 25, 2020 shows employees working at the production line at Swedish auto maker Volvo Cars' Torstaanda production plant in Gothenburg. — AFP

## Volvo reports better than expected results

**STOCKHOLM:** Swedish automaker Volvo Cars on Thursday announced better than expected quarterly results despite supply chain problems linked to the war in Ukraine and the COVID pandemic.

The Gothenberg-based firm, majority owned by China's Geely Holding, said net profit rose to 3.9 billion Swedish kronor (380 million euros, \$400 million) against 5.7

billion kronor a year earlier. Its first-quarter operating profit fell to 6.0 billion kronor, while turnover rose 11 percent to 15.7 billion kronor, beating analyst forecasts.

A global shortage of semiconductors has forced Volvo and other carmakers to cut vehicle output despite robust demand. The new COVID lockdowns in China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have exacerbated the problem, Volvo said. The Ukraine conflict "sent already rising inflation to new heights and further disrupted supply chains that were already fragile", Volvo chief Jim Rowan said.

"Volvo Cars sold a total of 148,295 cars in the first quarter as the supply chain constraints affecting the company continued to slowly ease," a statement said.

## Musk's Twitter purchase puts moral champion in crosshairs

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The fate of Twitter's top attorney, deemed a moral champion of the platform, was in doubt Wednesday after Elon Musk tweeted displeasure with content moderation he had carried out.

Musk, the world's richest man, has vowed to be a free speech absolutist when he takes control of the global messaging platform as part of a \$44 billion deal. The lawyer, Vijaya Gadde, has led efforts to battle bullying and posts that could lead to real-world harm such as the attack on the US Capitol by supporters of former US president Donald Trump.

She was also involved in decisions such as removing political advertising from Twitter, and banning Trump from the platform for instigating the January 6 attack.

Musk on Tuesday criticized Gadde's role in taking down a New York Post story about the overseas business dealings of President Joe Biden's son Hunter ahead of the 2020 election.

The billionaire said that banning the story was "incredibly inappropriate" in a tweet responding to another user's post that included a Politico article detailing how

Gadde had cried during a meeting about the Musk takeover. Musk went on to retweet a meme featuring Gadde and accusing Twitter of having a "left-wing bias", prompting former Twitter chief Dick Costolo to fire off a reply asking what he was trying to accomplish. "You're making an executive at the company you just bought the target of harassment and threats," Costolo said in the tweeted reply to Musk.

Tweet clause

The deal Musk signed to buy Twitter comes with a clause saying he can tweet about the merger as long as the posts "do not disparage the company or any of its representatives." Women's rights group UltraViolet said Musk's tweets aimed at Gadde are "proof positive that his leadership

of the company will open the floodgates of harassment and abuse." "The fact that not even one day after the deal was announced, Musk was already breaking the terms of his agreement with Twitter to explicitly single out and encourage harassment against one of Twitter's top employees, is all you need to know about his intentions," said the organization's spokesperson, Bridget Todd.

Twitter chief Parag Agrawal defended his team in tweets of his own on Wednesday, endorsing a post that praised its lawyers as among the most aggressive in going to court to protect free speech. "I took this job to change Twitter for the better, course correct where we need to, and strengthen the service," Agrawal tweeted. "Proud of our people who continue to do the work with focus and urgency despite the noise." —AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: The Twitter logo is seen outside their headquarters in downtown San Francisco, California. — AFP



Business

# Indonesia bans exports of palm oil

## Archipelago nation faces shortage of cooking oil as prices soar

JAKARTA: Indonesia began imposing a complete ban on palm oil exports Thursday, as the world's largest producer of the commodity risked destabilizing a global vegetable oil market already hitting peak prices.

The archipelago nation is facing a domestic shortage of cooking oil as well as soaring prices, with consumers in several cities having to queue for hours in front of distribution centers to buy the essential commodity at subsidized rates. Authorities in Southeast Asia's most populous country fear the scarcity and rising costs could provoke social tensions and have moved to secure supplies of the product, which is used in a range of goods such as chocolate spreads and cosmetics.

In a last-minute reversal late Wednesday, they clarified the embargo would include all exports of the oilseed and not only products intended for edible oils, as indicated a day earlier.

"All products," including crude palm oil, "are covered by the Ministry of Trade regulation and will be enforced," said Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto.

President Joko Widodo said supplying the country's 270 million residents was his government's "highest priority". "As the world's largest palm oil producer, it is ironic that we are having difficulties getting cooking oil," he said.

Indonesia produces about 60 percent of the world's palm oil, with one-third consumed by its domestic market. India, China, the European Union and Pakistan are among its major export customers.

The months-long shortage has been exacerbated by poor regulation and reluctance among produc-

ers to sell at home due to high international prices that have made exports more profitable.

Jakarta plans to resume exports when the price of bulk cooking oil in local markets has fallen to 14,000 rupiah (97 cents) per liter, having rocketed 70 percent in recent weeks to 26,000 rupiah (\$1.80).

Vegetable oils are among a number of staple food items that have seen prices hit record highs in recent weeks, following Russia's invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

### Long queues

The supply of palm oil has been problematic since the beginning of the year, with people often spending hours in lengthy queues at distribution centers to obtain it.

"Cooking oil was difficult to find, even in bulk," Lius Antoni, a consumer, told AFP. "I finally decided to reduce the use of cooking oil." For Ade Neni, who sells popular fried snacks called gorengan, the ban has been a blow for business. "The high oil prices have reduced my sales," she said. "I had to increase the price of my gorengan."

Eddy Hartono, head of the Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association, said the new measures have already caused plantation farmers' incomes to plummet.

"There is no problem of supply, but of distribution," he said. Public discontent with rising food prices has contributed to a decline in President Widodo's popularity, according to recent polls, and prompted protests in several cities. —AFP



PEKANBARU, Indonesia: A worker weighs palm oil seeds in Pekanbaru, Riau province on April 28, 2022. —AFP

## German inflation hits 40-year record in April

BERLIN: Consumer prices in Germany rose at their fastest pace in four decades, data published Thursday showed, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed up energy prices. Inflation climbed to 7.4 percent in April from 7.3 percent in March, according to the federal statistics agency Destatis.

"Energy prices, in particular, have increased considerably since the war start-

ed in Ukraine" with a knock-on impact for inflation, Destatis said in a statement. The last time prices rose at a faster pace was for West Germany in the autumn of 1981, as the Iran-Iraq War caused oil prices to increase "sharply". Germany, like many of its European neighbours, is highly dependent on supplies of Russian gas to meet its energy needs.

The outbreak of the conflict sent prices soaring, while the threat of a potential stop to supplies could push inflation higher if realized. On Wednesday, the Russian energy giant Gazprom stopped deliveries to Poland and Bulgaria for refusing to pay in rubles.

German inflation would likely "accelerate further in the coming months", said

Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at the ING bank, as the war in Ukraine continued to rumble. While the soaring cost of energy was still the main driving force behind rising prices, "the pass-through to all kinds of sectors is still in full swing", Brzeski said.

Year-on-year prices for energy in the inflation statistics rose by 35.3 percent, while food costs increased by 8.5 percent in April, according to Destatis. "Delivery bottlenecks due to interruptions in supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic" had also delivered a bump to inflation, Destatis said.

Coronavirus-related lockdowns in China have notably caused interruptions to deliveries from the key manufacturing hub. —AFP



DUSSELDORF, Germany: This file photo taken on January 27, 2020 in Dortmund, western Germany, shows a Euro banknote and coins. —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 28 APRIL 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,042	1,052	1,060	1,040	20	25,149,014	9	0.86%	5.52%	1,030	1,055	20.9	2.14	2.9%	1.25
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	326	341	346	326	20	31,270,545	14	4.28%	22.22%	330	346	25.9	1.64	1.9%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	245	243	247	236	11	12,398,924	-3.883	-1.57%	11.47%	240	246	26.3	1.09	1.6%	1.00
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	290	296	300	285	15	7,528,242	5	1.72%	17.93%	291	296	21.4	1.32	1.6%	1.03
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	980	985	995	971	24	34,256,988	5	0.51%	18.39%	976	995	34.2	4.30	1.2%	1.39
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	910	981	995	904	91	7,734,208	75	8.28%	24.18%	969	995	64.3	5.54	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	411	424	425	411	14	5,529,967	13	3.16%	93.61%	419	439	15.2	1.71	10.6%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	183	197	202	181	21	22,210,184	13	7.07%	38.73%	195	200	72.3	1.65	2.4%	0.60
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	122	122	124	120	4	9,298,407	0	0.00%	3.39%	121	125	NM	0.74	7.0%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	170	170	171	167	4	14,141,664	0	0.00%	-5.03%	166	174	25.8	1.25	1.6%	0.96
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	851	835	860	830	30	3,602,295	-15	-1.76%	5.30%	831	850	17.7	1.85	1.7%	1.09
501	National Industries	Financial Services	323	315	323	314	9	38,077,530	-7	-2.17%	11.31%	300	330	5.7	1.13	3.8%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,782	1,756	1,790	1,720	70	924,326	-25	-1.40%	101.61%	1,750	1,850	23.0	1.62	3.4%	0.96
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	1,000	1,016	1,035	1,000	35	2,158,329	15	1.50%	19.25%	1,010	1,019	28.2	2.25	5.3%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	371	375	377	370	7	3,325,244	2	0.54%	8.07%	371	379	34.6	1.02	4.0%	0.74
603	Agility	Industrials	1,232	1,250	1,259	1,212	47	14,954,771	16	1.30%	32.28%	1,222	1,250	2.9	1.39	1.5%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	652	681	687	645	42	23,191,319	30	4.61%	14.45%	677	693	15.9	2.48	3.4%	1.33
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,449	3,376	3,449	3,317	132	753,496	-83	-2.40%	4.71%	3,350	3,440	6.6	3.13	11.8%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	215	216	219	213	6	6,366,787	1	0.47%	-0.92%	212	217	NM	0.74	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,890	1,928	1,978	1,817	161	2,324,186	38	2.01%	49.46%	1,880	1,939	59.9	14.10	1.7%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	315	315	317	305	12	113,753,065	-2	-0.63%	13.31%	314	325	19.1	2.60	3.5%	1.16
821	Warba Bank	Banking	278	277	278	275	3	7,098,303	-1	-0.36%	1.09%	275	280	34.7	1.88	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	575	584	585	573	12	2,678,478	10	1.74%	-0.85%	582	590	22.1	1.66	2.7%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	445	438	478	435	43	18,081,734	-10	-2.23%	2.30%	428	458	66.7	1.79	2.3%	0.48
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	222	222	225	220	5	4,298,694	2	0.91%	-2.63%	220	224	18.0	4.18	4.1%	0.56
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,600	2,650	2,675	2,600	75	739,023	20	0.76%	31.19%	2,600	2,700	33.5	8.78	2.5%	0.67

\* As of end of week closing

## Business

## NBK Economic Report

# Kuwait's economic growth to spike in 2022, erasing pandemic losses

## Strong demand, supply shortages drive inflation higher

**KUWAIT:** Economic growth continues to gain traction amid a post-pandemic rebound of buoyant private consumption, strong real estate activity, surging oil prices and increasing oil production. GDP should be almost back at pre-pandemic levels in real terms by the end of the year, growing by 8.5 percent. Proceeds from high oil prices should help sustain Kuwait's growth amid a more challenging global economic backdrop due to war, high inflation, tighter monetary policy and persistent COVID-19 pressures in some countries, notably China.

In the non-oil sector, consumer spending (+36 percent in 2021 in Knet data) and real estate sales (+65 percent to a seven-year high) are expected to remain strong. Consumption has also been facilitated by expanding domestic credit (+6.3 percent in 2021), which has continued to increase beyond the expiry of the loan repayment holiday for nationals in 4Q21. Corporate lending, having lagged household credit growth, is finally accelerating, which bodes well for stronger investment over the forecast period, even while government-sponsored project activity has been slow to take off. The authorities are believed to be working on a new strategic plan to drive medium-to-long-term non-oil growth, with a special focus on an expanded role for the private sector. But political disputes between the government and parliament continue to impede effective implementation of reforms and the Vision 2035 development program for now.

Non-oil activity will also be boosted by refining

sector gains, as KNPC begins to utilize the 1.4 mb/d of refining capacity from the Clean Fuels and Al-Zour New Refinery projects. We expect non-oil GDP growth to average 3.6 percent in 2022-23, slightly above estimated 2021 levels. Oil production, meanwhile, is gradually increasing as per the OPEC+ schedule. For Kuwait, output should rise by 300 kb/d to 2.72 mb/d (average) in 2022. Oil GDP growth should reach 12.8 percent before slowing to 3.1 percent in 2023.

### Inflation higher

Pandemic-era supply chain disruptions and robust consumer demand continue to drive consumer prices higher in Kuwait. Inflation reached a 10-year high of 3.4 percent in 2021 and is likely to exceed 4 percent this year on the extreme inflationary impact of the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Moreover, after five years of deflation, rental costs are ticking up as landlords look to recoup higher construction costs and as demand in the mid-level expatriate rental market stabilizes.

### Tighter monetary policy

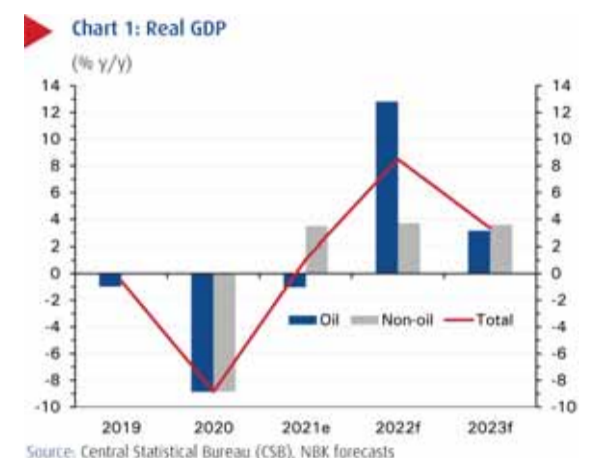
The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), following the US Fed, tightened its main policy rate, the discount rate, by 25 bps to 1.75 percent in March. Further hikes are expected, but the flexibility offered by the currency basket peg means that the CBK need not follow the Fed one-for-one. Borrowing costs will therefore rise, though credit demand is unlikely to weaken dramatically.

### First fiscal surplus in 8 years

The government should post its first budget surplus since 2014 this year (FY22/23), at 8.6 percent of GDP (before FGF transfers), on the back of significantly greater oil revenues and restrained spending growth-up from a similar sized deficit in FY21/22. The fiscal turnaround offers in principle space for policy loosening. But while spending may rise rather than fall as per the 5 percent cut outlined in the draft budget, the government is likely to prefer relative spending control going forward, not least to mitigate risks in case oil prices fall back. Meanwhile, the surge in oil prices to far above the budget break-even level (\$79/bbl in FY22/23) has improved liquidity, and future surpluses will help recapitalize the near-depleted General Reserve Fund. We still expect the debt law to be approved this year, which will enable the government to return to the funding market, further improving its own financing position, while keeping public debt (below 5 percent of GDP) extremely low by global standards. External buffers are very strong, with \$46 billion in CBK reserves and around \$700 billion in assets held by the Kuwait Investment Authority.

### Rising global headwinds

In the near term, Kuwait should benefit strongly from the oil windfall. But key risks include a deterioration in the global economic outlook, which could send oil prices lower and result in weaker



trade and fiscal balances, and economic growth. More critically, continued legislative impasse and government resignations will further delay much-needed economic reforms, constraining growth prospects and potentially affecting the country's credit rating even if oil prices remain high. Reforms must address deficit financing capabilities, unsustainable expenditure growth, untapped non-oil revenue streams, limited private sector development and employment of nationals, skilled labor shortages and housing supply bottlenecks. Tackling these would lessen the economy's oil-dependence and leave Kuwait in a better position to thrive in a post-fossil fuel, carbon-neutral energy world.

## KFH offers 24/7 e-services during holiday

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to provide its banking services around the clock through a group of various technological and digital tools during the holiday.

Most of the banking services are available in several channels around the clock, whether through the bank's website, KFH.com, or via the KFHonline mobile application, or through the KFHGo electronic branches that are spread in many important locations, in addition to the KFH accounts on social media and many E-service channels as per the latest financial technology and digital platforms.

KFH Go branch is considered a new electronic channel that helps transfer normal customer transactions to an innovative automated branch, that provides capabilities that allow customers to benefit from highly efficient banking services. It includes more than 80 percent of the services and business provided by the branches in their traditional sense, which makes KFH Go branches the preferred choice to many segments of customers, especially the youth.

KFH GO branches include the XTM device that allows direct video call with service personnel, as well as automatic teller machines and cash deposit machines. The cash deposit machines receive 300 notes per transaction. Moreover, Customers can perform a variety of interactive banking services through KFH Go's 10 branches located in various places in Kuwait, including Kuwait International Airport, such as: establishing "Murabaha" financing transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, instant cheque printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening (gold, savings, Al-Rabeh, electron) accounts, online gold purchase and sell, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, or by using Civil ID or phone number, in addition to many other financing and banking services conducted quickly, easily and safely. The electronic banking services at KFH are also characterized by their high efficiency in addition to ease and safety. This was evident in the number of electronic banking operations that KFH customers carried out via KFHonline, on the website or through the mobile application.

The e-banking transactions includes: opening a bank account online for citizens and residents to join become a KFH customer without having to visit the branch, local and telex financial transfers, opening deposits, adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, cheque book request, requesting financing, opening an account, requesting Al-Kheir Card, and checking the PINs for credit and debit cards, activating new bank cards, reporting a lost credit/debit cards, checking the financing obligations and the number of installments, perusal of investment plans, receiving account balances and deposits summary, along with other wide range of digital services.

KFH has recently launched digital signature service in personal financing products through KFH mobile app or desktop from anywhere without having to visit the branch, instant card issuance within 3 minutes, Live FX Pricing, instant cross-border payments service at KFH-Turkey using Ripple's technology and digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches which provides advanced and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

Meanwhile, the call center continues to provide services around the clock to receive customer calls, listen to their enquiries and respond to them through a qualified and technically advanced staff. KFH provides the automated telephone service that works with the same efficiency and speed, to respond to transfers between accounts, inquire about financial operations, pay bills, and recharge Mobile phone cards, along with other services.

## ABK offers 0% interest on loan to buy a 2022 Volkswagen Golf GTI

**KUWAIT:** Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is pleased to announce an exclusive vehicle financing offer for the Volkswagen Golf GTI 2022 models. The exclusive offer includes a special rate of 0 percent interest on an auto loan to purchase a 2022 Volkswagen Golf GTI. The offer is available at the Volkswagen showroom in Al-Rai.

This offer features exceptional benefits for customers and will prove to be of great advantage to customers looking forward to buying the all-new Golf GTI. In addition to the 0 percent interest, customers will receive complimentary three years of service, three years of warranty, and three years of roadside assistance. The offer is available for ABK

and non-ABK customers, terms and conditions are applicable

Commenting on the offer, Johair Marafi, Acting General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, said, "We wanted to offer our customers a suite of incredible offers. Delivering on our 'Simpler Banking' promise, we work closely with our partners to ensure the offers are affordable and appealing and the path to purchase is as seamless and convenient as possible. We hope that by offering this all-in-one finance option, customers can realize their dreams of purchasing the trendy 2022 Volkswagen Golf GTI."

The Golf GTI has been an icon among sports cars for almost 45 years and has sold more than 2.3 million cars globally since 1976. The all-new 2022 Volkswagen Golf GTI embraces power and sophistication, delivering a huge leap forward in performance and technology, making it a fun-to-drive car. The 2022 Volkswagen Golf GTI comes with built-in heightened driving dynamics and a suite of con-

nectivity solutions and digital features.

Emphasizing on the collaboration, Mohamed Shway General Manager of Volkswagen Kuwait Behbehani Motors Company said, "This partnership with Volkswagen is a perfect way to connect with our customers, and add value to their car purchase. With ABK, the dream of owning or gifting this car becomes simpler, especially during these times when convenience is key to meeting customer expectations."

ABK aims to drive a best-in-class banking experience and enhance the shopping experience by providing a gateway to the best deals and offers to customers in Kuwait.



Johair Marafi

## NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an exquisite array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Najwa Saad Adibas the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for April 2022.

The draw was held in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, representatives from NBK, as well as a representative from Deloitte who oversee Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws. Al-Jawhara Account provides a great opportunity to save and win weekly, monthly or quarterly prizes.

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy

General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Providing our customers with valuable prizes and rewards all year round is a key pillar in our strategy to offer them a richer banking experience."

Al-Nusif mentioned that NBK is committed to provide customers with an integrated banking experience including exclusive rewards, top-notch banking products and services, and quick and easy banking. "Al-Jawhara Account is one of our key products that give our customers periodic chances to win in weekly, monthly and quarterly draws, and through which we seek to promote the saving culture among customers from all age groups," he added. On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws for April worth KD 5,000 each including: Essa Mohammed Ismail, Zahraa Sayed Hasan and Ahmed Fadel Al-Tayeb.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to

enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers are made on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK strives to give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes matching their interests all year round.



Hisham Al-Nusif

## Here's why new Huawei nova 9 SE makes ideal Eid Gift!

**KUWAIT:** Eid is that time of the year when you have to spoil your loved ones with gifts. The key to finding the perfect Eid gift is to consider the tastes and interests of each and every member of the family. Sweets and cards always work. But to show that you really know and care about them, you have to give them something that they will love and use in the long run. In a world that is turning increasingly digital every day, smartphones can be excellent gifts. Fortunately, it looks like the new Huawei nova 9 SE has launched at the right time, packing everything that young people would love. Following in the footsteps of its predecessors, the HUAWEI nova 9 SE boasts a High-Res AI Quad Camera, 66W Huawei SuperCharge, and a young fresh aesthetic. Here is why we think it is the right Eid gift for your loved ones for this season.

tion main camera (f/1.9 aperture) allows you to experience the extraordinary and unleash your true creativity. Whether you're shooting scenery, portraits, architecture, or more, the moment you take a photo, the Huawei nova 9 SE captures what you see before your eyes in crystal-clear detail. The 108MP photo achieves three times lossless magnification. Therefore, images can be zoomed in and cropped to make the framing look just right before posting them on social media.

The Huawei nova 9 SE can capture pictures in dark environments and increase the brightness while reducing noise and improving the photo's dynamic range. You can also snap perfect selfies in low light as the Super Night Shot feature can accurately recognize human faces and optimize the background while filtering out noise.

**Look at the world in pin-sharp detail**  
The 108MP ultra-high-defini-

**Running out of charge is a thing of the past**  
The fear of running out of bat-



tery is now real. That's why a good smartphone should have fast charging. With 66W Huawei SuperCharge, Huawei nova 9 SE can be charged by 60 per cent in just 15 minutes or be fully charged in 36 minutes.

### Sleek design with an immersive screen

The Huawei nova 9 SE features a Huawei FullView Display with ultra-narrow bezels measuring just 1.05mm. This contributes to a far more immersive experience

for the user and perfectly complements the ultra-slim body of the smartphone, which comes in at just 7.94mm. The rear lens bears the nova Series' iconic Star Orbit Ring camera design. As eye-catching as ever, the classic design, with its focus on the circle, gives a reassuring sense of aesthetic order through its symmetry. With its slim body coupled with the 3D Glass Rear Cover, the Huawei nova 9 SE is easy to hold and fits well in the palm of your hand.

## Business

# BoJ hikes inflation forecast on soaring energy prices

## Central bank leaves its ultra-loose monetary policy unchanged

TOKYO: Japan's central bank hiked its full-year inflation forecast on Thursday but cautioned that it sees rising prices, driven by a surge in commodity costs caused by the Ukraine war, as a temporary and volatile trend. Despite climbing prices and a slump in the yen to a 20-year low against the dollar, the Bank of Japan left its ultra-loose monetary policy unchanged.

It revised its inflation projection for the 2022-23 financial year to 1.9 percent—sharply up from its previous 1.1 percent forecast. The figure, which excludes fresh food, is just below the bank's longstanding two-percent target but the BoJ views recent rises as a short-term trend and is calling for continued efforts to achieve sustainable economic growth. Consumer prices are "likely to increase temporarily to around two percent—due to the impact of a significant rise in energy prices—in fiscal 2022", it said.

"However, the rate of increase is expected to decelerate, because the positive contribution of the rise in energy prices to the CPI (consumer price index) is likely to wane." In March, core consumer prices rose 0.8 percent—the fastest increase in more than two years—as oil prices soared. Excluding energy, however, prices were down 0.7 percent.

Although the bank's revised inflation forecast is "broadly in line" with its two-percent target, "a hike to the policy rate remains off the table as none of the acceleration in inflation is being driven by domestic demand", wrote Tom Learmouth of Capital Economics.

The BoJ now expects the economy to grow 2.9 percent in the current fiscal year, against its previous forecast of 3.8 percent. But it also predicted 1.9 percent expansion in 2023-24, from its previous projection of 1.1 percent.

Bank policymakers left their inflation forecast for 2023-24 unchanged at 1.1 percent. The announcement



TOKYO: The Japanese flag flutters over the Bank of Japan (BoJ) head office building (bottom) in Tokyo. — AFP

followed a two-day policy meeting and comes with the yen at its weakest level against the dollar since 2002 because of the widening gap between Japan's loose monetary policy and the US Federal Reserve's increasingly hawkish tilt. The BoJ has suggested that the benefits of a weaker yen, particularly for major Japanese exporters, outweigh the disadvantages, but this messaging has become more difficult to sustain in the face of growing concern.

A weaker yen is particularly problematic for resource-poor Japan, which relies on energy imports, and in recent weeks politicians have expressed concern about the speed of the currency's slump.

But no intervention appears on the horizon, though the government this week unveiled a new economic package including cash handouts for low-income families and an expansion of fuel subsidies to cushion the impact of rising prices. — AFP

## Videoconferencing 'hinders creativity'

PARIS: People are worse at coming up with creative ideas during a video call compared to meeting in person, a study said Wednesday, suggesting that workplaces should prioritize brainstorming sessions for the office. The pandemic has changed the nature of office work, propelling a massive rise in videoconferencing that looks unlikely to abate as home-working becomes more entrenched across the world.

Seeking to find out how this huge change affects creativity, US researchers studied nearly 1,500 employees of a telecommunications company in Finland, Hungary, India, Zionist entity and Portugal. In pairs, either in person or on a Zoom call, the employees came up with as many creative ideas as they could for the company's products, then picked

the best one. The pairs who spoke in person came up with around 15 percent more, according to the study published in the Nature journal.

The researchers found similar results in an experiment involving more than 600 university students, who were also paired off and told to come up with creative ideas for either a frisbee or bubble wrap. The in-person pairs came up with 14 percent more ideas. However, it was not all bad news for Zoom, Skype and the other videoconferencing apps. Both sets of results found that video calls were just as effective for selecting the best idea, a decision which requires "cognitive focus and analytical reasoning", the study said.

"We're most creative when unfocused": To understand the difference, the researchers tracked the gaze of the participants. "In the virtual condition people are looking significantly more at their partner—almost double—at the expense of their broader environment," the study's co-author Melanie Brucks, an assistant marketing professor at Columbia University, said in a Nature video.

The study said that "videoconferencing hampers idea generation because it focuses communicators on a screen, which prompts a narrower cognitive focus". That kind of focus might help select the best idea—but hinder coming up with one in the first place. "We're most creative when we're unfocused and free," Brucks said. "I always suggest turning off the camera during idea generation, so you can walk around, you can look around." — AFP

These results could inform how companies plan remote working, said the study - particularly in hybrid home-office set-ups where "it might make sense to prioritize creative idea generation during in-person meetings". The researchers added that they had had to exclude results from a telecommunications company's engineers in Poland who, unlike the other groups, met in a hotel conference room. "Perhaps for this reason, participants exhibited rampant non-compliance, including a notable pre-occupation with the hotel catering's coffee and cookie station," the study said. — AFP

## Facebook parent Meta calms investors with strong profit

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook parent Meta on Wednesday reported better profit than expected in the recently ended quarter, calming investors worried about the toll of competition from TikTok and eased pandemic restrictions.

Meta said it made a profit of \$7.5 billion on revenue of \$27.9 billion in the first three months of this year, sending shares up more than 18 percent in after-market trading that followed release of the earnings figures. "We made progress this quarter across a number of key company priorities and we remain confident in the long-term opportunities and growth that our product roadmap will unlock," said Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg.

The average number of people using Facebook monthly rose 3 percent to 2.94 billion by the end of March, while some 3.64 billion people used at least one member of Meta's family of apps each month, the tech giant reported. Meta owns Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Instagram and virtual reality firm Oculus. "More people use our services today than ever before, and I'm proud of how our products are serving people around the world," Zuckerberg said.

The growth in the ranks of people using Facebook on any given day is a good sign for the social network, especially after seeing the number decline for the first time ever in the final quarter of last year, Insider Intelligence analyst Evelyn Mitchell told AFP.



"But it's also clear that Facebook is still struggling to bring in new users, and it's becoming increasingly difficult for Instagram to pick up the slack," Mitchell said.

Investors had been worried that as the pandemic eased and people socialized more in real life that they would engage less on Facebook. There were also concerns about competition from video sharing sensation TikTok. Zuckerberg has cited pressure from TikTok, and launched his own short-form video sharing feature Reels which has seen fast growth on Facebook and Instagram.

"Video is the main way that people experience content online," Zuckerberg said on an earnings call. Reels accounts for more than a fifth of the time that people spend on image-centric social network Instagram, Zuckerberg told analysts.

### More mindful spending

Expenses at Meta climbed 31 percent to \$19.4 billion when compared with the same quarter a year earlier. Meta said that it ended the quarter with 77,805 employees, an increase of 28 percent from a year ago. The company kicked off a number of long-term projects based on its performance last year, but plans to throttle back its pace of spending in line with "current business growth levels," Zuckerberg said.

Meta has been investing heavily in a future that Zuckerberg believes will include spending time in immersive virtual worlds referred to as the metaverse. It has a Reality Labs unit devoted to what he has predicted is the future of the internet. The metaverse is a 3D virtual world where people will be able to interact using sensors, head gear and other gadgets.

Doubts have swirled about whether the major metaverse investments will pay off for Meta, which changed its name from Facebook last year to highlight its shifting focus.

Meta's early metaverse platform, called Horizon Worlds, already allows people to socialize virtually while represented by avatars. "Over the next several years, our goal from a financial perspective is to generate sufficient operating income growth from our family of apps to fund the growth of investment in Reality Labs, while still growing our overall profitability," Zuckerberg said.

"Now, unfortunately, that's not gonna happen in 2022, given the revenue headwinds."

Meta's ad business faces some "very real challenges" including privacy changes to iOS software that make it tougher to target money-making ads, noted Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg.

"Facebook, of course, is no stranger to obstacles but the iOS changes are the first direct threat to its ad business," Enberg said. "Combined with the rise of TikTok, brand safety concerns, and a shift in social media user behavior, there's a perfect storm heading straight for Meta's ad revenues."

Meta executives assured analysts that they are developing technology that minimizing the amount of personal information needed to show people relevant ads, offsetting the impact of the iOS privacy labels. — AFP

## China cuts coal import taxes

BEIJING: China will slash coal import tariffs to ensure energy security, the finance ministry said Thursday, the latest move to cast doubt on the country's environmental promises. Beijing is the world's biggest importer of coal, but import volumes dropped in the first quarter of the year and energy prices have surged globally since the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Chinese leadership has pledged the country

will curb coal consumption after 2025. Last year half of China's economy was fuelled by coal and imports hit a record high. As the world's biggest polluter, China has also promised to peak emissions by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2060. Policymakers in Beijing have long walked a tightrope balancing climate objectives with domestic growth. Now as growth slows, authorities are resorting to an old formula of propping up smokestack industries to juice the economy. A zero tax rate will apply for all coal imports from May 1 until March 31 next year, in a move the finance ministry said would "strengthen the guarantee of energy supply and promote... development".

China's current coal tariffs stand at five to six per-

cent for different types of thermal coal used to generate electricity, and three percent for coking coal, used to make steel. In late 2021 China began construction on 33 gigawatts worth of coal-fired power plants—the most since 2016 — that will emit as much carbon dioxide annually as Florida, according to data from Global Energy Monitor. China also opened dozens of shuttered coal mines to boost domestic production last year after power outages crippled swaths of the economy. President Xi Jinping on Monday called for an "all-out" campaign to build infrastructure, according to state media, as fears grow over the impact of strict virus restrictions on a COVID-battered economy. — AFP

## US GDP dropped 1.4% in Q1 2022

WASHINGTON: US economic growth fell 1.4 percent annualized in the first quarter of 2022 as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and tapering of government spending hit consumers and business, government data said Thursday. The result was far worse than the mild increase analysts had expected, and came after the economy had grown 6.9 percent in the final quarter of 2021. The United States is dealing with record inflation as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, even as prices for fuel and other components increase due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and global supply shocks, which have raised fears of a recession in the world's largest economy. Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said last quarter's shortfall was partially a result of companies importing more to rebuild inventories, and growth could rebound in the second quarter of 2022.

"The economy is not falling into recession. Net trade has been hammered by a surge in imports, especially of consumer goods, as wholesalers and retailers have sought to rebuild inventory," he wrote in an analysis. The Commerce Department said the decrease in GDP was the result of less private inventory investment, government spending and exports, as well as a jump in imports. Durable goods propelled the increase in imports, while the report said the shortfall in private investment was made up mostly of wholesale trade goods, in particular motor vehicles, which have been in short supply due to the global shortage of semiconductors.

Exports of nondurable goods decreased, though the data said that was offset by an increase in business services, particularly financial services. The drop in government spending was fueled both by a decrease in defense spending as well as the expiration of government programs such as the child tax credit, which provided payment to families with children. — AFP

## Democrats target oil giants 'ripping off' motorists

WASHINGTON: US Democrats announced legislation Thursday to punish fuel companies they accuse of unfairly raising prices at the pump, as record inflation threatens the party's prospects in November's midterm elections. The reforms would allow regulators to impose heavy fines on companies exploiting the war in Ukraine and a pandemic-related surge in crude prices to cash in at the expense of American motorists.

"At this time of war — at any time — there is no excuse for Big Oil companies to profiteer, to price gouge or exploit families," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told a news conference. "That is why Democrats are moving forward with forceful action that will stop, and hold accountable, oil and gas companies for profiteering and manipulating markets." The push comes with gasoline prices skyrocketing from an average of \$2.89 a gallon a year ago to \$4.14, according to AAA data published Thursday.

The Democrats' proposals would give the Federal Trade Commission and individual states increased authority to go after businesses that manipulate prices in both wholesale and retail sales. They are hoping to pass legislation before the end of May but would need support from Senate Republicans, who are pressing instead for hikes in domestic fossil fuel production. House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone said however that oil giants were "ripping off the American people" by suppressing production to maximize profits.

Maria Cantwell, Pallone's counterpart in the Senate, said elevated pump prices were driving inflation - which is at a 40-year high - and threatening the post-pandemic recovery. "In the state of Washington, many of my constituents are paying \$4.50 a gallon and that means that average



WASHINGTON: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) talks to reporters about Congressional Democrats efforts to lower fuel prices in the US Capitol Visitors Center on April 28, 2022 in Washington, DC. — AFP

Washington drivers will be forced to shell out \$750 more to fill up this year than they did in 2021," she said. "It's even worse for West Coast truckers who are facing diesel costs as high as \$6.60 a gallon, and that is driving up the price of every good that is delivered because of those transportation costs."

In March, President Joe Biden announced a record release from US strategic oil reserves of a million barrels of every day for six months to "ease the pain" of soaring prices. Some Democrats facing tough re-election fights in November have also floated a federal gas tax holiday that would save motorists around 18 cents a gallon, but Pelosi appeared to rule out the idea.

"There had been some interest in the holiday. The pros of it are that it's good PR," she said. "The cons are that there's no guarantee that the saving... would be passed on to the consumer. We have no evidence to think that the oil companies would pass that on." AFP reached out to the American Petroleum Institute for its reaction to the announcement but there was no immediate response. — AFP

## Lifestyle | Features



This photo shows combatants competing in Muay Thai at an event by Fight Club Thailand, an underground organization that hosts unsanctioned fights of various martial arts disciplines, in a parking lot in the Klong Toey district of Bangkok.



This photo shows combatants competing in Muay Thai at an event by Fight Club Thailand.

## Blood and bruises: Welcome to Bangkok's real-life fight club

Harsh spotlights and street lamps illuminate a vicious brawl between two furious shirtless men as the screams of a crowd echo beneath a Bangkok underpass: Fight Club Thailand is on. In the capital city of a country renowned for its highly technical martial arts scene, amateur fighters gather regularly promising to exchange only blood and bruises in the underground club.

While the bout resembles a particularly frenzied boxing match, the setting-surrounded by shipping containers in a poor port-side neighborhood-is a far cry from the glitzy charms of Muay Thai boxing stadiums. "Here you don't have to know how

to fight. You just need to have heart and that's it," club co-founder Chana Worasat told AFP.

The 30-year-old founded the club in 2016, partly inspired by the cult Brad Pitt movie, to allow amateur fighters to test their skills-or just vent their aggression. "I think the popularity is due to a variety of occupations and fighting styles that are different from the styles in the (professional) ring," he said. That's certainly the appeal for 23-year-old contestant and grocery store owner Surathat Sakulchue. "It's quite different (from traditional fights)," he told AFP, expecting to dish out-and absorb-punishment using all four limbs. Plus, he

added, "fighting with containers surrounding us is just fun and exciting."

### 'Violence into friendship'

Unlike the movie's famous line banning fighters from talking about their club to outsiders, the Bangkok-based outfit calls itself "the ring that will change violence into friendship". The group has become a local sensation, with a private Facebook group racking up 73,000 members as word spread of the underground matches. Fighters are allowed to go all-out in a single three-minute round-with neither a winner or loser declared-but the bouts aren't quite no-holds-barred.

Elbowing, grappling, throwing opponents to the ground and punching to the back of the head are strictly prohibited. Unsurprisingly, the gatherings have not escaped the notice of the Thai police. Authorities were alerted in 2016 to the underground matches-which allegedly violated the Boxing Act, punishable with a one-year jail sentence and fines of up to about \$600 — but despite a small police presence on occasion, the fights have continued.

Meanwhile, the club insists it is not governed by the Boxing Act, meaning organizers are not holding unsanctioned fights. Co-founder Chana says the group is

approved by the Department of Provincial Administration. "I don't oppose the idea of turning this into legal, sanctioned fights, but at the same time, we can't lose the underground identity, so the question is 'where is the balance?'"

### Fear, then elation

It is all a far cry from the scrappy club's beginnings, when there were no clear rules. Now there are fighting guidelines, screening procedures, a risk-acceptance pledge as well as protective equipment and on-scene medical care. "We don't ask fighters to kill each other. If you're too tired or too injured to go on, then we'll stop the fight," said Chana as another bout began.

After paying his respects with folded hands and touching gloves with his opponent, amateur fighter Ilya Ostroushchenko gets to work. Landing a kick to his opponent's torso, Ostroushchenko bashes out a combination of punches, and a left hook to the face finally sends his opponent stumbling to the rubber mat. The crowd enthusiastically roars "Somchai"—a traditional, masculine Thai name given to the Russian-as the bout finishes. Seemingly cool and composed during the fight, the 22-year-old Russian told AFP it is nerve-racking right before stepping into the informal ring. "My hands shake. My knees shake also, but when I go out to the centre, I feel good," he said. — AFP



This photo shows a fighter warming up at an event by Fight Club Thailand.



This photo shows combatants competing in Muay Thai at an event by Fight Club Thailand.

## After life of trauma, Liberian lab chimps settle into retirement

(NYBC) funded biomedical research related to hepatitis B and other diseases at a complex by the Farmington River.

During Liberia's devastating 1989-2003 civil war, the chimpanzees nearly starved to death as the country imploded around them. Research staff in the impoverished country had to dig into their own pockets to provide basic sustenance. The researchers retired many of the chimps to the river islands in the mid-2000s but their

petition, wrote at the time: "Effectively they have left these poor chimpanzees to suffer from dehydration and starvation".

### 'Victim of torture'

Liberia is one of the world's poorest countries, where 44 percent of the population lives on less than \$1.90 per day, according to the World Bank. Local staff at the research centre kept showing up to work to help the chimps when NYBC cut

care and two daily meals. But many still bear the scars of their grim past. At another island, during morning feeding, Ssuna points to a grizzled ape who's missing an arm. The vet says the animal is "essentially a victim of torture."

The chimp, named Bullet, lost the limb as an infant when poachers killed his mother and ripped him from her arms. He then ended up at the research lab. The carers are trained to form close attachments with

came into contact with them. Keeping them fed is a serious operation. Carers prepare about 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of food every morning, and 120 kilos (264 pounds) in the afternoon-amounting to about 10 tons a month. Care will continue until every ape on the islands dies, according to Ssuna. He estimates that their life-long care will last some 50 years. Many of the chimps are around 20 years old and have a lifespan of about 60.

Floating on a river boat near a Liberian island, vet Richard Ssuna watches intently as animal carers wade towards the shore hurling fruits and imitating chimpanzee calls as they go. The beach is empty, but the sound of rustling and chimpish grunts begins to fill the green undergrowth. Slowly, an ape knucklewalks out onto the beach to grab some food. He's a high-ranking member of his troop, explains Ssuna, as more chimpanzees follow. The younger ones gambol and hoot in delight as carers throw them bananas, palm nuts and cassava.

Sixty-five chimps are spread across six uninhabited river islands near the Atlantic Ocean, about 55 kilometers (34 miles) south of the West African country's capital Monrovia. But their joy in feeding belies a dark past.

The chimps are the remainders of a group of about 400 ex-test subjects of a US-funded research project-and have survived decades of invasive experiments. Some of the animals underwent several hundred biopsies. "They were traumatized," says Ssuna, who's also a director of Humane Society International (HSI), a rights group that now cares for the primates. Chimp testing in Liberia began 1974, when the New York Blood Center



Chimpanzees holds their hand out to catch a pieces of fruit thrown by an animal care specialists on one of the islands on the outskirts of Marshall City. — AFP photos

ordeal continued.

For reasons that remain unclear, NYBC cut funding in 2015 — in a move that provoked global outrage-abandoning the apes on the tiny river islands incapable of supporting them. Activists picketed NYBC headquarters in New York and Hollywood stars such as Joaquin Phoenix and Ellen Page signed a petition urging the blood bank to reinstate funding. Brian Hare, a US-based primatologist who launched the

funding-at a time when an Ebola epidemic was raging in Liberia. Rights groups and US financial giant Citigroup also provided relief funds during the turbulent period.

Under pressure, NYBC eventually struck an agreement to split the long-term care costs for the chimps with the Humane Society in 2017, pledging \$6 million. NYBC did not respond to questions from AFP about why it withdrew funding. Years on, the former lab chimps now enjoy veterinary



A chimpanzee picks his teeth as he waits for the animal care specialist to feed him on one of the islands on the outskirts of Marshall City.

the chimpanzees and to be gentle, explains Ssuna, who says certain stimuli can trigger negative memories in chimps, as in humans.

### Bright future

None of the chimpanzees can be released into the wild, and are confined to the islands for life. They never learned to fend for themselves and there are also fears they would spread disease if humans

There are also a small number of babies. HSI plans to vasectomise the males to prevent further births. "The future is very bright, as much as we would like to leave them back in the wild," says Ssuna back on the mainland after the feeding, standing near the rusted animal cages of the old research complex. "They're in a better place." —AFP



Chimpanzees eat pineapple, fed to them by the animal care specialists on one of the islands on the outskirts of Marshall City.



Animal care specialists working with the Humane Society keep their distance as they throw pieces of fruit to some of the sixty five chimpanzees living between six different islands on the outskirts of Marshall City.

## Lifestyle | Features

## Can movie theaters save Netflix? 'Door is open,' says trade group boss

John Fithian, head of the movie theater industry's trade body, is used to shrugging off claims that Netflix will spell doom for the big-screen, popcorn-munching experience. But with box offices bouncing back from the COVID-19 pandemic, and Netflix stock plummeting after its first loss of subscribers in a decade, Fithian predicts movie theaters could even help the streaming giant adapt to an uncertain future.

"The theater door has been open to play Netflix movies for years," Fithian told AFP at CinemaCon, the annual Las Vegas summit held by the National Association of Theatre Owners. Fithian said he has held "lots of discussions" with Netflix content chief Ted Sarandos and "urged him to take a shot at seeing if they can also do well theatrically." "I don't look at share prices one way or the other-I just look at the data... you can make more money, even if you're a streamer, if you put your best movies in theaters first."

Releasing films widely on big screens before offering them to subscribers would long have seemed anathema to Netflix's wildly successful business model, which has sent the likes of Disney and Warner scrambling to catch up in the so-called streaming wars. Netflix has revolutionized Hollywood and the way movies are consumed, splurging huge amounts to lure top stars away from the traditional studios and keep cinephiles on their couches.

But Netflix's loss of 200,000 users-



John Fithian President and CEO of NATO speaks at CinemaCon 2022 at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, in Las Vegas, Nevada.

announced last week-spooked Wall Street, sending shares plunging more than 30 percent in a single day. Netflix has already announced new strategies it did not previously countenance, including cheaper subscriptions with advertising. The streamer currently releases its most prestigious titles in theaters for limited runs-so that they are eligible for Oscars-but could a broader theatrical focus be on the cards? "I think the Netflix model might evolve somewhat into that... we hope it does," said Fithian. A run in the theaters means a movie "pops and stands out better," while "movies that go

straight to streaming services get lost," he added.

## 'Dead'

The mood at this year's CinemaCon is noticeably brighter than last August, when a COVID-19 variant was spooking moviegoers, and studios were bypassing theaters to release their wares on streaming. This week, a boisterous Fithian made headlines by declaring in his annual address that the pandemic-era trend of releasing films on streaming the same day as theaters was "dead."

"That wasn't just pulled out of thin air-that's in consultation with lots of our studio partners about what they're thinking on how they're going to release their movies," he told AFP. Major studios have recently 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. "It's more of a discussion of how long a window-or period of exclusivity-should be. It's not whether there should be one or not," said Fithian.

## 'Very concerned'

Despite the warm words for Netflix and rosy predictions for recovery, there remain causes for worry. Fithian said the theater owners' association was "very concerned" about Amazon Prime, noting that the subscription service's business model was not "trying to make money off of movies" but



Co-CEO and Chief Content Officer at Netflix, Ted Sarandos attends the Los Angeles Special FYC Event for Netflix's "Grace And Frankie" at NeueHouse Los Angeles.—AFP photos

instead getting consumers to "buy their groceries and use their shipping services." Amazon Prime took over Hollywood's historic MGM in an \$8.5 billion deal closed last month.

On Wednesday, it emerged that MGM's film leadership would be leaving the studio behind the James Bond films and recent hits such as "House of Gucci" and "Licorice Pizza." "If they're buying companies that take movies out of the supply line for theaters, to basically only release them in the home, they're reducing consumer choice and reducing competition," said Fithian. Last month Apple TV+ became the first streamer to win best picture at the Oscars,

in a year described by Fithian as "very bizarre."

"We're still very concerned about the Oscars, in general," he said, pointing out that mainstream smash hits like "Spider-Man: No Way Home" had missed out on best picture nominations. Meanwhile, theater chains operating in Russia have been hit by Hollywood's embargo over the invasion of Ukraine. "It's not an abandonment of the market. It's a pause until there's peace, until there's the right time to come back into the market," said Fithian. — AFP



## First 'Avatar 2' footage shown as Disney, Universal hit CinemaCon

James Cameron said his long-delayed sequel to "Avatar," the highest-earning movie of all time, would "push the limits of what cinema can do," as Disney and Universal presented first looks at their upcoming movies in Las Vegas Wednesday. Attendees at the CinemaCon movie theater industry summit were invited to don 3D glasses and return to Pandora, with first footage of "Avatar: The Way of Water" showing Na'vi characters swimming beneath the planet's oceans and soaring through its skies. The movie, which will be released in December, is the first of four planned sequels to the \$2.8 billion-grossing original from 2009. "I can assure you it's been well worth the wait," said Disney distribution chief Tony Chambers, confirming the film's name. Cameron addressed CinemaCon via video from New Zealand, where finishing touches are being put in place on the film.

He promised giant technological leaps forward from the original, whose main characters Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) now have a family. "We set out once again to push the limits of what cinema can do," said Cameron. To reacquaint audiences with Pandora nearly 13 years after the smash hit original, which sparked a 3D wave in Hollywood, the first "Avatar" will be re-released in theaters in September.

## 'The next decade'

Movie theater bosses are gathering at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas for their annual meeting, where Hollywood studios bring fresh footage and A-list stars to court the industry. Marvel Studios boss Kevin Feige kicked off the morning's Disney presentation, telling attendees that planning for "the next decade" of the record-grossing



In this file photo US director and actress Olivia Wilde holds an envelope reading "personal and confidential" as she speaks onstage during the Warner Bros. Pictures "The Big Picture" presentation.—AFP

## Olivia Wilde served legal papers live on stage

When Olivia Wilde was handed a mysterious envelope on stage midway through her presentation before a packed Las Vegas audience, many assumed it was the set-up for an elaborate joke. Instead, she was getting served legal papers from her ex-partner Jason Sudeikis. "This is for me, right?" asked Wilde, interrupted while introducing

## Homemade library builds bookish community in S Africa's Soweto

Behind an unmarked gate, on a residential street in South Africa's Soweto township, Thami Mazibuko makes his way down a corridor and up a stairwell, all lined with books. Here in his childhood home, the 36-year-old has turned the upper level into a bookstore and library, seeded with 30 of his own books, now overflowing with hundreds of donations. The slender man's face lights up as he rummages through the stacks to find some of the most popular reads-currently Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Sol Plaatje's "Mhudi," the first novel in English by a black South African.

"Books, they put you in other people's shoes," Mazibuko told AFP. "I want people to visit here, and be transported into other communities." As a child, he can't remember having any books in his home. After he finished school, he left Soweto and moved into the formerly white suburbs of Johannesburg, staying with relatives who were artists, with a home full of books. He developed an insatiable appetite for reading, even bring books into the reggae club where he liked to listen to music.

When he decided to move back home, he brought his growing personal collection with him. "Readers who do not have access to books, your old aunts, they are like 'you have books! Can I borrow one?'" he recalled. "And I am like, okay aunty it's fine." So began the Soweto Book Cafe, officially founded in 2018.

Now, he sells books to those with enough money to buy them. And he offers a membership fee of 50 rand (\$3.50) a year for people who want to borrow books-though in reality, he loans them to almost

anyone who asks. "That's one of the reasons I started this place, to advance literacy and to provide the community with access to books and information, which is a basic human right," he said.

## 'Reading Is Super Cool'

The Book Cafe also hosts a youth group, called Reading Is Super Cool, with 50 regular members from ages four to 16. Older kids read to younger ones, and Mazibuko teaches them board games like chess and go. Sindisiwe Zulu, 27, started the book club to help her niece get through school. "She was failing dismally and I asked her," why.

The reply was that she didn't know how to read: "I don't understand a thing that is why I am failing." "I have a lot of books at home, and I initially started with her and a few friends, and started the book club," Zulu said. Neighborhood start-ups like the Book Cafe took on even greater importance during South Africa's stringent COVID lockdown, when public libraries were closed for more than a year.

Small bookshops such as this one proliferate across Johannesburg, usually offering second-hand books, but also a sense of community. The last major survey of Johannesburg's books scene was completed a decade ago, as part of the World Cities Culture Report, which found the city has 1,020 bookshops-just five less than Paris, and about 250 more than New York.

Mazibuko likes to focus on African literature, and has hosted book launches and readings on his unassuming residential street. More importantly, he provides a quiet, safe space for his neighborhood. "I come to do my assignments, read and de-stress," said 14-year-old Anele Ndlovu, one of the Soweto Book Cafe's regulars. "It's where I like to think about what I want in my life." Her dream is to go into finance, and become a forex trader. So while she's enjoying a Michael Connelly's thriller at the moment, she knows what she'd like to read next: "Books that can teach us how life is, and how markets work." — AFP



footage from her upcoming thriller "Don't Worry Darling" during Warner Bros' presentation at CinemaCon, the annual movie theater industry gathering.

"Very mysterious. I'm going to open it now," she said, opening an envelope marked "Personal and Confidential" after it was slid calmly onto the stage by an unknown person. Glancing at its contents, she asked "Is this a script? OK, got it. Thank you," before returning to her description of her upcoming thriller, hardly missing a beat. The envelope was never referred to again during the presentation, prompting speculation that somebody had tried to slip a new screenplay to the actor-director.

But it emerged Wednesday the document held legal papers concerning two

children Wilde has with her former partner Sudeikis, star of television comedy "Ted Lasso." "Papers were drawn up to establish jurisdiction relating to the children of Ms. Wilde and Mr Sudeikis," a source close to Sudeikis told AFP Wednesday.

"Mr Sudeikis had no prior knowledge of the time or place that the envelope would have been delivered as this would solely be up to the process service company involved and he would never condone her being served in such an inappropriate manner." Wilde's representatives did not respond to a request for comment. "Don't Worry Darling," a twisty, erotic thriller inspired by "The Truman Show" and "Inception," stars Harry Styles, who is currently dating Wilde. — AFP



Actor Johnny Depp attends his defamation trial against his ex-wife Amber Heard, at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax.—AFP

## Disney dropped Depp from 'Pirates' over abuse allegations

Johnny Depp was dropped from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise because of the domestic abuse allegations made by Amber Heard, his former Hollywood agent said Wednesday, backing up the actor's claim against his ex-wife. "My opinion is that it was related to the accusations that Amber has made," Christian Carino, who works for Creative Arts Agency, said in a videotaped deposition in the defamation suit filed by Depp against Heard. Depp filed a defamation case 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."

The 36-year-old Heard never named the 58-year-old Depp but he sued her for implying that 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. 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." Carino, Depp and Heard's former agent, said it was never explicitly stated by Disney that Depp was being dropped from the "Pirates" franchise because of the domestic abuse accusations but it was "understood." Depp, testifying earlier on his own behalf, blamed the accusations by Heard for the loss of his lucrative role in "Pirates" as Captain Jack Sparrow.

## 'Just filling space'

Carino, the former fiance of Lady Gaga, was also asked about Heard's relationship with billionaire Tesla and SpaceX founder Elon Musk that followed her 2017 divorce from Depp. Lawyers for Depp read out August 2017 text messages between Carino and Heard, who starred in the movie "Aquaman." "Dealing with breakup. I hate when things go public. See, I'm so sad," Heard said in a message about the end of her relationship with Musk. "You weren't in love with him and you told me 1,000 times you were just filling space," Carino replied. "Why would you be sad if you weren't in love with him to begin with?" Heard responded: "I know but I wanted time to grieve and recover in my own time."

Asked by a lawyer for Depp if Heard was referring to Musk or Depp, Carino said "I don't know." He also provided her with some advice. "You could avoid all this if you stopped dating uber-famous people," he said. "You can be with a big man who isn't famous." Testifying last week, Depp said the allegations that he was a "drunken, cocaine-fueled menace who beat women" have cost him "everything." Depp denied ever physically abusing Heard and claimed that she was the one who was frequently violent. 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. — AFP

## Sports

# Star all-rounder Ben Stokes named England Test captain

**LONDON:** Star all-rounder Ben Stokes was named as England's new Test captain on Thursday, replacing Joe Root, who stood down earlier this month after a string of painful defeats. The 30-year-old, who served as Root's deputy, was the overwhelming favorite to take charge of a struggling team that have won just one of their past 17 matches.

Stokes, whose career is peppered with staggering performances with bat and ball, has been a loyal lieutenant to Root and made a point of praising his friend and predecessor in a short statement. "I am honored to be given the chance to lead the England Test team," he said. "This is a real privilege and I'm excited about getting started this summer. "I want to thank Joe for everything he has done for English cricket and for always being a great ambassador for the sport all across the world. He has been a massive part of my development as a leader in the dressing room and he will continue to be a key ally for me in this role."

Root resigned after five years in charge following a 1-0 series loss in the Caribbean, which came hot on the heels of a humiliating 4-0 Ashes defeat in Australia. New managing director of England men's cricket Rob Key told Sky Sports that Stokes was

the "obvious choice". "I just think the time is right for him," Key said. "He's been a leader in that dressing room for a long, long time. He's been the one that people turned to a lot of the time. "He's a strong leader, he's got a good cricketing brain. Everything he's done has got him to this point." The former England batsman added: "He's got a hell of a lot of empathy as well.... All of those traits, as well as an outstanding cricket brain, make him the obvious choice."

## New Zealand challenge

Stokes, who made his Test debut in 2013, has scored more than 5,000 Test runs and taken 174 wickets in 79 matches and is also one of the stars of England's white-ball teams. He has created his own personal highlights reel with his powerful batting, pace bowling and outstanding fielding, with 2019 a standout year. First he won the man-of-the-match award for an unbeaten 84 in the 50-over World Cup final at Lord's, where England triumphed against New Zealand.

Then the following month he produced an innings for the ages, smashing a match-winning 135 not out in England's astounding one-wicket win over

Australia at Headingley. But the new skipper has also had setbacks during his golden career. His cricket was put on pause following a fracas outside a nightclub in September 2017. That led to a charge of affray and although he was eventually found not guilty in court, he missed the 2017/18 Ashes.

Last year he took a break from the game to "prioritize his mental health", returning for England's ill-fated Ashes campaign. Stokes's first match as the permanent England skipper will come against New Zealand, the country of his birth, at the start of a three-Test series at Lord's on June 2. He previously captained the Test side in a four-wicket defeat by the West Indies in Southampton two years ago when Root was on paternity leave - his only first-class match in charge.

But he has long been regarded as a leading figure in the England dressing room. He was praised for the way he led an inexperienced side in a 3-0 one-day international series win at home to Pakistan last year after a coronavirus outbreak ruled out the first-choice squad. Key is still looking to appoint a permanent head coach, although he has said he will split the job into separate red and white-ball roles.

He added that Stokes wanted both James



Ben Stokes

Anderson and Stuart Broad, England's two all-time leading Test wicket-takers, who were both left out of the West Indies tour, to be considered for selection. "I told them, 'I can't promise you're going to play but you're available' and Ben Stokes has been very clear he wants Jimmy and Broady to come back in," he said. —AFP

## Rashid's last-over heroics pull off IPL heist for Gujarat

**MUMBAI:** Afghanistan's Rashid Khan hit two sixes off the final two balls to pull off a sensational chase for Gujarat Titans after Sunrisers Hyderabad pace sensation Umran Malik took his first IPL five-for on Wednesday. Needing 196 for victory, Gujarat slipped to 140-5 but Rashid (31) joined Rahul Tewatia (40) to turn the match on its head and the pair hit four sixes between them to score the 22 runs required from the final over and win by five wickets in Mumbai.

Tewatia hit the first six followed by a single and Rashid then smacked three sixes in four balls off South African left-arm quick Marco Jansen. The left-right batting pair of Tewatia and Rashid put on an unbeaten stand of 59 off 24 deliveries to fire Gujarat, one of the two new teams, to the top of the 10-team IPL table. "Happy to deliver against them, just trying to play my game and have that belief in my batting which I'm working on from the last two years," said Rashid. "When it was 22 left, I just told Tewatia that we have given 25 in the last over with one of our best bowlers bowling and I told him that we needed to have that belief and not panic, anything is possible."

The batting fireworks overshadowed Malik's 5-25 as the 22-year-old bowler from the Jammu region in Indian-administered Kashmir clocked speeds of over 150 km/h. The menacing bowler with a thick mop of hair and a silver chain around his neck got the key wickets of skipper Hardik Pandya (10), Wriddhiman Saha (68), and David Miller (17) to rattle Gujarat. He ended Saha's stinging 38-ball knock with an unplayable yorker at nearly 153 km/h to raise the roof at the Wankhede Stadium.

Malik, who was named man of the match despite ending on the losing side, beat David Miller with another pacy delivery as the ball crashed into the stumps and then bowled Abhinav Manohar for a duck. "He is a fast bowler," former England batter Kevin Pietersen screamed on commentary. "He is going to rattle stumps for a long time." Skipper Kane Williamson said: "He's sort of been bowling beautifully really and making a difference but it was only a matter of time before he would have a day like this."

South Africa's Aiden Markram hit 56 and Shashank Singh clubbed 25 off only six deliveries to power Hyderabad to 195 for six after being sent into bat first. Markram and Abhishek Sharma put on 96 for the third wicket to set the platform for the total that was boosted by Singh's last-over blitz of three sixes. Pace bowler Mohammed Shami took three wickets. —AFP

## Quick Malik tipped for India after igniting IPL

**NEW DELHI:** Speed demon Umran Malik is being backed to win a place in India's bowling attack after lighting up the IPL with deliveries of more than 150kph and wickets galore. The 22-year-old returned figures of 5-25, becoming the first player on a losing team this season to be awarded man of the match, as his Sunrisers Hyderabad team went down to Gujarat Titans in a last-over thriller on Wednesday.

Malik's rise from the Jammu region of Indian-administered Kashmir to the Indian Premier League has been nothing short of a fairytale. The son of a fruit vendor rattled Gujarat's big guns including skipper Hardik Pandya, Wriddhiman Saha and David Miller to earn rich praise from cricketing greats. Former Test captain Sunil Gavaskar had already predicted Malik would play for India and, after the express bowler's five-wicket haul, said India should "take him to England for the one-off Test and the limited-overs (in July)."

Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen said on Star Sports: "I think what was more exciting than these five wickets is the way Sunny (Gavaskar) was celebrating in the commentary box. "Punching the ceiling, jumping and screaming. I think Sunny did that because how often have we seen India produc-

## Afridi proud to be part of Pak English county contingent

**LONDON:** Paceman Shaheen Shah Afridi hopes Pakistan will reap the benefits of their players' involvement in English county cricket as he prepares for his home debut with Middlesex. The young bowler is one of 10 Pakistani cricketers who have signed as overseas players for at least part of the 2022 season.

The high-profile contingent also includes fellow internationals Mohammad Abbas, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Shan Masood, Azhar Ali and Mohammad Rizwan. "I think, this year, I saw like nine or 10 players here and that's good for Pakistan cricket," Afridi said Wednesday, on the eve of Middlesex's County Championship match against Leicestershire at Lord's.

Since the 2019 World Cup in England and Wales, Pakistan have been frequent visitors to England despite

ing the fastest bowler in world cricket?" India, once renowned for producing spin bowlers, currently have a potent pace attack led by Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah.

The fast bowling revolution was started more than 20 years ago by Zaheer Khan, now director of cricket with Mumbai Indians, and has seen a steady stream of world-class pace bowlers emerge since. Malik, menacing with a thick mop of hair and a silver chain, bowled Saha with an unplayable yorker at nearly 153kph to raise the roof at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. He flattened Miller's stumps with another pacy delivery and then bowled Abhinav Manohar for a duck to register his first IPL five-wicket return.

## 'Learn and improve'

"The idea was just to bowl as fast as I can. The ground is slightly on the smaller side so the idea is to stay on the stumps, mix the pace and try to keep the ball within the stumps," Malik said. "God willing, if I have to bowl 155kph, I will do it one day. But at the moment, all I want to do is bowl well." Gujarat's New Zealand import Lockie Ferguson has bowled the fastest delivery at 153.9kph this year so far.

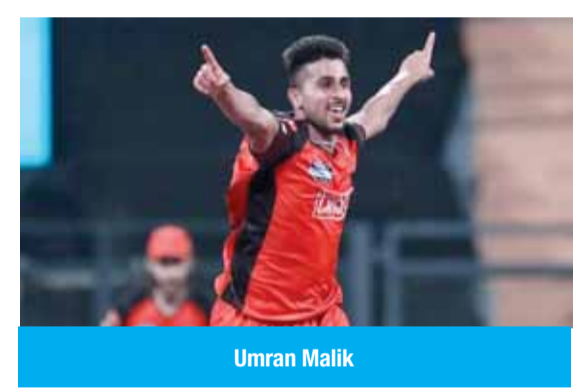
Australia's Shaun Tait bowled the IPL's fastest ball at 157kph in 2011. Malik was picked up by Hyderabad last season as a Covid replacement for T Natarajan. His raw pace in just three matches prompted the India team management to keep him in the United Arab Emirates after the IPL as a net bowler for the T20 World Cup. Hyderabad, champions in 2016, retained him for \$523,000 ahead of the

the coronavirus pandemic. In 2020 they lost a three-match Test series 1-0 and drew a Twenty20 campaign 1-1, while last year Pakistan were beaten 3-0 in a one-day international campaign and went down 2-1 in a T20 contest. Left-arm fast bowler Afridi, 22, said the team had under-performed. "We played not good cricket here as a team, so now I think the top guys are all there," he said. "So maybe it will be good for us (to get to know) the conditions and the pitches. Maybe this will help the national team as well."

Pakistan players have long been familiar to fans of English domestic cricket. Asif Iqbal (Kent), batting great Zaheer Abbas (Gloucestershire) and star all-rounder Imran Khan (Sussex), recently ousted as Pakistan's prime minister, all became familiar figures on the county scene from the 1960s onwards.

## Alternative to IPL

But the expansion of the international program in recent decades, allied to the growth of franchise T20 cricket, means top overseas cricketers are increasingly unlikely to spend an entire English season at a club. Pakistan players, however, are effectively banned from participating in the Indian Premier League, the



Umran Malik

auction this season and the bowler has repaid them with 15 wickets in eight matches.

"The rise and rise of Umran Malik is the story of this IPL," tweeted former India opener Wasim Jaffer. Malik was mentored by former India fast bowler Irfan Pathan at the Kashmir state side and now is under the tutelage of South Africa fast-bowling great Dale Steyn, Hyderabad's bowling coach. "Umran is growing in confidence as the tournament unfolds. He bowled exceptionally well tonight," said Hyderabad coach Tom Moody. "The most pleasing thing with Umran is he is constantly wanting to learn and improve."

The troubled region of Kashmir has thrown up exciting talent in the IPL including Malik's Hyderabad teammate Abdul Samad, an attacking batsman. Off-spinner Parvez Rasool became the first player from Jammu and Kashmir to be awarded an IPL contract in 2013. —AFP



Shaheen Shah Afridi

world's most high-profile Twenty20 competition, on political grounds.

And that has made county cricket an increasingly attractive option. Afridi took four wickets on his Middlesex debut in an innings victory away to Glamorgan last week, twice dismissing Australia's Marnus Labuschagne, the world's top-ranked Test batsman. Masood has started the season in breathtaking form, with 611 runs under his belt for Derbyshire so far this season, including two double centuries. —AFP

## Fatat win triple table tennis titles

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The women's table tennis team at Fatat Club won the open title for 2021-2022 Wednesday, giving it a triple crown, as besides this win they also won in the singles and doubles categories. The tournament began Saturday at Salwa Al-Sabah Club Hall in Qurain with the participation of Al-Arabi, Salwa Al-Sabah and Fatat. Salwa Al-Sabah came second and Arabi was third. In the under-13 category, Salwa Al-Sabah team won first place, Fatat were second and Oyoum third.

Competition in the singles open category was

strong, but Fatat players proved to be up to the task and took the top three places. Mariam Baroun won gold, Minva Al-Shimmari won silver and Sheikha Al-Hamad won bronze. In the singles combination for juniors and youth (under-15 and -18), Salwa Club players Jana Abdallah and Dhuha Al-Khaled won first and second places, while third place went to Fatayat Al-Oyoum player Ameerah Faraj.

Chairwoman of the women's committee at the Table Tennis Federation Khalid Al-Ali lauded the cooperation of all clubs, adding that the league matches are going on in the best way possible. She also commended the cooperation of the federations board headed by Ali Al-Dabbous. She said the second edition of the league witnessed strong competition. "We were happy to see several talented players displaying high-quality levels, and they may join the national team soon," she said.



KUWAIT: The conscripts who attended the shooting course.

## Conscripts complete shooting course

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Shooting Federation concluded the first conscripts' course for those in the military national service department at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Complex. The participants were recognized by President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi, Secretary General Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi and Commander of the National Service Brigade Maj Gen Khalil Fadel Al-Fadli.

"We are happy for graduating this group of our conscripts in cooperation with Kuwait Shooting Sports Club and the ministry of defense for this specialized course that was held from March 6 to April 24. They were trained in different types of shooting,"

Otaibi said after the ceremony. He said there is an agreement with officials to organize courses in cooperation with the defense ministry and KSSC to get them involved in the shooting sport and train them on safety and security systems, besides the ideal use of arms.

Otaibi said these are important courses that the club will benefit from by discovering new talents. He thanked Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for his support. He also thanked the chief of staff and defense ministry officials for their interest and care.

Otaibi also said the Kuwait national shooting team is ready for the Gulf Games, including shooting, which will be held at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Shooting Complex. He welcomed athletes from GCC countries who are participating in this very important championship and thanked the Olympic Committee officials and the Public Authority for Sport for organizing the Gulf Games in Kuwait.



KUWAIT: The winning teams pose with their trophies.

Sports

# Curry shines as Warriors advance, Bucks rout Bulls in NBA playoffs

**LOS ANGELES:** The defending champion Milwaukee Bucks and resurgent Golden State Warriors completed 4-1 series victories to advance to the second round of the NBA playoffs on Wednesday. In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points as the Bucks brushed aside the Chicago Bulls 116-100 to clinch a comfortable series win and advance to an Eastern Conference showdown with the Boston Celtics.

In San Francisco, Golden State relied on 30 points from Stephen Curry and a crucial late 15-point cameo from Gary Payton II to seal a pulsating 102-98 victory over reigning MVP Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets. The Warriors will now face either the Memphis Grizzlies or Minnesota Timberwolves in the Western Conference semifinals.

The Warriors, who had led the series 3-0 before dropping game four in Colorado on Sunday, dug deep in the fourth quarter to clinch victory at the Chase Center. The Nuggets, buoyed by a towering 30-point display from Jokic, had led by eight points at the end of the third period. But Golden State outscored the visitors 32-20 in the fourth quarter - with Payton contributing 10 points - to claim a dramatic win.

The victory was Golden State's first playoff series win since 2019 after two consecutive seasons where they missed the postseason. "I think you could see those first three quarters we'd forgotten what it felt like to try and close out a game," Curry said. "The nerves, the energy, the pressure in the building. It's been a long time since we've felt this. We still know how to do it but we had to grind it out. It's a good feeling to go through and get the win."

While Curry led the Warriors scoring, Draymond Green delivered another huge shift marshalling the defense against the threat of Jokic. "What Draymond does is hard to quantify because the stats never do him justice," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "I just feel like he's built for the playoffs. This is what he's all about. Regular season is hard for him because the games aren't as meaningful and he's at his best when the games are most important."

### Bucks gore Bulls

In Milwaukee, Antetokounmpo was in dominant form, shooting 11-of-15 from the field and finishing with nine rebounds as the defending NBA champion Bucks romped to victory at the Fiserv Forum. "I just wanted

to set the tone, come out and play hard," Antetokounmpo said. "Sometimes when you're up 15 or 20 points you start being sloppy with the ball or not playing as hard. I think our team kept their composure, kept playing hard, kept making shots."

Antetokounmpo received scoring support from Pat Connaughton with 20 points while Bobby Portis had a double-double with 14 points and 17 rebounds. It was another emphatic win for Milwaukee after victories by hefty double-digit margins in games three and four of the best-of-seven series. Milwaukee will approach that series brimming with confidence after swatting aside sixth-seeded Chicago with ease.

"It's big," Antetokounmpo said of the task in front of his team. "We've got to get some rest, go back and practise, watch some film, take care of our body and get ready for Boston." On Thursday's evidence, Milwaukee will approach that series brimming with confidence after swatting aside sixth-seeded Chicago with ease.

The Bucks blazed into an early 20-7 lead in the first quarter and remained comfortably ahead of Chicago for the remainder of a one-sided contest. Milwaukee's lead



**SAN FRANCISCO:** Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors is guarded by Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets in the second half during Game Five of the Western Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Chase Center on April 27, 2022. —AFP

stretched to 29 points in the second quarter and although Chicago closed the gap to 11 points early in the third, another burst of scoring saw the Bucks surge into a 91-68

lead heading into the final quarter. Chicago star DeMar DeRozan was restricted to just 11 points while Patrick Williams led the Bulls scorers with 23 points. —AFP

## Players hit by pitches leads to MLB brawl

**WASHINGTON:** A benches-clearing brawl sparked by batters being hit by pitches erupted Wednesday in a Major League Baseball game between the New York Mets and St Louis Cardinals. Rising tensions over days led to the fracas in the bottom of the eighth inning at St Louis in the Cardinals' 10-5 triumph over the Mets, who were involved in their second melee since the season began three weeks ago.

New York pitcher Yoan Lopez threw a pitch high and inside the strike zone to St. Louis slugger Nolan Arenado. The Cardinals batter shouted back to Lopez on the pitcher's mound and players from both benches raced to the infield to exchange blows. Pitchers even raced in from workout areas beyond the outfield wall to become involved in the melee.

Arenado and Cardinals first-base coach Stubby Clapp were ejected for their actions. The Mets, whose MLB-leading record fell to 14-6, have had an MLB-high 19 batters struck by pitches from opponents this season. Setting the stage for the eruption Wednesday was New York slugger J.D. Davis being hit in the left foot by a

throw in the top of the eighth. Davis left the game after being struck.

That marked the sixth time in the series at St Louis that a Mets batter had been struck by a ball thrown by a Cardinals pitcher. Mets slugger Pete Alonso was struck by a pitch on Tuesday in a New York victory and forced to undergo concussion protocols after the game. He was found well enough to play on Wednesday. The tensions came to a head only hours after Mets pitcher Chris Bassitt said MLB was putting players at risk after seeing three teammates hit by pitches on Tuesday.

The Mets won 3-0 but Bassitt and Mets manager Buck Showalter weren't celebrating after Alonso was struck in the head by a pitch for the second time this season. Cardinals starter Jordan Hicks had already hit Dominic Smith in the second inning before Kodi Whitley hit Alonso in the helmet in the eighth. Aaron Brooks hit Starling Marte in the ninth with the bases loaded.

### 'A very big problem'

Bassitt, who himself dinged two Cardinals batters with pitches, said the problem is with "different" baseballs in use this season. "To get hit in the head the amount that we're getting hit is unbelievable," Bassitt said. "I had some close calls tonight, and I've been hit in the face and I don't want to do that to anybody ever, but MLB has a very big problem with the baseballs. They're bad. Everyone in the league knows it. Every pitcher knows it. They're bad."

black people in these spaces. Why? Because in Brazil it's not common to have black people in any positions of power. Football just reflects... our racist society," he says. Black and mixed-race Brazilians make up 55.8 percent of the country's 213 million people. But they occupy just 24.4 percent of seats in Congress, and 29.9 percent of management positions, according to the national statistics institute, IBGE.

From the Selecao to the domestic league, Brazil's beloved football teams typically reflect the country's racial diversity. But coaching jobs are another matter. Just a handful of black men have coached in the first division in recent years: Andrade, Cristovao Borges, Marcao and Roger Machado, in addition to Ventura. The national team has had two black coaches: Gentil Cardoso (1959) and Vanderlei Luxemburgo (1998-2000) - though in a sign of how messy the issue of race can be, the relatively light-skinned Luxemburgo, who went on to coach Real Madrid, publicly self-identified as black only later in life. "There is structural prejudice... against black coaches," the Selecao's current boss, Tite, said in October.

Experts say that is part of the legacy of slavery and the systems that kept black people from positions of power after Brazil abolished it in 1888. "After slavery ended, Brazil never had a policy of opportunities for black people, so the idea became rooted in society that black people aren't occupying those spaces because they don't



**ST LOUIS:** Paul Goldschmidt #46 of the St Louis Cardinals attempts to restrain Tomas Nido #3 of the New York Mets after the benches cleared in the eighth inning at Busch Stadium on April 27, 2022. —AFP

Mets manager Buck Showalter has suggested that MLB approve a "universal substance" that all pitchers could use to help them grip the ball after MLB cracked down on the use of sticky "foreign substances" by pitchers last season. After Tuesday's game, Showalter was less concerned with baseball's overall problem than with the safety of his own players. "You're talking about a pitch that broke his helmet," he said of the ball that struck Alonso - who had already been hit in the face by a pitch this season. "It's not good, I'm not happy." —AFP

want to or are intellectually inferior," says Carvalho.

Roger Machado, the 47-year-old coach of second-division club Gremio, says he has felt the sting of racism and discrimination throughout his life, on the pitch and off. Machado, who has coached some of Brazil's top teams, including Atletico Mineiro, Palmeiras and Fluminense, says people commonly assume he is a bodyguard when he is out with his mixed-race daughter. "Football shows what we are as a society," he told AFP. "When blacks start to scale the social pyramid, the filters start to appear - the filters created by racism that say blacks are less intelligent, less capable of leadership and management."

He says the problem has only grown more acute under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has faced frequent accusations of racism. "The (racist) individuals who were in hiding now feel authorized to speak out in line with the stances and viewpoints coming from our nation's leader," he says. "We have to resist that." —AFP



Roger Machado

## Ledecky dominates in 200m free at US championship trials

**WASHINGTON:** US freestyle great Katie Ledecky punched her ticket to a second individual event at the 2022 World Championships with a dominant 200m freestyle victory at the US trials on Wednesday. Ledecky, the 200m free gold medalist at the 2016 Rio Olympics, clocked 1min 55.15sec to beat 15-year-old Claire Weinstein (1:57.08) by almost two seconds. Ledecky's time made her the second-fastest in the world this year behind Australian Ariarne Titmus, who is not expected to compete at the World Championship in Budapest June 18-July 3.

As in her impressive 800m free victory on Tuesday, Ledecky swam faster than she did in the Tokyo Olympic final last year. Kieran Smith, who won 400m free bronze in Tokyo last year, won the men's 200m free in 1:45.25, just one of the 2022 world-leading times produced on Wednesday on the second day of the trials in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Drew Kibler was second in 1:45.32, second-fastest in the world this year, coming up just short in his late challenge to Smith. Ryan Murphy won the men's 200m backstroke in a world-leading 1:55.01, surging over the final 100m to overtake Shaine Casas, who finished second in 1:55.46. Lilly King went out fast and held on to win the women's 200m breaststroke in a world-leading 2:21.19, with collegiate star Kate Douglass finishing second in 2:21.43, booking her berth in Budapest in the second-quickest time this year.

Seven-time Olympic gold medalist Catech Dressel won the men's 50m butterfly in 22.84sec, a US Open record that is second-fastest in the world this year behind Brazilian world record-holder Nicholas Santos's 22.73. —AFP



**GREENSBORO, North Carolina:** Katie Ledecky competes in the women's 200m freestyle finals on day two of the Phillips 66 International Team Trials at the Greensboro Aquatic Center on April 27, 2022. —AFP

## Black coaches rare in Brazilian football

**SAO PAULO:** Pele, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Neymar: Brazil has a long list of legendary black and mixed-race football stars. But the coach's bench remains a largely white domain. More than six decades after Pele led the Selecao to the first of their five World Cup titles, in 1958, prejudice and discrimination still divide Brazilian football, a reflection of structural racism in the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, experts say. Of the 20 teams in Brazil's top-flight league, just one, Goias, currently has a black coach: Jair Ventura, son of 1970 World Cup-winning talisman Jairzinho. Most seasons, there are none. "The most striking thing about that isn't that there are no black coaches... it's that the debate doesn't even exist in Brazilian football," says Marcelo Carvalho, executive director of the Observatory on Racial Discrimination in Football.

In the United States and Europe, the lack of black coaches in professional sports has long drawn criticism. In Brazil, the issue has barely registered, Carvalho told AFP. "It's seen as normal in Brazilian society not to have

# Classifieds

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LIVERPOOL: Villarreal's French midfielder Francis Coquelin fights for the ball with Liverpool's French defender Ibrahima Konate during their UEFA Champions League semifinal first leg match at Anfield Stadium on April 27, 2022. —AFP

## Dominant Liverpool roll over Villarreal

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp warned that Liverpool must remain "on alert" despite putting one foot in the Champions League final with a dominant 2-0 win over Villarreal in the first leg of their semi-final tie at Anfield on Wednesday. Two goals in two minutes undid Villarreal boss Unai Emery's defensive game plan as Pervis Estupinan deflected Jordan Henderson's cross into his own net before Sadio Mane slotted in a second.

The Reds remain on course for an unprecedented quadruple of Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup. And barring a huge upset when the sides meet again in southern Spain in six days' time, Liverpool's season will finish with a third Champions League final in five seasons in Paris on May 28. "It is 2-0 at half-time," said Liverpool boss Klopp. "You have to be completely on alert, 100 percent in the right moment and play the second half like we played the first. We know it will be a tricky atmosphere for us."

In stark contrast to the free-flowing thrills of Manchester City's 4-3 win over Real Madrid in the other semi-final, on Tuesday, Emery's men followed the same tactic that saw them past Juventus and

Bayern Munich by retreating behind the ball. However, the Yellow Submarine could barely lay a glove on Klopp's men as Liverpool just had to bide their time to make their dominance count. "The 2-0 is a clear, deserved result," said Emery. "It could have been even worse but we still have a chance. "I want to show we are capable of playing a different game at home."

### Shaky Rulli

The Reds have now scored 135 goals this season, but were held scoreless in a frustrating first 45 minutes. Mane headed wide Mohamed Salah's pinpoint cross with the best opening. The Senegalese also saw a deflected effort fly just wide and Villarreal goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli escaped unpunished with some sloppy handling from a number of speculative efforts.

Another long-range strike was the closest Liverpool came to breaking the deadlock before the break as Thiago Alcantara's sweet strike clipped the post. The six-time European champions started the second half at a higher tempo and quickly began to punch holes in Villarreal's rearguard. Fabinho's goal was ruled out for

offside against Virgil van Dijk in the build-up.

Moments later, Anfield erupted as the error-prone Rulli finally cost the Spaniards with a feeble attempt at parrying Henderson's deflected cross. The last thing the visitors could afford was the floodgates opening, but they were powerless to stop the waves of Liverpool attacks. Salah was the architect with a perfectly weighted pass for Mane to prod past Rulli on 55 minutes.

The offside flag came to Villarreal's rescue once more to rule out Andy Robertson's strike. Emery was hailed the "king of the cups" by Klopp for his stunning Europa League record, with one of his four triumphs in that competition coming as Sevilla boss against the German during his first season at Liverpool in 2016.

However, Liverpool are a different beast six years on and the limitations of a side sitting seventh in La Liga were shown up as they struggled to mount any sort of response to going behind. Luis Diaz smashed across the face of goal as Liverpool threatened to kill the tie off with a third. The English giants had to settle for a two-goal advantage, but they are yet to lose by a two-goal margin in 55 matches this season. —AFP

### Quadruple-chasing Liverpool hitting all the right notes

LIVERPOOL: As Liverpool fans all around Anfield celebrated their Champions League semi-final first leg victory over Villarreal, it was fitting they choose a Beatles song to serenade the mastermind of their bid for football immortality. In recent months, Jurgen Klopp has been feted by supporters who have turned the Beatles' 'I feel fine' into a song of praise for the Liverpool manager. "Jurgen said to me, you know. We'll win the Premier League, you know. He said so. I'm in love with him and I feel fine," they chant from the Kop.

Never has the work of Merseyside's most famous musical sons been more appropriate than on Wednesday. Liverpool won 2-0 against a Villarreal team nicknamed the 'Yellow Submarine' since the 1960s when the Spanish club's fans used the Beatles song in tribute to their yellow shirts. Villarreal tried to frustrate Liverpool with a defensive game-plan - a formula that had earned them shock wins over Juventus and Bayern Munich in the previous two rounds - but Klopp's men torpedoed them with a patient display.

It took 53 minutes to break down Villarreal's stubborn rearguard action, when Jordan Henderson's cross deflected off Pervis Estupinan and looped into the net. Two minutes later, Sadio Mane doubled Liverpool's lead to put them in pole position to reach the Champions League final for a third time in five seasons. Yet the Reds have more than a seventh European Cup triumph, and second of Klopp's reign, in their sights.

They are chasing an unprecedented quadruple. No English team has ever won all four major trophies in one season, not even Arsenal's 2004 'Invincibles' or Manchester United's 1999 treble winners. For Liverpool, who have already won this season's League Cup, that is the historic goal now. They sit one point behind Premier League leaders Manchester City with five games left and face Chelsea in the FA Cup final in May. Needing a slip from City to take the title, Liverpool don't have their destiny in their own hands, but they are playing well enough to keep dreaming.

### 'Best I've ever seen'

Winning a quadruple would establish them as the greatest of all Liverpool's golden generations, better even than the 1988 vintage of John Barnes and Peter Beardsley and the late 1970s and early '80s crop of Kenny Dalglish and Graeme Souness. Mirroring the transformation of the city's Albert Dock into a vibrant, urban hub, Klopp's team are building their own history from the storied foundations laid by their forefathers.

From murals of greats like Dalglish and Steven Gerrard to statues of Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley, the streets around Anfield are a living monument to Liverpool's past. Towering high over the red brick terraced houses of the Walton district, Anfield would be unrecognizable to fans who watched their first dominant era in the 1960s. Back then, Shankly became a Liverpool icon as he led them to sustained success after taking over a club languishing in the second tier. But echoes from the Shankly era still reverberate to this day, with his ethos that Anfield must be a "bastion of invincibility" a core tenet of Klopp's regime. —AFP

### VAR to rescue as Seattle stun Pumas

MEXICO CITY: Nicolas Lodeiro scored two second-half penalties as the Seattle Sounders stunned Mexican side Pumas UNAM to snatch a 2-2 draw in the first leg of the CONCACAF Champions League final on Wednesday. Seattle skipper Lodeiro completed a remarkable fightback in the ninth minute of stoppage time, burying his second spotkick of the game to give the Sounders an improbable draw at Mexico City's Estadio Olimpico Universitario.

Uruguay international Lodeiro had handed Seattle a lifeline in the 77th minute after slotting the Sounders' first penalty. Until that point Pumas had looked to be cruising to victory after two goals from Argentine striker Juan Dinunno left the Mexican club in control of the tie. But the game swung back in Seattle's favour after two interventions from VAR resulted in Sounders penalties.

The first came 13 minutes from time when VAR ruled Pumas substitute Sebastian Saucedo handled in the area. VAR then prompted referee Ivan Barton to award a second Seattle penalty deep into stoppage time after Cristian Roldan was adjudged to have fouled in the box. The extraordinary conclusion means Seattle's hopes of becoming the first team from Major League Soccer to be crowned champions of North America, Central America and the



MEXICO CITY: Pumas' Argentinian forward Higor Meritao vies for the ball with Cristian Roldan of the Seattle Sounders during their first leg CONCACAF Champions League final match at the Olimpico Universitario on April 27, 2022. —AFP

Caribbean since 2000 are very much alive.

Seattle coach Brian Schmetzer admitted however that his team had been below par. "It might take me until we're halfway back home to really understand what happened in the game," Schmetzer said. "It certainly was an interesting game. "I think it's just getting back to our team understanding what we're good at because tonight I don't think we were at our best."

Seattle host Pumas in the return leg next Tuesday.

For long periods on Wednesday, Seattle looked dead and buried as Pumas took a 2-0 lead. Dinunno rifled home a controversial first-half penalty before burying a header early in the second half to put the Mexican club ahead. A lackluster first half burst into life just after the half-hour mark when Pumas striker Dinunno was brought crashing down in the area after a rugged joint challenge from Yeimar Gomez Andrade and Xavier Arreaga. —AFP

### Mamelodi Sundowns seal fifth straight South African league title

JOHANNESBURG: Mamelodi Sundowns sealed a record-extending fifth consecutive South African Premiership title on Wednesday, despite a 0-0 draw at home to Cape Town City in Pretoria. Securing a point lifted 12-time champions Sundowns to 58 with four matches to play, and second-placed Royal AM can reach only 57. Cape Town stretched an unbeaten league run to nine matches and remain third, boosting chances of qualifying for one of the two African club competitions next season.

Sundowns and the runners-up go into the Champions League and the club finishing third qualifies for the Confederation Cup along with the FA Cup winners. Having won the early season MTN 8 knock-

out competition and the Premiership, Sundowns are on course for a treble as they are away to Royal on Saturday in an FA Cup semifinal.

"It was nice to wrap up the title in front of our supporters," said Sundowns co-coach Rulani Mokwena. "We missed them so much when they were barred from stadiums for two years due to Covid-19 restrictions. "Winning would have been nicer, but there was no lack of effort from our boys tonight. City have not lost this year and proved very resolute opponents. "Five league titles in a row is an incredible achievement and the secret of our success is that everyone at the club works together, from the chairman down."

### 'Well organized defensively'

Cape Town coach Eric Tinkler said they came to Pretoria hoping to "spoil Sundowns' party by securing all three points". "We were extremely well organized defensively, which you have to be to contain a team with the attacking flair of Sundowns. The teams cancelled each other out." City can narrow the gap

behind Royal to a single point if they win away to off-form Kaizer Chiefs on Saturday in Johannesburg.

In a match of few clearcut chances, Sundowns came closest when Rushine de Reuck won an aerial duel with Angolan goalkeeper Hugo Marques and nodded just over. Mduzuzi Mdantsane nearly put City ahead early in the second half when he controlled the ball and turned superbly in the goalmouth only to blaze wide. In Durban, fifth-placed Chiefs suffered a third straight loss when surrendering the lead in a 2-1 defeat to mid-table Golden Arrows. Zimbabwean Khama Billiat gave Chiefs an early lead before substitutes Siboniso Conco and Michael Gumede netted for Arrows in the final 30 minutes.

It was only the third time in 17 attempts that Arrows had won at home against Chiefs, who sacked English coach Stuart Baxter last week as a trophy-less run extended to seven seasons. Orlando Pirates climbed one place to fourth despite only drawing 0-0 at home to relegation-threatened Chippa United in a scrappy Soweto match. —AFP