

8 Kuwait Investment Forum boosts support for SMEs



10 Crypto provides fix for some in crisis-hit Afghanistan



16 Ferrari's Leclerc wins dramatic F1 season-opening Bahrain GP



Saudi Aramco profits surge as Houthis strike facilities

Drone attack causes 'temporary reduction' in oil output • Kuwait condemns strike

News in brief

Fadhlah insists to quit

KUWAIT: MP Yousef Al-Fadhlah reiterated in a letter sent to the National Assembly his determination to quit his parliamentary seat. Fadhlah submitted his resignation around 11 months ago because of continuing political disputes. Last week, the Assembly voted to reject the resignation, but Fadhlah insisted he is determined to quit and called for voting again on the issue.



Al-Fadhlah

Army fund meeting 'illegal'

KUWAIT: Deputy National Assembly Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi said yesterday that a special meeting demanded by opposition MPs to discuss the army fund case - after a special tribunal acquitted all suspects - is "unconstitutional", because the case is still being heard before the court. He commended those who submitted the motion, but added that out of respect for the judiciary, the issue cannot be debated now.



Al-Shuhoumi



BEIJING: A health worker takes a swab sample from a woman to be tested for COVID-19 at a swab collection site yesterday. — AFP

China locks down millions

BEIJING: China yesterday imposed stay-at-home orders on millions more people in the country's northeast as it battles its biggest COVID-19 outbreak in two years. Jilin will lock down about 4.5 million inhabitants for three days from tonight, local authorities announced. More than 4,000 new infections were reported across China yesterday - with two-thirds in Jilin province. — AFP

Two die in Lanka fuel queues

COLOMBO: At least two people in Sri Lanka died while waiting in long queues for fuel, officials said yesterday, as widespread shortages cause misery and hardship across the island nation. Police said a 70-year-old man who was standing in line to buy gasoline collapsed and died at a filling station on the outskirts of Colombo yesterday. It was the second such death in as many days, after another elderly man collapsed in Kandy while waiting for kerosene oil to use as cooking fuel. — AFP

RIYADH: Oil giant Saudi Aramco yesterday reported a 124 percent net profit surge for last year, in results released hours after its facilities were hit by Yemeni rebel drone and missile strikes. As the world economy started to rebound from the COVID pandemic, "Aramco's net income increased by 124 percent to \$110.0 billion in 2021, compared to \$49.0 billion in 2020," the company said.

The results followed news of the overnight attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels, which caused no reported casualties but hit targets including Aramco facilities and a water desalination plant. The attacks "led to a temporary reduction in the refinery's production, which will be compensated for from the inventory", said the Saudi energy ministry in a statement on state media, without providing numbers.

The Kuwaiti ministry of foreign affairs yesterday expressed Kuwait's terse denunciation of the dangerous terrorist attacks carried out by the Houthi militias on civilians and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. Such continuous terrorist acts on civil and economic installations in several regions in the kingdom target not only the security of the kingdom and the region, but also aim at disrupting supplies to international energy markets, undermining the global economy and navigation, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

It called for rapid reaction from the international community to deter such criminal and terrorist attacks and bring the culprits into account. Kuwait maintains a full and unwavering stance on the side of the kingdom with respect of the measures it may take to safeguard its security and stability, the ministry affirmed, wishing the injured quick recovery.

The Saudi-led military coalition which backs Yemen's government said it intercepted and destroyed ballistic missiles and drones launched towards Jizan and other areas in the kingdom, causing "damage" to several sites. "Initial investigations indicate the militia used Iranian cruise missiles that targeted Al-Shaqeeq desalination plant and Aramco's Jizan bulk plant," it said in a statement.

Targets included a Dhahran Al-Janoub power station, an Aramco gas plant in Yanbu and a gas station in Khamis Mushait, it said. The Houthis confirmed they had launched the drone and missile attacks targeting a number of "vital and important" sites, including Aramco facilities. In 2019, Houthi-claimed aerial assaults on two Aramco facilities

Continued on Page 2

Russia accused of bombing Ukraine school

KYIV: Ukrainian authorities said yesterday that Russia had bombed a school sheltering 400 people in the besieged port of Mariupol, as Moscow claimed that it had again fired hypersonic missiles in Ukraine, the second time it had used the next-generation weapon on its neighbor. Turkey said that the two sides were close to a deal to stop the fighting, amid reports of more civilians being killed in strikes across the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the siege of Mariupol, a strategic mostly Russian-speaking port in the southeast where utilities and communications have been cut for days, would go down as a war crime. "Our cities have turned into multi-storey ruins, every area is like a horror movie," Sergiy Gaiday, head of the Lugansk regional administration, wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

Continued on Page 2



KRASYLIVKA, Ukraine: An elderly woman stands in front of a destroyed house after bombardments in this village east of Kyiv yesterday as Russian forces try to encircle the Ukrainian capital. — AFP

UAE opens door for Assad return to Arab fold

BEIRUT: A surprise visit by Syria's Bashar Al-Assad to the oil-rich United Arab Emirates opens the door to his isolated regime's return to the embrace of the Arab world, analysts say. The president's trip also showed that a more assertive UAE

is willing to upset its ally Washington with a rapprochement with Assad, whose Russia- and Iran-backed regime is accused of crimes against humanity.

The Syrian autocrat's visit to the UAE capital Abu Dhabi last Friday was his first to an Arab state in more than a decade of brutal civil war that has killed close to half a million people. Assad and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE's de facto ruler, discussed the "fraternal relations" between the two countries, the official news agency WAM reported.

Washington was "profoundly disappointed and

troubled by this apparent attempt to legitimize Bashar Al-Assad," said US State Department spokesman Ned Price, who stressed that "we do not support efforts to rehabilitate Assad".

Badr Al-Saif, a history professor at Kuwait University, said the UAE has pushed for Syria's return to the Arab fold "regardless of the role of the regime in the death and displacement of many Syrians". He said the bold move reflects the way the UAE - a wealthy state that has militarily intervened in conflicts in Libya, Yemen and elsewhere - now sees itself as a regional powerbroker.

Continued on Page 2

Deadly attacks on women rise in Kurdistan

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq: A woman burned alive by her husband, others shot dead by a father or a teenage brother - bloody violence against women has spiked in northern Iraq's Kurdish region. The autonomous area, keen on projecting an image of a relative haven of stability and tolerance in war-battered Iraq, has seen a sharp rise in femicide, killings motivated by gender.

"In the past two months, there has

been an increase in femicide compared to the previous year," said Hiwa Karim Jwamir of the Kurdish General Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women. In the first two months of 2022, 11 women were killed in autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, most of them shot, said the official based in Sulaimaniyah. Forty-five women were killed in 2021, up from 25 the previous year, said Jwamir.

On a Friday before dawn, a 15-year-old teenager was fatally wounded by six bullets fired by her father in the village of Soran. The man told police his daughter "went out with two boys late at night", according to a domestic violence unit which also records so-called "honor killings".

Continued on Page 2



BEIRUT: A member of the Kurdish community in Lebanon takes part in a celebration marking Nowruz (Persian New Year) yesterday. — AFP

Local

IPU 144th session kicks off with Kuwaiti participation

Speaker chairs Islamic Geopolitical meeting

KUALA LUMPUR: Indonesian President Joko Widodo yesterday opened the 144th Session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference in Bali Island, which will continue until March 24, with the participation of Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation.

In the opening ceremony, President Widodo underscored importance of "mobilizing parliamentary action to work on climate change," also stressing necessity of setting up a serious international strategic policy on climate change, considering the ongoing challenges. He also called for attention to renewable energy and harnessing technologies to deal with climate change, indicating that his country has hydroelectric energy, geothermal energy, wind energy and solar energy, but it needs investments, financing and international cooperation.

President Widodo pointed out that in light of the continuation of the COVID 19 pandemic, several issues must be discussed in the conference such as energy scarcity, food prices, logistical transport issues and inflation issues in most countries, as nations are beginning to suffer from the high costs of living. On his part, IPU President Duarte Pacheco said in his speech that the climate change issue must be a priority in the IPU's plans and discussions, adding that the IPU will launch two new "tools for parliamentarians."

The "tools" are a guide on strengthening health security preparedness in partnership with the World Health Organization and the third global parliamentary report on public participation in the work of parliament in partnership with the Parliamentary United Nations Development Program. He stressed on importance of discussing the war in Ukraine and taking tangible actions to stop it and solve the crisis, noting that Ukrainian people are greatly affected by it, as well as the Russian people who are affected by economic sanctions.

On her part, Indonesian Parliament Speaker Maharani Nakshatra said in a similar speech that this year's conference is about mobilizing parliaments to act on climate change, calling for cooperation in setting up a policy on climate change and protecting the world from the impact of those changes. The conference will discuss other issues like the Palestinians' freedom rights, democracy in Myanmar, gender equality and the role of youth in politics, added Nakshatra, stressing the importance of parliamentar-

ians' contribution to making peace in the global geopolitical environment and harnessing diplomacy to prevent wars.

She also stressed on the importance of cooperation between parliaments in facing the pandemic's repercussions through developing local policies that reflect global issues, stressing on the equitable distribution of anti-Coronavirus vaccines and joint cooperation between countries in economic recovery during and after the pandemic.

About 1,000 delegates from 115 countries are participating in the IPU conference, which is hosted by Indonesia for the first time. The IPU is a global organization of national parliaments, established more than 130 years ago as the first multilateral political organization in the world that encourages cooperation and dialogue among all countries.

Islamic Geopolitical meeting

In another development, Kuwait National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem chaired the coordination meeting of the Islamic Geopolitical Group on the sidelines of the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference in Indonesia. The Kuwaiti delegation was headed by Undersecretary of the Parliamentary Division, Dr Obaid Al-Mutairi, who was nominated by the Islamic group to represent it in the emergency clause drafting committee, said Al-Dustour News Network in a statement yesterday.

The meeting discussed a number of topics on the conference agenda and it was agreed that the Islamic Group would support the emergency item submitted by Indonesia. It also witnessed a proposal to amend the statute of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to impose strict and firm penalties on any country that invades or occupies another country. Al-Ghanem, accompanied by a parliamentary delegation, arrived on the Indonesian island of Bali on Friday to partake in the 144th conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) due on March 19-24.

Also, the Arab Parliament strongly condemned the terrorist attack carried targeting Shuqaiq desalination plant, Aramco facility in Jazan in the southern region of Saudi Arabia, and the power transmission station in Dhahran Al-Janub with drones. The parliament condemned in a statement yesterday the hostile attacks of the Houthi militia, while the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Nayef Al-Hajraf announced hosting Yemeni-Yemeni consultations to end the state of war and stop bloodshed.

Houthi militia's continuation of its hostile attacks against the Kingdom amidst calls for peace confirms its rejection of any attempts to put Yemen on the path to political stability and end the human suffering experienced by the Yemeni people, it underlined. The Arab Parliament called on the international community to take immediate action to stop the group's supply of weapons and pressure it to accept peace, confirming its full solidarity with Saudi Arabia in the measures it is taking to preserve its sovereignty while maintaining safety and security.

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign

have so far resisted the pressure, stressing their commitment to the OPEC+ alliance of oil producers led by Riyadh and Moscow. Aramco president and CEO Amin Nasser cautioned that the company's outlook remained uncertain due in part to "geopolitical factors". Alluding to the effect price spikes have had on consumers, he noted that "energy security is paramount for billions of people".

"We continue to make progress on increasing our crude oil production capacity, executing our gas expansion program and increasing our liquids to chemicals capacity," Nasser added. On the latest results, for 2021, he acknowledged that "economic conditions have improved considerably". The oil giant had in 2019 achieved a net income of \$88.2 billion before the pandemic hit global markets, resulting in huge losses for the energy and aviation sectors, among others. A strong rebound last year saw demand for oil increase and prices recover from their 2020 lows. Brent crude has repeatedly spiked above \$100 per barrel lately, driven by supply concerns centered on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

all but lost the war when Russia's military intervened on its side in 2015, allowing Damascus to regain most of the territory it had lost.

The UAE has made clear that it opposes the so-called Arab Spring movements, especially in Syria where Islamism, its biggest enemy, was gaining power through jihadist groups. In recent years Abu Dhabi has led an Arab overture to Damascus as the Assad regime has consolidated power. The UAE reopened its embassy there in 2018. Hours later, Bahrain said it planned to follow suit. Last November the UAE foreign minister, Abdullah bin Zayed, visited Damascus.

The Syrian government, for its part, is desperate to revive economic ties with wealthy Arab states after years of war and US sanctions. At least 90 per cent of Syrians live in poverty and more than half have been displaced by war. — AFP



Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem



BALI: Participants pose for a group photo as Indonesian President Joko Widodo yesterday opened the 144th Session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference in Bali Island, with the participation of Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation.

Judging human rights

Al-Ghanem on Saturday stressed the need of following specific standards in tackling the basic human rights issues worldwide. "It is unfair and illogical to address the Russian-Ukrainian crisis in a way that is completely different from the approach to the abuses being committed by the Zionist occupation forces," Al-Dustour news network quoted him as saying.

Al-Ghanem was addressing the coordinative meeting of the Arab group of states on the eve of the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly. "At a time which stringent measures are being taken against suspected human rights violators in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over the past three weeks, including the calls to cancel Russia's membership in the IPU, there is total negligence at the atrocities being committed by Zionist entity in the occupied Palestinian territories over the past six decades," he argued.

Affairs yesterday expressed Kuwait's terse denunciation of the dangerous terrorist attacks carried out by the Houthi militias on civilians and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. The militias have carried out a fresh attack with ballistic missiles and booby-trapped drones, targeting several regions in the kingdom.

Such continuous terrorist acts on civil and economic installations in several regions in the kingdom target not only security of the kingdom and the region, but also aims at disrupting supplies to the international energy markets, undermining the global economy and navigation, the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It called for rapid reaction from the international community to deter such criminal and terrorist attacks and bring the culprits to account. —KUNA



Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf

Reiterating Kuwait's principled rejection of all forms of occupation, he said, "I belong to a country that underwent the ordeals of occupation 30 years ago, and this is why we have to stand against practice of the double standards in political conflicts, particularly when it comes to legal human rights issues." The 144th IPU Assembly is chaired by the IPU current chair, the Bahraini Parliament Speaker Fawzia Zainal with IPU President Duarte Pacheco attending.

Addressing Pacheco, of Portugal, Al-Ghanem said, "With due respect to your person and the European group of states, the IPU presidency should represent all member states, not just the European bloc." The IPU Assembly will adopt resolutions on the subjects of "Rethinking and reframing the approach to peace processes with a view to fostering lasting peace" and "Leveraging Information and Communication Technology as an enabler for the education sector, including in times of pandemic." —KUNA

GCC condemns Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf condemned the continued Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, targeting civilians and threatening vital facilities. In a statement yesterday, Al-Hajraf stressed that these repeated attacks target not only Saudi Arabia, but also the security of all of GCC countries, along with regional and international stability.

He affirmed that all of GCC states support all measures taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to protect its national security and to confront those who implement or support such terrorist and sabotage attacks, praising the efforts of the Saudi forces to intercept these attacks. Earlier, Saudi Arabia announced that the Saudi-led coalition intercepted and destroyed a ballistic missile and nine booby-trapped drones targeting different areas.

Information minister lauds foundation for promoting peace

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouheddine yesterday lauded the renowned national cultural establishment, the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation, for playing a noticeable role for promoting just peace world wide. The minister was speaking during a gathering, held at the foundation headquarters, designed for examining avenues of cooperation between the ministry and the institution, according to a statement released by the information department.

The poet, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, during the gathering, spoke about history of the foundation, touching on the Global Forum for a Culture of Peace, second edition of which was held, earlier this month, by Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation in Malta, in the presence of a number of heads of state, political, and academic figures from around the world. The Kuwaiti poet, during the event in Malta, was granted awards in appreciation for his role for promoting the culture of peace. —KUNA

Saudi Aramco profits surge...

Continued from Page 1

in eastern Saudi Arabia temporarily knocked out half of the kingdom's crude production.

The Saudi energy ministry said in its statement the attacks had targeted a gas plant and the YASREF refinery, which produces 400,000 barrels per day according to its website, in the Yanbu Industrial City on the Red Sea. Yesterday evening, the coalition reported a new attack on an Aramco petroleum products distribution station in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, saying it caused a small fire. The kingdom, one of the world's top crude exporters, has been under pressure to raise output as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent sanctions against Moscow have roiled global energy markets.

Oil-rich Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia,

UAE opens door for Assad return...

Continued from Page 1

"The UAE's self-perception is at the heart of its policymaking," Saif said. "It sees itself as the leader of the Arab world, where it initiates and hopes the rest will follow. Its reception of Bashar Al-Assad is best understood in this light."

When Assad first launched his bloody crackdown on mostly peaceful demonstrations, plunging the country into civil war from 2011, most Arab countries severed ties with Syria. Several Gulf states supported rebels fighting against Assad's forces. The regime had

Russia accused of bombing...

Continued from Page 1

The war in Ukraine, which Russian President Vladimir Putin launched on Feb 24 to stamp out the pro-Western leanings in the ex-Soviet country, has sparked the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, felled Russia-West relations to Cold War-era lows, and is wreaking havoc in the world economy still recovering from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Yesterday, the Russian occupiers dropped bombs on art school No 12," the Mariupol city council said on Telegram yesterday, adding that around 400 women, children and elderly people had been sheltering there from bombardments. "Peaceful civilians are still under the rubble," it said, adding that the building had been destroyed. City authorities also claimed that some resi-

dents of Mariupol were being forcibly taken to Russia and stripped of their Ukrainian passports.

"The occupiers are sending the residents of Mariupol to filtration camps, checking their phones and seizing (their) Ukrainian documents," Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of the Donetsk regional administration said, adding that more than 1,000 Mariupol residents had been deported. "I appeal to the international community: put pressure on Russia and its madman of a leader," he said on Facebook.

In the encircled northern city of Chernigiv, Mayor Vladislav Atroshenko said on television early yesterday that dozens of civilians were killed after shelling hit a hospital, adding that the city was "suffering from an absolute humanitarian catastrophe." Russia's defense ministry said yesterday that Moscow had again fired its newest Kinzhal (Dagger) hypersonic missile, destroying a fuel storage site in the southern Mykolaiv region.

The strike would mark the second time the sophisticated weapon was used in combat, a day after Russia said it used it to destroy an underground arms storage site in western Ukraine close to the border with NATO member Romania. — AFP

Deadly attacks on women rise...

Continued from Page 1

Across Iraq, gender-based violence rose 125 percent to over 22,000 cases between 2020 and 2021, says the UN children's agency UNICEF, which has also pointed to "a worrisome increase in depression and suicide among women and girls".

Last December, a 16-year-old girl was disfigured with acid in Baghdad by an adult who wanted to marry her but had been rejected. For years, activists have denounced violence against women and forced marriages in Iraq, which remains a conservative and patri-

archal society. "Cases of violence against women are on the rise," said long-time Kurdistan activist Bahar Munzir, director of local group the People's Development Organization. "Most of the women who are killed are victims of a family member."

A few days before International Women's Day on March 8, the body of a 20-year-old woman was found on the side of the road in Arbil, the capital of Kurdistan. Maria Sami, the victim, was known on social networks for her feminist speeches. The following day, on March 9, Kirkuk police announced the arrest of the killer, her 18-year-old brother. While he was still on the run, he spoke by phone to a Kurdish television channel and tried to justify the killing by charging his sister had failed to obey the family.

In February, mother-of-two Shinyar Huner Rafiq died in hospital, five days after being admitted with serious burns. — AFP

Local

Ministers discuss energy challenges, opportunities

Qatari Amir discusses overhauling Arab energy sector

DOHA: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Fares stressed yesterday the importance of the 14th session of the Arab Ministerial Council for Electricity. In a statement to KUNA, the minister said that the meeting discusses energy challenges in the Arab world. He also noted that the meeting would discuss the two agreements of the Arab common market for electricity and the rules for operating Arab networks.

Furthermore, the minister said that the meeting would discuss cooperation with countries and regional and international organizations in the field of energy, such as Arab cooperation with China, India and Germany. The Kuwaiti delegation headed by Minister Al-Fares includes the Undersecretary of the Ministry, Engineer Khalifa Al-Farij and the Assistant Undersecretary for Electrical Transmission Networks, Engr Mutlaq Al-Otaibi, the Monitor of Councils and Committees in the Minister's Office, Abdullah Al-Sanafi, and other officials.

Meanwhile, Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani yesterday discussed a number of plans for overhauling the energy and power



Deputy Premier, Minister of Oil and Renewable Energy Dr Mohammad Al-Fares at the inauguration of the 7th Arab Union of Electricity conference.

sectors in the Arab countries with Arab energy ministers partaking in the seventh conference of the Arab Union for Electricity. It was officially reported that the Amir wished success

for the ministers during the convention for sake of boosting pan-Arab cooperation at the energy and power levels. Among the attending ministers was Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister,

Minister of Oil, Minister of Electricity, Water and Energy Dr Mohammad Al-Fares. The ministers expressed gratitude to the Amir for the warm hospitality. —KUNA

Kuwait's charity work reflects political leadership's keenness

KUWAIT: Charity and humanitarian work in Kuwait are a reflection of the political leadership's keenness on supporting this domain, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Shuaib said yesterday. He was speaking on behalf of Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Mubarak Al-Mutairi during a ceremony organized by the Union of Kuwait Charity Organizations (UKCo) for a number of Kuwait's charities in the country, during the second session of Khaled Al-Essa Al-Saleh prize for charity excellence.

Number of Kuwaiti charity organizations and institutions reached a total of 210 in the country, Al-Shuaib added. On Kuwait's noticeable humanitarian efforts, Al-Shuaib indicated that His Highness the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was granted "leader of humanitarian

work" title by the United Nations (UN). This prize celebrates four centuries of charity and humanitarian work in Kuwait all over the globe, namely "owner of the prize Khaled Al-Saleh", he added.

"We aim to include the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) in this prize, and also to reach out for the Arab and Islamic world in the future session," he added. Khaled Al-Saleh's prize aims at supporting development integrations of charities and boosting them to attain further fruitful contributions, he affirmed. The second session of the prize was developed to include governance and performance evaluation of the participating charities, which will contribute to supporting their institutional strategies, Head of UKCo Dr Abdulmohsen Al-Kharafi said in a speech he gave during the event.

A special model, according to international standards, was formed to encourage participants improve their institutional performance and achieve excellence, he added. The Kuwaiti Charitable Society for Serving Holy Quran won the first prize, the Humanitarian Relief Society won the second place, while the Al-Najat Charitable Society (Awareness Center) and the Distinguished Foundation for the Service of the Holy Quran and its sciences came third. —KUNA

Kuwait's Central Bank 'poised' to deal with future challenges

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Central Bank (CBK) is "poised" to withstand future challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, its Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel said yesterday, citing the enhanced resilience the regulator has acquired. The consolidated budgets of local banks had jumped to KD 91 billion (\$300 billion), the "highest annual growth in history," the CBK chief said in a statement, hailing the data as a testament to the banking regulator's "resilience" and ability to buoy national economic growth.

The increase in assets was driven by a revolving credit facility worth KD 56 billion (\$184.8 billion) by

the end of last year, according to official data, which showed that financial safety indicators "have never been more solid," he underlined. Dishing out more statistics, he said the non-performing loan ratio for Kuwait's banking sector was 1.4 percent by the end of 2021, "the lowest figure in history," he highlighted, attributing the unprecedented results to the bank's shrewd policies.

On the Kuwaiti banking sector's total net profits, which reached KD 961 million (\$3.1 billion) last year, the CBK chief said the figures were back to pre-pandemic levels as a result of "sufficient liquidity" and financial stability, he added.



Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry raided two stores in Hawally governorate for storing a large number of fake accessories and bags of popular brands that were kept out of view to sell clandestinely. The goods were confiscated and legal action will be taken.



KUWAIT: Incredible India at the Diplomatic Festival at Abraj Park Adaliya on March 19, 2022. The event featured Indian dance, music and cuisine.

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356



kuwaittimes.net

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

Grand Quran contest announces winners

KUWAIT: The Awqaf (Endowment) Public Foundation announced yesterday the winners of the 24th Kuwait Grand Quran memorization and recitation contest. In a speech during the final ceremony of the competition, the Awqaf Foundation's Secretary General Saqer Al-Sajr said that this year saw the participation of 1,939 contestants of whom 226 were declared the winners.

On his part, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Issa Al-Kandari said the contest was an important social and religious event celebrated annually. The competition - held under the auspices of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah - is still going strong since its inception back in 1997 with over 35 participants to date, indicated the minister, adding that thus far, 4,000 individuals attained the final prize. He affirmed that the ongoing event would help promote the values found in the Holy Quran and also would aid in safekeeping the tradition of memorizing and studying the Quran for years to come. —KUNA

Al-Qurain Cultural Festival to kick off

KUWAIT: The 27th session of Al-Qurain Cultural Festival will kick off today with several events and activities over nine days. Secretary General of National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Isa Al-Ansari said in a statement on Saturday that the event would be held under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

He pointed out the festival will distribute the state's awards for 2021 and honor Sheikh Suad Al-Sabah as the Arab personality for the International poetry day. He revealed that it would also include a number of workshops that keep pace with scientific and cultural development to boost knowledge and communication tools as well as develop digital culture in the country. Al-Ansari pointed to the comprehensive plastic exhibition in which a group of fine arts artists will participate, in addition to other artistic and musical activities. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Firefighters put out a limited fire that broke out in a restaurant in the Ardiya Industrial Area yesterday. The quick response from the firefighters prevented the fire from spreading to the rest of the place.

Gulf Bank participates in the 'KTech' Career Fair

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to empower local youth, and in order to consolidate its role as the most preferred employer in the Kuwaiti financial sector, Gulf Bank participated in the "KTech" Career Fair, which was organized by Kuwait Technical College (KTech), under the slogan "With You Throughout" from March 15-16.

As part of their participation in the career fair, Gulf Bank representatives shed light on the nature of the workplace at the Bank and provided a detailed explanation of the work mechanisms and job opportunities available for recent graduates. In addition, Gulf Bank representatives also conducted personal interviews for the applicants.

Gulf Bank's pavilion at the career fair attracted a large number of male and female students who were interested in getting more information about Gulf Bank's various departments and work culture, encouraged by the positive reputation that Gulf Bank boasts as one of the most prominent employers of young talent in the local financial sector.

In keeping with its continuous support for sustainability programs, Gulf Bank also took advantage of an opportunity to educate young people about the importance of environmental awareness. During the course of the career fair, Gulf Bank interviewed applicants through a paper-free, digital application at its pavilion, which was designed entirely out of recycled materials. In addition, the Bank distributed goodie

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The first round of Kuwait Motosurf championship concluded on Saturday with crowning a number of winners, including racers Hassan Bu Abbas, Shahin Ramadan and Saleh Al-Razalhan, who won the first three positions respectively in the professional category. The championship was organized by Kuwait Sea Sport Club on Khiran Beach, with the participation of 15 racers. —KUNA

Doha hosts 63rd meeting of ARABOSAI Executive Council

Organization focuses on e-learning, strengthening partnership



Kuwaiti Audit Bureau delegation, headed by Faisal Al-Shaya



President of the State Audit Bureau and Chairman of the Executive Council of ARABOSAI Abdulaziz bin Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Emadi.

DOHA: Qatar yesterday held the 63rd meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI), with the participation of Kuwait. President of the State Audit Bureau and Chairman of the Executive Council of ARABOSAI Abdulaziz bin Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Emadi in his opening speech praised the exemplary coherence and steadfastness shown by the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions against challenges of the coronavirus pandemic that the world witnessed.

He said that the organization has focused on the e-learning, strengthening partnership with relevant par-

ties, activating communication channels in order to promote the organization's achievements at the international level and promoting the benefit from technological progress. He pointed out that the upcoming strategic plan for the period 2023-2028, which is being prepared, will serve as a road map to enhance professionalism and excellence of the organization strategy.

The meeting will also tackle reports on activities of the council, the general secretariat and the organization's subcommittees, in addition to following up on the development initiatives proposed by the chairman of the council. The meeting agenda also includes approval of the archive system manual and procedures of the

control office, the approval of the final account for 2021, the estimated budget for 2022, setting the date for the next meeting and the 14th session of the General Assembly to be held in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and adoption of the draft agenda for the 14th General Assembly session.

The Kuwaiti Audit Bureau delegation, headed by Faisal Al-Shaya, includes the Director of Training and International Relations Dr Saud Al-Zamanan, the observer of international relations, Heba Al-Awadhi, and the chief auditor at the Defense, Security and Public Affairs Control Department Abdullah Al-Shaitan. —KUNA

bags filled with plantable papers to its visitors.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, said: "Gulf Bank's participation in the Kuwait Technical College (KTech) fair is part of our ongoing efforts to support young Kuwaiti talent, and nothing makes us prouder than to take part in initiatives that are designed to enhance the skills and expertise of local youth."

Al-Hajjaj pointed out that the Bank's latest sponsorship of the "KTech" Career Fair falls in line with the Bank's ongoing efforts to consolidate its position as the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future, and falls within the Bank's strategy for the year 2025. Gulf Bank is keen to attract young talents across various fields, as local youth are the generation that is capable of keeping pace with the latest innovations and the rapid digital development in the banking sector both locally and globally.

Al-Hajjaj affirmed the Bank's keenness to support the national development plan, "New Kuwait 2035" Vision, which targets employment in the private sector and the development of Kuwaiti youth. In keeping with the national development plan, Gulf Bank has been witnessing increasing growth rates in national employment in recent years.

Al-Hajjaj added, "We are proud that Gulf Bank is one of the leading banks that invests generously in human capital to enhance the competencies of its employees. Gulf Bank's employees are at the heart of its strategic goals, and the Bank firmly believes in



Salma Al-Hajjaj



providing its people with the necessary expertise and skill sets to keep pace with the major banking developments in the global banking industry." She stated that the training and development of employees is a cornerstone in the Bank's initiatives to implement economic sustainability. By enhancing recruitment and development of Kuwaiti talent, Gulf Bank hopes to encourage local talent to take on future leadership roles in the private sector.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every

employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.



Tunisians protest against Saied, poll on reforms

Appeal launched over Pakistani brother's killing of social media star Page 7

Page 6



STREPY-BRACQUEGNIES, Belgium: People gather near a gymnasium where witnesses and relatives of victims are received near the site where a car crashed into a crowd of early morning carnival-goers killing six people and injuring 12 others seriously in Strep-Bracquegnies. —AFP

Six dead as car hits Belgium carnival crowd

Terrorism was not at this stage considered a motive

BRUSSELS, Belgium: A car ploughed into a crowd of early morning carnival-goers in Belgium yesterday, killing six people and injuring dozens of others, authorities said, as they ruled out an act of terrorism for now. The tragedy took place around 5:00 am (0400 GMT) as the carnival of Strep-Bracquegnies, a district in the former coal-mining town of La Louviere, was getting underway.

"At this stage of the investigation, we know that a vehicle slammed into a group (of carnival goers) and that there are six dead and 26 injured, including 10 people whose life is in danger," prosecutor Damien Verheyen told reporters at the town's city hall.

The main suspects, who were arrested, were born in 1988 and 1990, he said, adding that terrorism was not at this stage considered a motive. Verheyen said the two came from La Louviere, a town near the French border in Belgium's rust belt, and are not known to authorities for similar acts. Belgian towns and villages host many street carnivals around the season of Lent, with the parades in Binche and Aalst the best known internationally.

'Folklore to horror'

Like Binche, the carnival of Strep-Bracquegnies involves participants dressed up as "Gilles", extravagantly attired comical figures who are "called out

to the parade in the early hours. La Louviere mayor Jacques Gobert said there were 150 to 200 people participating in the carnival's pre-dawn prologue, including the "Gilles" in their garb.

When they reached a road, "a car coming from behind at high speed literally pulverised a large number of people," he said at the news conference.



Car moved 'very fast and didn't brake'

Witnesses described a horrific scene of a car that apparently wilfully drove into the carnival-goers that included children.

Fabrice Collignon, a Belgian TV presenter, told AFP the procession was joyfully underway when in a "snap of the fingers we went from fun and folklore to absolute horror." The car seemed to "deliberately

(Channel One) was so unpleasant that I realized I could not go back there." Ovsyannikova said she considered joining a protest in a public square, but saw that protesters were being arrested and faced jail time.

"I decided that maybe I could do something else, something more meaningful... and I could show to the rest of the world that Russians are against the war, and I could show to the Russian people that this is just propaganda." She said she hoped to "maybe stimulate some people to speak up against the war."

The sign she held up behind a news reader said: "Stop the war. Don't believe propaganda. They are lying to you here." Ovsyannikova, who has resigned her job, told France 24 television on Thursday that her protest had "broken the life of our family," with her young son particularly anxious. "But we need to put an end to this fratricidal war."

Meanwhile, a shell exploded outside an apartment block in Kyiv, wounding five people, the mayor said yesterday, the latest bombardment as Russian forces try to encircle the Ukrainian capital. The ten-storey building in northwestern Sviatoshyn district was badly damaged, with all the windows blown out and scorch marks from a fire that broke out, AFP journalists at the scene said. Firefighters led an elderly woman and a disorientated man with facial injuries to an ambulance. Two burned-out cars lay in the debris-covered courtyard, which also houses a playground.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said on Telegram that "the enemy's airstrikes" had wounded five people, two of whom were taken to hospital. "It was lucky" that there were not more casualties, Sviatlana Vodolaga, a spokeswoman for the state emergency service told AFP, adding that six peo-

enter into the pack," said Collignon.

Another witness, Theo, told RTBF news he saw a car that moved "very fast and didn't brake". Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo deplored the "horrible news" on Twitter, saying "a community gathering to celebrate has been hit in the heart."

De Croo and other ministers rushed to the scene along with Belgium's King Philippe who met first responders in the Strep-Bracquegnies sporting hall, where the morning's carnival procession began. The RIAAL La Louviere football team said that one of the victims was a steward at the club and that a match scheduled later on Sunday was cancelled.

"Words fail us," the team wrote on its Facebook page. In neighbouring France, just a few kilometres from the scene of the tragedy, President Emmanuel Macron "assured the Belgian prime minister of his support and friendship after this tragedy", his office said.

In February 2020, a man rammed his car through a carnival procession in Germany, injuring dozens of bystanders including children. Germany and other countries at the time had been on high alert for car ramming attacks since December 2016, when an Islamic State group sympathiser ploughed a truck through a Christmas market leaving 12 dead. German towns had seen several such attacks since, with most carried out by people who were found to have psychological issues. —AFP

UK PM urges China to condemn Russian invasion of Ukraine

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday urged China to join Western nations in condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. "As time goes on, and as the number of Russian atrocities mounts up, I think it becomes steadily more difficult and politically embarrassing for people either actively or passively to condone Putin's invasion," he told the Sunday Times.

There were now "considerable dilemmas" for countries who were yet to speak out against Russian President Vladimir Putin, he said, adding: "I think that in Beijing you are starting to see some second thoughts." Ukraine on Saturday called on China to condemn "Russian barbarism" after dozens were killed in new strikes. —AFP

Moscow TV war protester urges others to speak up

WASHINGTON: The Russian editor who protested Moscow's invasion of Ukraine during a state TV news broadcast called yesterday for other Russians to speak out against the "gruesome war."

While working for Channel One television in Moscow, Marina Ovsyannikova barged onto the set of an evening newscast Monday, holding a poster reading "No War." She was subsequently detained, fined 30,000 rubles (\$280), and then freed pending possible further prosecution, but has turned down a French offer of asylum. Yesterday she described to US media her decision to protest as "spontaneous," but said a sense of deep dissatisfaction with her government had been building for years—a feeling she said many of her colleagues shared.

"The propaganda on our state channels was becoming more and more distorted, and the pressure that has been applied in Russian politics could not leave us indifferent," she told ABC News program "This Week." "When I spoke to my friends and colleagues, everyone until the last moment could not believe that such a thing could happen—that this gruesome war could take place," she said from Moscow, speaking through an interpreter.

"As soon as the war began, I could not sleep, I could not eat. I came to work, and after a week of coverage of this situation, the atmosphere on



MOSCOW: File photo shows Marina Ovsyannikova, the editor at the state broadcaster Channel One who protested against Russian military action in Ukraine during the evening news broadcast at the station late Monday. —AFP

ple were rescued from the block.

A kindergarten was also damaged but was empty at the time. The boom of shelling and rocket fire could be heard in the distance from the scene, which is only a few kilometres from the frontline commuter town of Irpin.

"My sister was on the balcony when it happened, she was nearly killed," said Anna, 30, a resident of the block who asked to be identified by her first name. "Please NATO, close the skies. I hate Putin," she added referring to Russia's President Vladimir Putin.

Kyiv has been hit by a series of isolated strikes on apartment blocks over the past week, killing at least seven people in total and leaving one building in flames. Russia's advance on Kyiv has largely stalled. Moscow's forces engage in sporadic fighting to the northwest and east but have barely moved for two weeks. —AFP

Land For Sale

At Duqum

(Sultanate of Oman) – Industrial land
Area: 30000m2
Location: Duqum, Industrial Area, Wilayat of Duqum, Sultanate of Oman

Contact:- +968 92822040
Email:- admin@alsakhaya.com

Employment Opportunities within

the Embassy of the United States of America Kuwait

The U.S. Mission to Kuwait is seeking to attract the highest caliber and best qualified staff - We welcome all qualified applicants.

We have several positions available now and many upcoming vacancies in the summer.

To review vacancies and apply, follow the instructions on our website:
<https://kw.usembassy.gov/embassy/jobs/>

International

Algiers recalls Madrid envoy over Western Sahara policy change

Political pressure to be put on Madrid for a change of heart

ALGIERS, Algeria: Algeria recalled its ambassador from Madrid on Saturday in protest at Spain's decision to back a Moroccan autonomy plan for the disputed former Spanish colony of Western Sahara. A foreign ministry statement condemned the "abrupt about-turn" by Madrid, which had previously maintained neutrality in the decades-old conflict for the territory between Morocco and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front independence movement.



Deal sparked renewed tensions

Speaking Friday, Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares backed a 2007 proposal by Morocco to offer Western Sahara autonomy under its sovereignty, describing it as the "most serious, realistic and credible basis" to end the long-running conflict. "Completely stunned by the statements on the Western Sahara issue from the highest levels of the Spanish government, and surprised by this abrupt about-turn from Western

Sahara's former rulers, the Algerian authorities have decided to recall the ambassador to Madrid for consultations with immediate effect," the statement said.

The Polisario had already responded angrily to the statement from Albares, calling for political pressure to be put on Madrid for a change of heart. The movement still insists on full implementation of a ceasefire agreement brokered by the United Nations in 1991 that provided for a UN-supervised referendum on independence for the territory.

"The United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the International Court of Justice, the European Court of Justice and all regional organisations do not recognise Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara," it said.

Spain has maintained generally good relations with Algeria and last year imported more than 40 percent of its gas needs from the North African country. Its ties with Morocco, which controls two-thirds of the Western Sahara, have been more problematic.

Migrant worries

An April 2021 decision to allow Polisario leader Brahim Ghali to receive medical treatment at a Spanish hospital drew a furious response from Rabat. The following month, hundreds of would-be Moroccan migrants stormed the border around the Spanish North African enclave of Ceuta, taking advantage of the withdrawal of Moroccan border guards to penetrate the remote outpost of the European Union.

Rabat quickly welcomed Madrid's change of policy, describing it as "constructive." Bernabe Lopez, professor of Arab and Islamic studies at the Autonomous University of Madrid, said the migrant issue was the main spur for Spain's move.



Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares.

A referendum on the constitutional reforms, which Saied hopes will bolster his authority, is scheduled for July, exactly a year after his power grab, with parliamentary elections scheduled for December.

"Our condolences for the constitution, President Saied," demonstrators chanted yesterday, mocking the low turnout. Saied had written off the low turnout to "technical obstacles" and "attempts by the old system to abort this experiment" — in an apparent reference to his arch rivals Ennahdha.

Demonstrators also called for the release of the former head of the bar association, Abderrazek Kilani, arrested in early March on the orders of a military court on charges of "disturbing public order with the intent to obstruct the application of the law".

Kilani is a member of the defence committee for former justice minister and senior Ennahdha figure Noureddine Bhiri, who has been under house arrest since December. — AFP

Madrid wanted to see Moroccan border guards exercise "more control and not this deliberate lack of control", Lopez said. Earlier this month, the United States reiterated its support for Morocco's autonomy offer.

"We continue to view Morocco's autonomy plan as serious, credible and realistic," US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said during a visit to Rabat.

In late 2020, the administration of president Donald Trump recognised Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara as a quid pro quo for the kingdom mending ties with Zionist entity. The deal sparked renewed tensions with Algeria.

President Joe Biden's administration has not reversed Trump's decision. A UN peacekeeping force remains in Western Sahara with a mission to oversee implementation of the 1991 truce, but the ceasefire collapsed in November 2020 when the Polisario declared it null and void. Moroccan had sent in troops to forcibly reopen a highway to neighbouring Mauritania, prompting the Polisario to resume what it describes as "a war of legitimate defence". In early February, the Polisario said it had killed 12 Moroccan soldiers, including two senior officers, in fighting along the former ceasefire line.

The flare-up coincided with a tour of the region by the UN's new Western Sahara envoy, Staffan de Mistura, who has been trying to restart negotiations on the territory's future. — AFP

Tunisians protest against Saied, poll on reforms

TUNIS: Thousands of Tunisians rallied in the capital yesterday, the country's independence day, to protest against President Kais Saied and consultations over constitutional reforms proposed by him. Protesters shouted "the people want to overthrow the president" and "no to consultations", according to AFP reporters.

The demonstration was organised by the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party and a movement named "Citizens Against the Coup". It is the latest in a series of demonstrations in the North African country since Saied

seized a host of powers after dismissing the government and freezing parliament on July 25.

Critics have dubbed the move a "coup" and rights groups have warned that the country — seen as the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring protests — is sliding towards autocracy.

Demonstrators marched on parliament in the Bardo neighbourhood of Tunis yesterday, many waving national flags, but a large police deployment blocked their path.

"We will not accept the results of the consultation, this farce against the people," Samira Chaouachi, the vice president in the frozen parliament, told the crowd. Yesterday marked the final day of an online poll launched by Saied in January in a process to help rewrite the country's constitution, with the results set to be presented to a committee of experts.

So far only 508,000 people — about seven percent of the seven million eligible voters, have taken part, according to official statistics.

Assailant with spray attacks Canada mosque

MONTREAL: A man armed with a hatchet and a spray used to repel bears attacked worshippers at a mosque Saturday in Canada but no one was seriously hurt, police said. The 24-year-old entered the mosque in the town of Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto, and sprayed people before being subdued by members of the congregation until police arrived and arrested him.

Some members of the congregation sustained minor injuries from the bear spray. At this point investigators think the incident was an isolated act and are considering hate as a possible motive, police said in a statement.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put out a tweet condemning the assault as "incredibly disturbing." "I strongly condemn this violence - which has no place in Canada - and I'm keeping the community in my thoughts today," Trudeau wrote.

Other public figures joined in the chorus of condemnation including the mayor of Toronto and the Ontario provincial prime minister. The imam of the mosque, Ibrahim Hindy, praised the courage of the worshippers who subdued the attacker.

"Our community will never be broken and we refuse to be intimidated," he tweeted. In June in Ontario, a man driving a pick-up truck deliberately ran over a Canadian family of Pakistani origin, killing four people. Police said it was a case of Islamophobia. — AFP



TUNIS: Tunisian protesters try to remove metallic barriers installed by security forces, during a demonstration against their president, not far from the Tunisian Assembly (parliament) headquarters, in the capital Tunis, yesterday. — AFP

Jihadists suspected in gunfire on Tunisia police post

TUNIS: A firefight broke out between suspected jihadists and police near a national guard barracks early yesterday in the central Tunisian region of Kairouan, police said. They said in a statement that gunmen in a car opened fire but were repelled by a "massive" retaliatory barrage, without any casualties reported in the exchange.

Those responsible for "this cowardly attack were probably... part of a terrorist cell", operating between Kairouan and Sousse in eastern Tunisia, that had been dismantled with arrests made, the statement said. The attack came on Tunisia's independence day and with the country plunged in political crisis since a power grab last July by President Kais Saied.

Following the 2011 revolution that toppled longtime president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia saw a surge in militant attacks across the country. Many Tunisians also travelled to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State group or other extremists.

In March 2016, 13 members of the security forces, seven civilians and at least 55 jihadists were killed as IS members launched a battle in the town of Ben Guerdane near the border with Libya. The situation has since vastly improved but Tunisian security forces continue to hunt suspected jihadists.

On March 4, a Tunisian court sentenced 16 people to death in the first judgements against jihadists involved in the Ben Guerdane attacks. — AFP

Turkmen president inaugurated, pledges to keep father's course

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan's new president pledged Saturday to continue the tightly-controlled country's political course, including international neutrality, at an inauguration ceremony confirming the Central Asian state's father-son leadership transition. Official results showed Serdar Berdimukhamedov, 40, winning last Saturday's ballot with 73 percent of the vote, beating eight token candidates. It marked the beginning of a new era after 64-year-old strongman Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov announced plans to step down last month.

Donning a giant golden chain of office in a ceremony rich with pomp, the younger Berdimukhamedov said he would "continue the path of development created over 30 years of our sacred independence". "In our external relations we will retain the policy of neutrality," he added. Gas-rich Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic, is one of the world's most repressive, secretive states and little is known about how the regime makes day-to-day decisions. The elder Berdimukhamedov, has been its main face since 2006, when he ascended to power following the death of founding autocrat Saparmurat Niyazov. His pastimes-including horse riding, mass cycling, composing songs and authoring books-have made him a curiosity across the world on social media, which is blocked in Turkmenistan. Little is known about what makes the younger Berdimukhamedov tick.

Turkmen have only become used to seeing his face in

the last few years, after a series of promotions made a hereditary succession seem inevitable. He headed into last Saturday's vote as the deputy head of the cabinet with a broad purview over the economy and a member of the powerful security council.

His opponents, by contrast, were mostly little-known state employees in an all but invisible pre-election campaign. Bursting into public view as a lawmaker several years ago, Serdar Berdimukhamedov is also head of associations promoting the alabai shepherd dog and the Akhal-Teke horse-two national breeds that are important symbols of state propaganda. He promised that Turkmenistan "will preserve and increase" the two breeds in his inaugural speech. Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov is set to remain in politics as head of the upper house, a position which makes him the second-highest ranking official in the state. — AFP



ASHGABAT: File photo shows Serdar Berdimukhamedov, the 39-year-old son of the country's leader seen during a ceremony in the capital Ashgabat. The son of Turkmenistan's autocrat leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has won a decisive victory in presidential elections. — AFP

Group of orphans in 'huge danger' in Mariupol

KYIV: Nineteen children, most of them orphans, have lived in harrowing conditions after being stuck in a clinic in Ukraine's besieged city of Mariupol for weeks, a carer, a witness and a charity told AFP. The witness who managed to get out, Alexei Voloshchuk, told AFP that the children were in "huge danger". The children, aged four-17, were sent to a sanatorium for minors that specialises in pulmonary conditions from their homes in nearby towns before Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine on February 24th.

Their carers have been unable to get to them since due to heavy fighting in the port city that has been severely destroyed by Russian forces. Mariupol has seen a near total communications blackout and it is not possible to speak to the children. The city has also been cut from water, gas and electricity.

Witness Voloshchuk had taken shelter in the sanatorium, where his relative worked. Speaking from the central city of Zaporizhzhia where he was evacuated to on Friday, he said the children were living in freezing cellars and had not washed for more than two weeks.

Voloshchuk sent AFP a picture of the children that he had taken, which showed windows of the clinic shattered. He said rockets had landed nearby. "There is no heating, it is cold. One of the girls, around eight-years-old, showed me a wound on her face, she said it was from the cold," he said.

The children were being looked after by a "hero" pulmonologist, a cook and two nurses, he said. Voloshchuk who moved back to his native Mariupol from Kyiv in December, weeks before Putin's invasion-said local policemen had taken the children "under their wing" and were bringing them food, which is being cooked on fires outside. But he worried that supplies may run out soon.

One of the children's carers, Olga Lopatkina, said she sent six of her foster children to the sanatorium in January. "They are aged six, eight, 11, two 12 year-olds and 17," she said. She runs a private foster care home with her husband in the town of Ugedar, 100 kilometres (60 miles) north of Mariupol. — AFP

International

South Korea's president-elect ditches 'imperial' Blue House office

Yoon will start to work from the defence ministry compound

SEOUL, South Korea: South Korea's president-elect said yesterday he will relocate his office from the "imperial" Blue House, in a move critics charged is linked to his belief in shamanistic spiritual practices. Yoon Suk-yeol, who won a tight election earlier this month, pledged on the campaign trail that he would move presidential business out of the Blue House — home to South Korea's leaders since 1948.

The former prosecutor has accused the hilltop headquarters of fostering an "imperial" presidency and undermining communication with the public. He is not the first to try to relocate. Outgoing President Moon Jae-in also pledged to move out "to eradicate the authoritarian presidential culture" but faced security and logistical hurdles. Those hurdles remain — the move has raised concerns for its reported cost of around 50 billion won (\$41 million), and because roads in crowded Seoul would have to be closed every day during the presidential commute.

Yoon's critics have said his desire to move is tied to



He is not the first to try to relocate

his belief in feng shui, a traditional religious practice which stresses the importance of harmony between humans and nature. The former prosecutor has been dogged by accusations of ties to a shaman, which he has denied. The Blue House has long been rumoured to foster bad luck for its residents, given the impeachment, corruption trials and imprisonment that have befallen South Korean presidents.

At a press conference yesterday, Yoon said he will

start to work from the defence ministry compound after his inauguration on May 10. "It's a difficult task, but it's a decision I made for the future of the country," Yoon told reporters. Yoon said the defence ministry compound was equipped with the necessary national security facilities and would minimise inconvenience compared to other possible new offices.

Addressing the concerns around the move, he said his decision was aimed at making the president more accessible and approachable. "If I move into the Blue House compound, I think it will be harder to be free from the imperial power that is symbolic of the Blue House," he said.

The Blue House will be fully open to the public starting May 10, he added. Perched in the mountains of northern Seoul and named for its azure roof, the grounds around the Blue House were home to royalty as well as the colonial governor-general during Japan's annexation of Korea. It then became home to South Korea's president in 1948. — AFP



The "imperial" Blue House.

Appeal launched over Pakistani brother's killing of media star

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan: Pakistani prosecutors said yesterday they have appealed to the country's top court after a man was acquitted of murdering his celebrity sister over what he called her "intolerable" behaviour on social media.

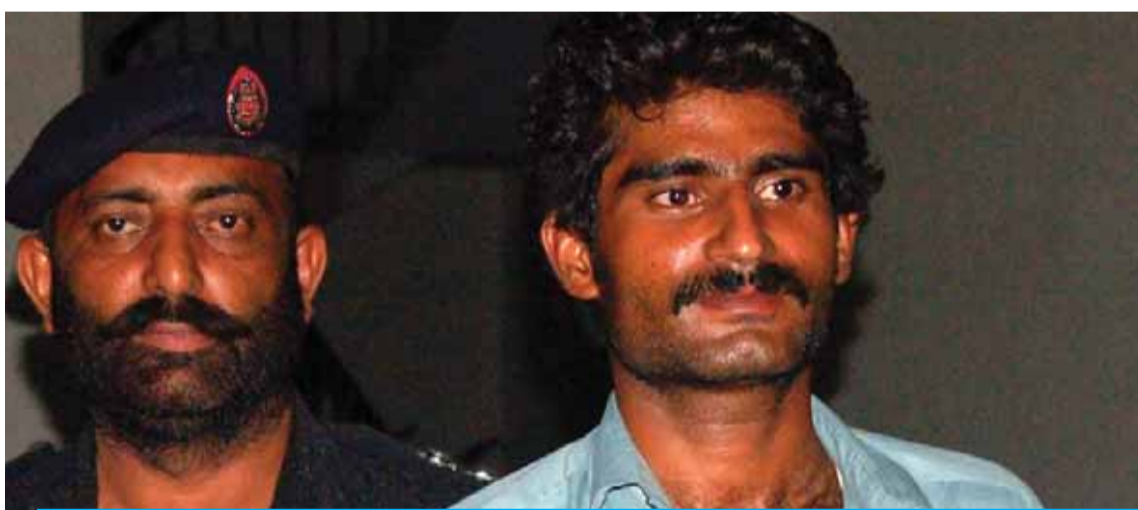
Qandeel Baloch — who was dubbed the Kim Kardashian of Pakistan — was strangled to death in 2016 by her brother Muhammad Waseem. He had brazenly told local media that he had no remorse for the killing and was initially sentenced to life in prison.

After six years, Waseem was freed on a legal tech-

nality that allows a victim's mother to pardon the crime. The case was considered the most high-profile "honour killing" of recent years — where women are murdered by male relatives for purportedly bringing "shame" to the reputation of a family.

Pakistan had passed legislation in 2016 mandating life in prison for honour killings, supposedly closing a loophole that allowed family to pardon the crime. But Waseem, 38, was acquitted after a judge ruled the crime was not an honour killing and so, in line with Pakistan's other laws on murder, their mother was still allowed to grant his freedom.

"We have challenged his acquittal, which was granted to him on mere assumptions and technical grounds," state prosecutor Khurram Khan told AFP yesterday. The appeal was filed on Friday, Khan added, but the top court has yet to fix a date for the hearing. Pakistani MP Maleeka Bokhari said the Supreme Court has an opportunity to set an important precedent when the case reaches its doors. — AFP



ISLAMABAD: Murdered social media star Qandeel Baloch's brother Muhammad Waseem.

Two migrants dead, 26 missing in Indonesia boat accident

MEDAN Indonesia: At least two people are dead and 26 others are missing after a ferry carrying dozens of migrants sank off the coast of Indonesia, an official said yesterday. The wooden fishing boat was carrying 89 onboard when it departed for neighbouring Malaysia through an unguarded route. But it sprung a leak soon after departing before being hit by strong waves and sinking.

A man and a woman were found dead while 61 others were rescued and immediately transported to hospitals for treatment. The remaining passengers are still missing. "We have deployed our personnel to search for the 26 missing victims but our efforts haven't been fruitful so far," head of local search and rescue team Ady Pandawa told AFP yesterday, adding that the damaged boat had been evacuated to the nearest port.

The passengers had come from across Indonesia and were seeking work in Malaysia without proper documentation, he added. "We suspect the number of passengers exceeded the boat capacity so when the vessel was hit by strong waves, it immediately sank,"

he said. Relatively affluent Malaysia is home to millions of migrants from poorer parts of Asia, many of them undocumented, working in industries including construction and agriculture.

Indonesians illegally seeking work in neighbouring Malaysia often risk dangerous sea crossings, and acci-

Civilians, children killed in DR Congo

BUNIA, DR Congo: Fourteen civilians, including seven children, were killed in a displaced people's camp in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo, the Red Cross said yesterday as a community leader blamed the machete attack on a militia.

Seven adults and seven children, including a two-year-old girl, were all killed in the machete attack Saturday in the Ituri region, according to a list from the local Red Cross seen by AFP. Five women aged between 25 and 32 were also among the victims, according to the list.

Jean D'Zba Banju, a community leader in the Djugu area of Ituri, said the perpetrators belonged to a notorious armed group called CODECO, which is blamed for a string of ethnic massacres in the area. "CODECO militiamen entered Drakpa and started to cut people with machetes. They did not fire shots in order to operate calmly," Banju told AFP.

"The victims are displaced people who had fled Ngotshi village to set up in Drakpa," he said, adding that five others were wounded. CODECO is a political-religious sect that claims to represent the interests of the Lendu ethnic group. In the neighbouring region of Beni, "four young people were killed in an ambush by ADF rebels yesterday, three kilometres (1.8 miles) from Eringeti," said Sabiti Njiamoja, an official for the governor of North Kivu.

The Allied Democratic Forces have been accused of killing thousands of civilians in DR Congo's troubled east. The so-called Islamic State group bills the ADF as its local affiliate. Ituri and North Kivu have both been under an official "state of siege" since last May, in a bid to crush armed groups that plague the two provinces.

Despite the crackdown—and cross-border support from Ugandan forces, which began in late November—the ADF's attacks have continued. — AFP

dents are common due to bad weather and poor safety measures. In January six Indonesian women drowned off the coast of Malaysia after their boat capsized during a suspected attempt to enter the country illegally. A month earlier, 21 Indonesian migrants also died after their boat capsized. — AFP



AT SEA, Indonesia: This handout photo from Search and Rescue (SAR) team and taken on March 19, 2022 and released yesterday shows migrant workers sitting on a boat during a rescue operation at sea in North Sumatra water. — AFP

News in brief

Bangladesh ferry sinks

DHAKA: One person is dead and dozens more are believed missing after a bulk carrier ran over a small ferry in a river near Bangladesh's capital yesterday. Police said nearly two dozen people managed to swim ashore after the MV Ruposhi-9 inland cargo carrier ran over the small vessel in the Shitalakshya River, southeast of Dhaka. Footage of the sinking aired by local media showed people shouting in alarm as the cargo vessel collided with the ferry and jumping into the polluted waterway as the craft quickly sank. "We have recovered one body and 22 people have safely swum ashore," police inspector Aslam Mia told AFP. Mia said the ferry was believed to be carrying more than 60 people at the time of the accident. District administrator Monjurul Hafiz said coast guard personnel and divers were assisting with rescue efforts. — AFP

Pope visits Ukrainian children

ROME: Pope Francis on Saturday visited Ukrainian children who have fled the Russian invasion and are being cared for at the Vatican's paediatric hospital in Rome. A smiling Francis, 85, reached out to clasp the hands of children as he walked through a ward at the Bambino Gesù hospital in the capital, which is currently treating 19 Ukrainian children. The Vatican said around 50 children in all had passed through the hospital since the war broke out. Some were suffering oncological, neurological and other problems before the crisis and "fled in the first days of the war", it said. Others were girls with "serious blast wounds" sustained in the clashes, it said. — AFP

Bangladesh launches food subsidies

FATULLAH: Bangladesh launched a nationwide food subsidy programme yesterday after prices for cooking oil, lentils and other staples shot up in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Rising produce costs, which officials blame on wild price fluctuations in the global oil market since the conflict began, have sparked murmurings of discontent around the South Asian nation of 170 million people in recent weeks. Opposition activists have accused traders of profiteering and staged several protest rallies, with a nationwide strike against soaring prices planned for the end of the month. Commerce ministry chief Tapan Kanti Ghosh said the programme would provide cheap food to 10 million people and run until the end of Ramadan—the traditional month of fasting in the Islamic faith—in six weeks. — AFP

North Korea fires 'multiple rocket launchers': Seoul

SEOUL: North Korea fired multiple rocket launchers yesterday, Seoul said, the latest in a series of provocations by the nuclear-armed nation to heighten tensions in the region. Pyongyang launched a string of banned weaponry this year and tested what it claimed were components of a "reconnaissance satellite"—although Seoul and Washington have described them as a new ICBM system.

"There were shots suspected to be from North Korea's multiple rocket launchers this morning," said the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a text message to reporters. "Our military is maintaining our defence readiness while closely following related developments," it added, without further detail.

Four shots were fired into the western waters during a span of an hour from 7:20 am from an unspecified location in South Pyongan province, Yonhap news agency reported citing unnamed officials. The intention of the firing was being evaluated, the report added.

South Korea's National Security Council held an emergency meeting and called for a tight readiness posture to "prevent security vacuum during the government transition period", according to a statement from the presidential Blue House. President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol will be inaugurated on May 10 after winning the March 9 polls.

Pyongyang has long possessed the ability to devastate Seoul—which is only around 60 kilometres (40 miles) from the border—with artillery fire. The US stations 28,500 troops in South Korea, a security ally, to protect it against its nuclear-armed neighbour, many of them based south of Seoul at Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek—its biggest overseas military facility.

Sunday's firings come just days after Pyongyang carried out a suspected failed ballistic missile test, in what analysts say could be the country's new intercontinental ballistic missile. The US and South Korea have said North Korea is preparing to fire an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017, possibly disguised as a space launch. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2022

Kuwait's economic vision stresses key role of private sector: Al-Shuraian

Union of Investment Companies (UIC) organizes fifth Kuwait Investment Forum



KUWAIT: A general view of the fifth Kuwait Investment Forum titled: 'Investing in Kuwait, missed and available opportunities' at the Chamber of Commerce yesterday.— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Union of Investment Companies (UIC) held the fifth Kuwait Investment Forum titled 'Investing in Kuwait, missed and available opportunities' at the Chamber of Commerce yesterday. The private sector's participation is essential for sustainable economic development. "This is part of Kuwait's economic vision. We aim to make Kuwait a financial center to attract investment. The ministry of commerce and its sub-institutions work hard to reach these goals through clear plans," Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Al-Shuraian said during the opening session.

"The ministry is systematically developing commercial laws and regulations to keep up with global changes such as electronic trading, restructuring, digitalizing and developing the corporate licensing system and automatic linkage with relevant third parties in issuing commercial licenses," he added.

Building industrial cities is important. "This will open the door for investing in Kuwait. This consists of different projects including industrial Shadadiya infrastructure, waste recycling in Shagaya and establishing the building of information and decision support centers for protection from disasters," Shuraian said.

The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) should update its laws. "CMA is currently working on completing the second part of the third phase of the development program of the capital markets system to provide new products and services. In addition, CMA is also developing its manpower through the capital markets academy," he said.

Regarding small enterprises, there are many future projects. "The investment platform is the most important one, and it will serve small enterprises to benefit from public utilities. Furthermore, we are planning to establish free trade zones and develop ports including the Shuwaikh Port and new locations in Mina Abdullah," concluded Shuraian.

Ease of doing business
UIC Vice Chairman Abdullah Al-

- Ministry systematically updating commercial laws, regulations
- Kuwait plans to establish free trade zones and develop new ports
- CMA developing manpower through capital markets academy



Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Al-Shuraian



UIC Vice Chairman Abdullah Al-Terkait.



Fayez Al-Kandari



MP Osama Al-Shaheen



UIC Chairman Saleh Al-Selmi



MP Dr Bader Al-Mulla

Terkait spoke about the government's vision on small enterprises and project requirements. "The government announced it will support small enterprises as part of the New Kuwait 2035 vision to relieve the public budget and participate in financing the national budget. Around 85 to 90 percent of employees work in the public sector. This is due to the unattractive environment in the private sector," he said.

According to the latest statistics on small enterprises in Kuwait, their output is only three percent of the GDP, ie KD 1.2 billion out of KD 40 billion. Compared to the rate in the GCC region, it's very low. The contribution of small

and medium enterprises to the country's GDP is above 50 percent in the UAE and around 22 percent in Saudi Arabia.

There are two institutions in Kuwait dealing with these businesses - Industrial Bank of Kuwait and the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development. "Local banks receive financial support from the Central Bank through deposits to these banks. The percentage of banks' financing to small and medium enterprises does not exceed five percent, while it ranks between 15 and 20 percent in developed countries. Banks should finance these businesses. The national fund is also not financing projects for

two years due to a lack of liquidity. If the entrepreneur doesn't receive financial support from the fund, they will go to the banks, which will only finance up to five percent," Terkait said.

"Kuwait ranks 102 out of 190 countries in ease of doing business. In fact, Kuwait ranks last among GCC countries, UAE for instance ranks 26th, Oman 60th and so on. To solve this problem, the government should meet with these global organizations to figure out how we can improve this ranking. This is the problem behind the migration of Kuwaiti investments abroad. Eleven thousand Kuwaitis have businesses in the UAE. They left due to the difficulty of financ-

ing and the difficulty in dealing with public institutions," he said.

"Kuwait ranked the 173 out of 190 countries in launching a business. If the percentage of Kuwaiti employees is 85 in the public sector today, I expect it to reach above 90 if the situation remains the same and if we don't provide realistic solutions and facilitate cooperation between the private and public sectors. Working in the public sector is secured for Kuwaitis, so they don't want to take a risk to work in the private sector. We need to solve this problem," Terkait said.

"Kuwait is late in the fintech. We need new legislation to support this sector. Also, the distribution of lands is another serious problem. There should be a special institution dealing with small and medium enterprises, instead of having entrepreneurs deal directly with the ministry of commerce and industry and other public institutions. All the plots that were distributed are still not fenced yet. The entrepreneurs are the main elements or pillars of any successful economy around the world, so we should support them," concluded Terkait.

Private sector

UIC Chairman Saleh Al-Selmi spoke about the vision of the private sector for economic reforms and stimulating the economy, explaining the national budget and spending in various sectors. He also mentioned the budgets for electricity and water, education, health, communications, public utilities and others.

Two sessions were held yesterday. The first was titled 'Solid Investment with Strong Vision'. This session included presentations on Kuwait's vision for the investment sector, rules and regulations for investing, private sector's vision for economic reforms and stimulating the economy. The second session was titled 'Small Enterprises Between the State's Vision and Reality'. This session included solutions and alternatives to overcome obstacles, laws regulating these businesses, government's vision for the demands of entrepreneurs and competition protection.



The fifth Kuwait Investment Forum in progress.

Business

Zain signs MoU with Huawei to accelerate 5.5G innovation

MoU aims to fast-track introduction of new digital services across multiple Zain markets

KUWAIT: Zain Group has selected Huawei to accelerate the migration from 4G to 5G including 5.5G innovation to enrich the customer experience across multiple markets. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) establishing the partnership was signed at the recently held Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

Present during the signing ceremony were Zain Group CTO Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Zain Group Network Director Mohammad Al-Murshed, President of Huawei Wireless Product line Yangchaobin, President of Huawei Zain Group Key Account Rico Lin, Vice-President of Huawei Middle East Marketing and Solutions Vanness You, as well as executive management teams from both companies.

customers on 5G. Therefore, Huawei's network technologies will play a big part in user migration, 5.5G innovation, and intelligent network development fast-tracking the introduction of new digital services. Zain Group will work closely with Huawei to provide the required technologies that enables us to further advance AI and digital solutions that could immensely benefit our customers across multiple markets."

Yangchaobin, President of Huawei Wireless Product line, said: "As a global ICT and network technologies provider, Huawei is committed to support Zain to achieve their strategy aimed at providing a seamless converged experience for customers. In the past year, Zain ranked as number one in terms of 5G offload ratio and proved to be one of the leading telecom operators in the Middle East."

"In the future, 5G needs to support multi-dimensional services such as AR/VR, cloud gaming, passive IoT, autonomous driving, and so on. Therefore, both parties will need to pursue even deeper collaboration. In addition, Huawei's autonomous driving network (ADN) capabilities are supporting Zain improve network efficiency and serve society more efficiently," Yangchaobin added.

Zain Group is a leading ICT service provider in the Middle East and Africa region launching commercial 5G services in 2019 in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and has since experienced rapid growth of 5G uptake. For example, Zain Kuwait's 5G data traffic already accounts for 46 percent of its total wireless traffic, and it is likely to become the first mobile operator in the MEA region that has more active 5G traffic than 4G. Zain Saudi Arabia launched the largest 5G network in the region now covering 51 cities.

Zain aims to empower marginalized and disadvantaged communities by providing digital transformation solutions to create social and financial value. This will be achieved by ensuring inclusive access to connectivity, IoT, digitalization of Zain's core products and services, and the development of digital verticals. In addition, Zain will work closely with Huawei to develop the application of new 5G services and intelligent networks to accelerate the digital transformation of the societies it serves.



BARCELONA: After signing the memorandum of understanding.

Huawei will support Zain Group to optimize its network architecture to extend 5G capabilities to support IoT, Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communications, uplink centric broadband, real-time broadband communication, harmonized communication and sensing.

Within the scope of the MoU, Huawei will support Zain Group to optimize its network architecture to extend 5G capabilities to support IoT, Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communications, uplink centric broadband, real-time broadband communication, harmonized communication, and sensing. The two entities will also work together to define autonomous driving network-level criteria and explore new use cases.

Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Zain Group CTO, said: "Zain aims to provide a seamless converged experience for

- Partnership deal signed at MWC in Barcelona
- MoU to help enrich customer experience
- Zain to provide a converged experience for 5G customers
- Huawei to help accelerate migration from 4G to 5G

Lenders see huge economic fallout from Ukraine war

KYIV: The International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other top global lenders warned Friday of "extensive" economic fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and expressed horror at the "devastating human catastrophe".

"The entire global economy will feel the effects of the crisis through slower growth, trade disruptions, and steeper inflation, harming especially the poorest and most vulnerable," they said in a joint statement, warning that the conflict was increasing poverty. "Higher prices for commodities like food and energy will push inflation up further." The Ukraine crisis has sent oil prices rocketing close to record levels of close to \$140 per barrel, while other commodities including

aluminum, coal, copper, natural gas, nickel, tin, wheat and zinc have hit historic highs on supply fears.

The statement was issued a day after a meeting to discuss the global impacts of the Ukraine war and their individual and collective responses to the escalating crisis. Other signatories included the Council of Europe Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

"We are horrified and deeply concerned about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing crisis," the lenders said. Attacks on civilians and their infrastructure were "causing tremendous suffering, creating massive population displacements, threatening international peace and security, and endangering basic social and economic needs for people around the world." In addition to the devastating human catastrophe unfolding in Ukraine, the war is disrupting livelihoods throughout the region and beyond," the statement said. The UN says more than three million people have fled Ukraine since Russia launched its assault on February 24, with more than two million crossing into EU member Poland.—AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 17 MARCH 2022

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

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	35,806	8,694.12	-0.7%	4.5%	13.8%	615,170,421	268,154,460	32,666	31.1	2.7	77.4%
Main Market	10,433	6,186.75	-2.4%	-1.7%	5.1%	582,348,897	71,523,052	24,657	14.8	1.3	22.6%
All Share	46,239	7,869.66	-1.1%	3.0%	11.7%	1,197,519,318	339,677,512	57,323	27.3	2.4	100%

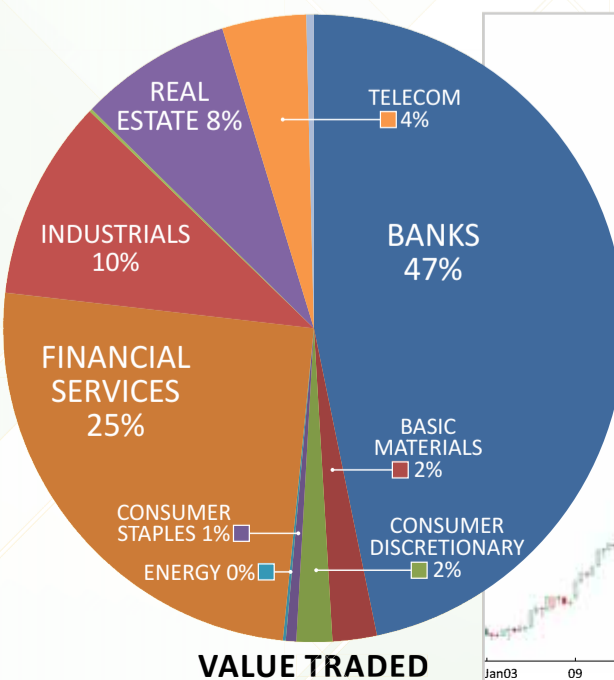
Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	27,412	1,841.75	-0.8%	4.8%	13.5%	345,574,393	158,779,007	13,059	31.8	2.6	58.62%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,028	1,152.95	-1.5%	1.9%	12.5%	15,872,373	7,817,394	1,280	27.0	1.6	2.20%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	784	1,532.14	1.8%	-0.8%	14.6%	32,960,926	6,316,621	2,934	31.6	6.6	1.68%
CONSUMER STAPLES	219	718.54	-0.9%	-0.5%	-1.7%	3,294,909	1,840,524	296	14.9	1.5	0.47%
ENERGY	286	1,373.89	-0.5%	0.2%	-3.8%	13,314,228	518,935	554	13.5	1.4	0.61%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,589	1,614.00	-1.2%	2.4%	13.4%	495,044,612	85,633,969	18,485	11.8	2.2	9.81%
HEALTH CARE	246	497.12	-37.3%	-38.8%	-37.6%	23,268	14,782	82	14.8	2.6	0.53%
INDUSTRIALS	4,447	1,253.54	-0.8%	-1.1%	9.8%	50,356,730	35,146,715	8,907	39.2	1.4	9.51%
INSURANCE	687	1,642.69	0.0%	1.8%	7.1%	2,093,469	497,410	231	8.1	1.2	1.47%
REAL ESTATE	2,970	1,380.29	-0.7%	2.4%	4.1%	208,851,485	26,922,038	8,357	16.0	1.3	6.35%
TECHNOLOGY	9	683.85	-5.9%	-1.1%	0.0%	113,756	11,022	22	-	0.8	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,838	1,251.66	-1.1%	2.8%	14.9%	24,052,286	14,836,512	2,752	16.2	2.2	8.21%
UTILITIES	249	594.74	0.4%	2.3%	-0.9%	5,966,883	1,342,582	364	19.2	4.0	0.53%

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
SANAM	93	17.72	4,452,130	410,932	308
OSOUL	107	16.81	9,295,327	967,455	433
QIC	95.7	10.00	40,350	3,858	2
MADAR	114	8.57	2,116,381	236,212	61
JAZEERA	1,681	6.39	1,765,660	2,894,909	629

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MIDAN	614	-48.83	22,218	14,208	77
PAPER	230	-22.30	709,487	169,034	163
FTI	43.6	-17.74	100,500	4,766	9
KFIC	77.1	-17.01	6,190,329	496,006	346
KHOT	114	-10.24	343,041	46,706	212

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AUB	298	-3.25	175,805,944	53,107,512	1,772
KPROJ	209	0.00	142,988,203	29,417,164	3,450
GFH	98	-2.97	117,422,216	11,691,256	2,394
URC	107	0.94	67,204,283	7,589,306	1,190
KFH	992	-0.80	42,229,380	41,978,249	4,072

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AUB	298	-3.25	175,805,944	53,107,512	1,772
KFH	992	-0.80	42,229,380	41,978,249	4,072
NBK	1,120	-1.24	28,753,719	32,232,832	2,654
KPROJ	209	0.00	142,988,203	29,417,164	3,450
AGLTY	1,029	0.29	14,406,986	14,650,528	3,083



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value increased 13% and 11%, respectively. Main market volume and value decreased 25% and 23%, respectively.
- Premier Index rebound from the support level and aimed towards the previous peak, while the Main Index is struggling and on a temporary downtrend.
- Technically, the All-Share index closed at 7869, support levels at 7850, 7810, and 7677, while resistance at 7934. Premier index closed at 8694, support levels at 8599, 8543, and 8527, while resistance at 8736. The main index closed at 6186, support levels at 6182, 6153, and 6112, while resistance at 6235.

Business

Sudan's coup-hit economy in free fall as prices bite

Aid from international lenders remain suspended amid domestic crisis

KHARTOUM: Sudanese schoolteacher Babiker Mohamed barely covers his family's needs with his meager income, but since last year's military coup he no longer knows if he can even keep afloat.

Like many in Sudan, Mohamed has been grappling with shortages in basic goods, as well as new taxes and steep price hikes on fuel, electricity and food since an October military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. "I used to buy 20 loaves of bread at 100 Sudanese pounds before the coup," Mohamed, who provides for a family of six, told AFP.

"Bread alone now costs me around 27,000 pounds a month which is like 90 percent of my salary" of about 30,000 pounds (or \$50), he said. "I don't know if I can afford to send my children to school anymore." Mohamed joined teachers who went on strike this week against the worsening living conditions.

Sudan's latest coup upended a transition painstakingly negotiated between civilian and military leaders following the 2019 ouster of president Omar Al-Bashir, whose rule was marked by crippling US sanctions and international isolation. It also triggered international condemnation and punitive measures, with the United States, World Bank and International Monetary Fund suspending badly needed aid to the impoverished country. Sudanese exports have sharply declined, foreign currency shortages have been reported, and efforts by local banks to re-establish ties with international counterparts in the US and the West came to a screeching halt. "It's like the embargo was back since October 25," said economist Sumaya Sayed.

'Beyond people's reach'

Protesters staged several rallies this week against the decline in living conditions. Sudanese citizens have for decades endured severe economic hardship due to government mismanagement, internal conflicts and the 2011

secession of the oil-rich south. Bashir himself was ousted in April 2019 following months of street protests initially triggered by the tripling of bread prices.

Essameddine Okasha, spokesman for the association of bakery owners in Khartoum, said bread prices have surged "beyond people's reach". He attributed the hikes to increasing operational costs. Sudan is also especially vulnerable to the impact of global supply shortages in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Protesters in northern Sudan have in recent weeks blocked a key trade route between Egypt and Sudan following a sharp increase in electricity tariffs. In January, Sudanese authorities sharply raised electricity prices across sectors, with households seeing an increase of about 500 percent.

Sudan had already embarked on plans to scrap fuel subsidies under the transition which was derailed by the coup. Fuel prices have undergone several hikes over the past year. On Saturday, petrol at the pump cost 672 pounds (\$1.50) per liter, up from some 320 pounds before the coup.

Workers laid off

Many local business owners have been forced to suspend operations. "I have laid off some 300 employees, mostly women who were the breadwinners of their families," said a food factory owner in North Khartoum, speaking on condition of anonymity. "I couldn't keep up with electricity and production input price hikes," Economist Mohamed Al-Nayer says Sudan is in a "state of shock".

"The absence of international aid and loans in the 2022 budget is having a negative effect," he said, pointing out that the fiscal plans rely heavily on tax rises. "Taxes now constitute 58 percent of the budget, sharply increasing prices and pushing the country into recession." Sudan has been reeling from triple-digit



KHARTOUM, Sudan: Vegetable vendors sell fresh produce at a market in the Sudanese capital Khartoum. — AFP

inflation, which stood at 258 percent in February. "It will not be possible for the government to bring down inflation... instead it will likely jump to 500 percent," forecast Nayer.

'Right decision, wrong time'

Sudan has yet to name a prime minister since the January resignation of UN economist-turned-premier Abdalla Hamdok. This month, Sudan formed a council to address key economic challenges, led by the deputy head of its Sovereign Council, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, known as Hemeti. On March 9, Daglo blamed a

"mafia" of currency dealers responsible for currency and gold speculation on the local market. Sudan's central bank announced this month it will allow the currency to float as part of measures to stem the black market.

"It was the right decision but at the wrong time," according to Sayed. She said the move would only drive up inflation and further weaken the local currency. In mid-February, the Sudanese pound hovered at 450 pounds to the dollar but now the greenback buys about 600 pounds. "Central bank policies... have so far failed," Sayed said. "The situation 'requires proper reserves of funds and gold'." — AFP



NEW DELHI: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (front third left) and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi (front third right) pose for a group photo during the India-Japan Economic Forum at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Saturday. — AFP

Suzuki to invest \$1.3bn in India electric vehicle production

NEW DELHI: Suzuki Motor will invest \$1.3 billion into electric vehicle and battery production in India, the Japanese carmaker said yesterday, as it accelerates long-term plans to achieve carbon neutrality. In a deal signed with the Indian state of Gujarat in the presence of visiting Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, Suzuki said it planned to increase production capacity for electric vehicle manufacturing in the state.

It aims to begin operations in 2025. The company will also build a plant manufacturing EV batteries on land near its Gujarat plant, while a joint venture-Maruti Suzuki Toyotsu India-will construct a vehicle recycling facility at the same site, the statement said. "Suzuki's future mission is to achieve carbon neutrality with small cars," the company's president Toshihiro Suzuki said.

The announcement comes as major automakers move to boost production of green cars in a bid to reduce emissions. Early this month US car titan Ford said it would separate its conventional and electric-auto businesses as it steps up production of emission-free vehicles.

Sony also announced it was teaming up with Honda to create a joint venture that will develop and sell electric vehicles, after its January unveiling of the Vision-S, a new prototype. Nissan, Renault and Mitsubishi Motors have promised to offer 35 new electric models over the next five years, while Toyota recently hiked its 2030 EV sales goal by 75 percent. — AFP

Russian central bank chief set for new term

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has proposed reappointing central bank chief Elvira Nabiullina, again calling on the seasoned economist who has guided the country through difficult periods. In office since 2013, 58-year-old Nabiullina helped guide Russia's economy through a previous round of Western sanctions in 2014 over Moscow's annexation of Crimea, as well as wild swings in the price of oil and bouts of inflation. "The president of the Russian Federation has proposed to the Duma as candidate for the post of central bank governor Elvira Nabiullina," the lower house of parliament said on its Telegram channel on Friday. The Duma will vote on her reappointment today.

On February 28, four days after Russian troops

entered Ukraine, the central bank raised its main interest rate from 9.5 to 20 percent after Western nations imposed sanctions that largely cut Russia's financial sector off from the global economy. The Russian central bank's board held its main interest rate at 20 percent, as expected, at a regular meeting on Friday.

Nabiullina, who delivered a speech instead of holding her customary post-meeting press conference, said that it was "extremely difficult" to provide updated economic forecasts in the current conditions, but she would do so next month. She nevertheless sought to strike a reassuring tone about the economy, saying the measures undertaken in response to the "unprecedented" Western sanctions helped avoid a run on banks and that the liquidity situation has stabilized. "Inflation will remain elevated for a certain amount of time, but we won't allow an inflationary spiral develop," said Nabiullina. "The Bank of Russia's monetary policy should allow the economy to gradually adapt to the new conditions and return to a four-percent inflation level in 2024," she added.

The central banker said the spike in inflation was driven by consumers snapping up things like electronics and household goods they fear will disappear from shelves due to sanctions. While the central bank had also noted a rise in consumption of grains, flour, pasta and sugar, Nabiullina said Russia has sufficient stocks and production capacity of these foodstuffs. She said bond trading will resume on the Moscow stock exchange, which has been closed since the day following the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine. Nabiullina said the central bank would buy Russian government bonds to reduce volatility in that market. William Jackson, chief emerging markets economist at Capital Economics, said that Nabiullina's speech indicated that Russian policymakers believe that sanctions and restrictions are likely to remain for some time. — AFP



Elvira Nabiullina

LNG projects in Gulf of Mexico boosted as Russian gas alternative

HOUSTON: Two years ago, the American liquefied natural gas (LNG) company Tellurian was in free fall: Its stock price collapsed, it laid off 40 percent of its staff, and suspended a key project in Louisiana.

Now, executive chairman Charif Souki says investors "are lining up at the door to ask me: 'Can we finance your project?'" At the annual CERAWEEK energy conference in Houston, Souki told AFP that LNG projects have been boosted by the renewed emphasis on energy independence after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "Global market demand and the desire of the Europeans to divest from their reliance on Russian gas... those are all positive market signals, which will obviously help stimulate those projects and get them moving towards final investment decisions," said Charlie Riedel, vice president of the natural gas industry's advocacy group.

On March 8, the United States banned all imports of LNG, petroleum and coal from Russia, and has for years encouraged its European allies to decrease their dependence on their eastern neighbor. The White House, in a statement, also argued that "federal policies are not limiting the production of oil and gas." "To the contrary, the Biden administration has been clear that in the short-term, supply must keep up with demand," it added. Eight LNG terminals operate in the United States, pumping out 14 billion cubic feet (400 million cubic meters) per day, and fourteen other terminals have already been approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

That's the case for Driftwood LNG, Tellurian's future liquefaction plant and export terminal, south of

Lake Charles, Louisiana. Stalled for a year and a half, the company will finally break ground on the massive project next month. Once completed, the site will be able to export 3.6 billion cubic feet per day. Charif said that "in principle, we should be able to provide LNG in 2026" to the oil companies Shell, Vitol and Gunvor.

The Gulf Coast will see plant construction accelerate in the coming months: Five projects have already been approved by FERC in Louisiana, with seven more in Texas and Mississippi.

Faster regulatory approvals

Since its first exports in 2016, the Gulf Coast has become a key hub for global LNG shipments. A network of pipelines connects the states' ports to gas fields across the country, from the Permian and Haynesville basins in the south to the Marcellus, the country's largest onshore reserve, in the northeast. Once the gas arrives on the coast, it is liquefied and transferred onto LNG tankers, most of which head off to Europe. Earlier this month, not far from the future Tellurian site, Venture Global LNG saw its first tanker depart from its brand new Calcasieu Pass terminal.

The export terminal and its accompanying liquefaction plant were built off the coast of Louisiana in just 29 months—a record time for such a project, according to the company's CEO, Mike Sabel.

He added that, in his estimation, the government's regulatory approvals for both Calcasieu and another project near New Orleans have been "faster than they were before" the war in Ukraine. "They're being very supportive, so I'm very optimistic that they're going to approve projects more quickly," he said. In a room reserved for him at the CERAWEEK convention, Sabel shows a few journalists a video of tugboats, which he said were named after his children, maneuvering near the new plant. He notes another reason for the sector to celebrate: In early February, the European Commission ruled that gas could, under certain conditions, contribute to the fight against climate change. — AFP



LNG projects have been boosted by the renewed emphasis on energy independence after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Ethiopia postpones partial privatization of Ethio Telecom

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's finance ministry announced Friday the postponement of the partial privatization of state-owned firm Ethio Telecom, delaying a major step in the government's plan to open the country's tightly-controlled economy. The government took the decision in light of "recent developments and fast-moving macroeconomic changes" both at home and globally, the ministry said in a statement posted on its Twitter account.

"The Government of Ethiopia believes that taking time to accommodate the improved macroeconomic situation as well as continually improving financial per-

formance of Ethio Telecom will result in better value for all the parties involved and in particular the citizenry of Ethiopia," it said.

"The Government of Ethiopia remains committed to finalizing the privatization process and looks forward to re-engaging in due course" with parties that had expressed interest, the ministry added.

The government hoped that opening up Ethio Telecom would make the behemoth carrier—which has 44 million subscribers—more competitive and efficient.

In June, it launched the process for the sale of a 40-percent stake in the telco and a few months later invited proposals from interested parties. The government had discussions with "several bidders", the ministry said. In 2021, as part of breaking up its monopoly hold over the sector, Ethiopia also issued a tender to award two licenses to private telecommunication operators.

In late May, one license was awarded to a consortium led by Kenya's Safaricom, which offered \$850 million and promised to invest \$8.5 million over 10 years, officials said. — AFP



Employees cultivate the Dar Hi hotel's vegetable garden amidst palm trees in the remote Nefta oasis, a seven-hour drive from the coastal Tunisian capital Tunis. — AFP photos



Chef Najah Ameur prepares a salad from vegetables grown in their premises at Dar Hi hotel in the remote Nefta oasis.

Tunisian eco-pioneers battle to save Sahara oasis life

A remote oasis in Tunisia's desert was exhausted by decades of wasteful water use for agriculture-but now pioneers around an eco-lodge are reviving the spot with innovative projects. They hope their back-to-basics approach can keep alive the ancient Saharan caravan stop and its traditions as a sustainable alternative to the region's high-irrigation date plantations. "Among the palm trees, everything can grow," said Mohamed Bougaa, 63, a farmer in the remote Nefta oasis, a seven-hour drive from the coastal capital Tunis.

"There's everything you need here: vegetables, fruit. We can plant peppers, tomatoes, carrots-everything grows when there's sun and water." The problem has been that the Nefta spring-which once delivered some 700 liters (185 gallons) of water per second-has been exhausted to irrigate the region's famous dates, called "deglet nour". "The Nefta springs dried up 20 years ago," said Bougaa. As underground water sources have failed and summer temperatures peaked at a scorching 55 degrees Celsius (131 degrees Fahrenheit) last August, the season's crop has been disappointing.

Mimicking nature

Patrick Ali El Ouarghi, who runs an eco-tourism lodge in the oasis, said date palm plantations, at the right scale, can be run sustainably. He called them an ideal demonstration of permaculture, a system for producing food organically by mimicking natural ecosystems. "The palm trees protect the fruit trees, and the fruit trees protect the vegetable patches, it's natural in an

oasis," El Ouarghi said.

The French-Tunisian set up his Dar Hi lodge 11 years ago-including the so-called "Palm Lab" where engineers, architects and artists discuss how to conserve the oasis. The ecology project aims "to make

of Sousse in northern Tunisia, says he fell in love with dates during a visit to the south. "We realized that many dates, up to 20 to 30 percent, were thrown out and not used because of a small visual blemish," he said. So he bought a few kilos (pounds),

and also starting to sell on online retail site Amazon. Several firms are producing other date derivatives such as a coffee substitute made of date pips and a form of molasses for use in pastries.

you have to know exactly how to do it," the 40-year-old said.

She cooks a menu of dishes she learned from her mother and from French celebrity chef Frederick Grasser Herme, the recipes collated in a recently published



A camel herder prepares bread for his dinner in the Tunisian desert in Ong Jemel (Camel's Neck), near the Chott (salt lake) of Chihatt Sghat, north of Tunisia's southwestern Nefta oasis.

investors and farmers want to reinvest in the oasis, because it's decaying a bit", he said. A key theme is tackling the severe water shortages by experimenting with technology such as drip irrigation. The current system of flooding orchards with water, pumped from 100 meters (300 feet) below ground, is wasteful, he said.

Date sugar

Not far from Dar Hi, others are trying different ways of creating value in the oasis. American Kevin Klay, 35, a former resident

removed their seeds, dried them and then put them through a coffee grinder.

The result, he said, was a sweetener "with a fifth of the calories of white sugar" that is full of fiber and contains "more potassium than bananas". Armed with this knowledge, Klay in 2018 launched "Dateible", selling his "date sugar" produced from the organic-certified desert fruits for export. He now employs nine people, seven of them women. "We've seen huge demand, particularly in the US where our main market is," he said. The firm is exporting dates in bulk



Employees process dates at Dateible, a company founded by US Kevin Klay selling "date sugar" produced from organic-certified desert fruits, in the remote Nefta oasis.

Unknown flavors

Back at the lodge, the restaurant is reviving traditional desert cuisine. "It's very simple and dates from the arrival of nomads," when Nefta, today regarded as a spiritual home of Sufism, was a key stop on Saharan desert routes, El Ouarghi said. They brought "unknown flavors and spices that have remained here as a tradition", he said. Chef Najah Ameur says residents create their own unique spice mixes. "It's not the same as buying them at the market: cleaning the leaves, the smell, the flavor,

book on oasis cuisine. "Many ingredients come from the palm groves: parsley, celery, chard, green beans, peas," she said. Some recipes are also adapted to use Moringa, an Indian tree famed for its nutritional and medicinal qualities and its ability to thrive in arid conditions. The tree species may be new to the oasis, but residents are hoping that a mix of old and new can keep both their community and their ecosystem in good health.—AFP



An employee grinds dates at Dateible, a company founded by US Kevin Klay selling "date sugar" produced from organic-certified desert fruits, in the remote Nefta oasis, a seven-hour drive from the coastal Tunisian capital Tunis.



Chef Najah Ameur prepares a traditional couscous at Dar Hi hotel in the remote Nefta oasis.



An employee displays date sugar, produced from organic-certified desert fruits, at Dateible, a company founded by US Kevin Klay, in the remote Nefta oasis.

Affleck and Lopez splash out over \$50m on family home

Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez are splashing out over \$50 million on a 10-bedroom estate. The couple - who rekindled their romance last year - have reportedly agreed a deal to purchase a 20,000 sq ft abode in the Bel Air region of Los Angeles and the property has plenty of space for the 49-year-old actor's three children and the 'On the Floor' hitmaker's twins because the couple are keen for them to all stay there together. The property - which was listed for sale by billionaire Todd Lemkin for \$65 million - also has 17 bathrooms, multiple kitchens, a theatre, gym, his and hers bath, and a pool, and boasts a stunning city view in a very private location surrounded by trees. According to TMZ, Ben - who has Violet, 16, Serafina, 13, and Samuel, 10, with ex-wife Jennifer Garner - and Jennifer have agreed a deal in the "mid-\$50 million range" but there are still

contingencies that must be satisfied before the sale can go through. The news of the new family home comes after it was recently reported the 'Tender Bar' star and his partner - who has 14-year-old Max and Emmie with ex-husband Marc Anthony - are looking for a London base this summer. A source said: "There is a very trusted team looking for the perfect home for Ben and J-Lo for the summer. "It will probably be the usual mansion in a leafy area on the outskirts of London. American stars love areas such as Richmond which, as well as being lovely, is close to Heathrow Airport, but also near enough to some of the big studios such as Leavesden and Shepperton." Ben has been tipped to star in the new 'Barbie' movie - which is being shot at Warner Bros'

Leavesden Studios in Hertfordshire - and that could be one of the motivating factors behind the potential switch. Meanwhile, Jennifer recently described her romance with Ben as a "happy, healthy relationship" and thinks they are in a better place since they first dated from 2002 to 2004. She said: "We're older now, we're smarter, we have more experience, we're at different places in our lives, we have kids now, and we have to be very conscious of those things. "I think we are strong enough now to know what's real and what's not, whereas when we were younger maybe some of those outside voices were a little bit tougher for us to reconcile and survive."

—BangShowbiz



Samuel L Jackson had to fight for his purple lightsaber in Star Wars

Samuel L Jackson had to fight for his 'Star Wars' character to have a purple lightsaber. The 73-year-old actor, who played Mace Windu in 'Star Wars' Episodes I, II, and III of the blockbuster franchise and explained why he wanted his character to have a purple lightsaber. When asked how the purple lightsaber came about on the 'Happy Sad Confused' podcast, he answered: "Ask George [Lucas]. In Episode II, there's that huge scene in kind of like a war stadium. There's all these Jedi out there. And when I was reading it I was like 'how am I going to find myself in this?' So I thought, 'different coloured lightsaber!' So I said, 'George, can I get a purple coloured lightsaber?' [And he said,] 'they're green, they're blue.' I said, 'what, seriously, that's it?' And that was the end of the conversation." Though the 'Avengers' star thought he'd lost the fight at this point, he revealed the moment when director George Lucas, 77, told Samuel he'd changed his mind. He explained: "But

then we finished shooting reshoots, I had to fly back to London, and he was like 'I want to show you something,' and I was like 'what?' So he shows me a purple lightsaber. But then he says, 'it's already causing a storm online, so I don't know if I'm going to keep it,' and I was like 'really? Come on! And how do people online know anyway?' "But sure enough, when the movie opened, he was like, 'okay. You get to keep the purple lightsaber.' Because in episode one, I never even got to pull it." The 'Pulp Fiction' star also confessed that he believes Mace Windu is still alive, and would hint that he could reprise his role in the 'Star Wars' universe. Samuel revealed: "I think [Mace Windu] is alive somewhere. ... There's a huge history of people with one hand returning in 'Star Wars.' The only person I've ever said that to, about coming back, was Bryce Dallas Howard. I just did a movie with her, and she directs episodes of 'The Mandalorian.' So I was like, 'do you think you might be able to hook a brother up? I mean, you like me, right?' And she's like 'I love you, you're amazing!' So I said 'put me back in it.'



Lifestyle | Features

France's Michelin, the go-to guide on fine dining



This file photo shows the 2020's Michelin Red Guide, the oldest European hotels and restaurants reference guide. — AFP

France's prestigious Michelin Guide is among the world's most influential references on gourmet dining, its star ratings highly coveted and sometimes controversial. Ahead of the publication of its 2022 edition on Tuesday, here is some background.

More than 120 years old

French tyre manufacturer Michelin brought out a travel guide in 1900, the early days of the automobile, to encourage motorists to take to the road and so boost its business. The free, red guidebook included maps, instructions on how to change tyres and lists of mechanics and hotels along the route.

The first run of 35,000 copies was such a success that guides for Belgium, Germany, Portugal and Spain followed. In 2021, in a small revolution, an edition was published for those wanting to discover France by regional train, rather than by car.

Star rating

The guide included restaurant listings from 1920, when it started charging for the publication. It began sending out undercover inspectors, and from the early 1930s introduced its famous star ratings. Michelin says it issues up to three stars based on the quality of the ingredients used; mastery of flavor and cooking techniques; the personality of the chef in his cuisine; value for money; and consistency between visits.

One star indicates "High quality cooking, worth a stop"; two stars is for "Excellent cooking, worth a detour"; and three rates "Exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey". Of about 20,000 international restaurants listed, only around 130 have attained the highest distinction. In 2021, the Guide was criticized for keeping its selection in France going, despite the fact that restaurants were closed due to the COVID pandemic. Its competitors had decided to cancel their awards.

Michelin goes global

In 2005, the Michelin Guide branched out of Europe with a New York guide, followed in 2007 by editions for San Francisco then Las Vegas and Los Angeles. It moved to Asia with a Tokyo version in 2008 when 90,000 copies, in English and Japanese, flew off the shelves in 48 hours.

Michelin published its first Shanghai guide in 2016 and today there are versions for several Asian cities, with Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo also covered. Having long been criticised as biased towards formal dining, the guide in 2016 awarded a star to a Singapore street food outlet known for a braised chicken dish. A famed Tokyo sushi restaurant, where Barack Obama is said to have enjoyed the best sushi of his life, was meanwhile dropped in 2019 after it stopped accepting reservations from the general public.

A lot of pressure

A handful of French restaurateurs have relinquished their Michelin status because of the stress of being judged by its inspectors, including Joel Robuchon (1996), Alain Senderens (2005), Olivier Roellinger (2008) and Sebastian Bras (2017). The suicide in 2003 of three-star chef Bernard Loiseau was linked, among other reasons, to hints that his restaurant was about to lose its three stars.

Star Swiss chef Benoit Violier took his life in 2016, a day ahead of the release of the Michelin Guide, although his restaurant maintained its three-star rating. The guide was taken to court for the first time in 2019 when celebrity chef Marc Veyrat sued it for stripping one of his restaurants of a third star and suggesting-wrongly, he insists-that he had used cheddar cheese in a soufflé. His lawsuit was rejected. — AFP

Brazilian wins album of the year at French comic fest

Artist Marcello Quintanilha won the best album prize at the Angouleme comic books festival in France Saturday for his work, "Listen, pretty Marcia". Published last September, the book tells the story of a mother living in a favela near Rio, whose daughter gets caught up in gang violence.

Quintanilha, born in 1971 and a self-taught artist, published his first book in 1999 based on the life of his father, a professional footballer in the 1950s. Since

2002, he has been based in Barcelona, Spain. In 2016 he won the Angouleme prize for the best thriller, Tungsten, which was subsequently made into a film.

The festival's top prize, the Grand Prix, was announced on Wednesday and went to Canada's Julie Doucet — the first Canadian and the fourth woman to win the prize — for the body of her work during her career. — AFP



Brazilian comic book author Marcello Quintanilha receives the Fauve dior - Prix du meilleur album with 'Ecoute jolie Marcia' during the 49th Angouleme International Comics Festival (Festival International de la Bande Dessinee) in Angouleme, western France. — AFP

'CODA' bags key prize before Oscars as Spielberg honors Lucas

Hollywood's producers named "CODA," a heartwarming indie drama about a deaf family, the year's best film at their annual gala Saturday, throwing the race for next weekend's Oscars wide open. "CODA," which cast deaf actors in several lead roles, follows teenage Ruby-who can hear-as she juggles pursuing her musical ambitions with her family's dependence on her to communicate.

The movie, released by Apple TV+, is now best-placed to vie with Netflix's Western "The Power of the Dog," the presumed Academy Award frontrunner. "I have always been drawn to stories that are filled with humanity," said producer Philippe Rousselet, accepting the award. "And in a world where we see the lack of it every day, I'll take this tonight-this award-as a sign that there's still hope."

The Producers Guild Awards, taking place with Oscars voting now under way, have correctly predicted 11 of the past 14 winners of the best picture Academy Award. "Encanto" won the PGA's best animated film, strengthening its own Oscars bid before voting ends Tuesday. "Summer of Soul"-musician Questlove's first movie, about the huge "Black Woodstock" festival that took place in 1969 Harlem-racked up another best documentary win.

The Academy Awards take place in Hollywood on March 27. "In music, coda means the end of a movement. But our film is the beginning of one," said "CODA" actress Marlee Matlin. "It's a wonderful thing that audiences have embraced our movie and it's wonderful to be making



(From left) Daniel Durant, Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur and Sian Heder accept the Darryl F Zanuck Award for Outstanding Producer of Theatrical Motion Pictures for 'CODA' onstage during the 33rd Annual Producers Guild Awards at Fairmont Century Plaza. — AFP

history," she said, before it took the night's top prize.

Spielberg honors Lucas

Earlier in the night, Steven Spielberg praised "my brother" George Lucas as he presented the "Star Wars" creator with the PGA's career achievement award. "George and I met as two of the most nerdy film junkies in California... Across all the years we competed against each other, we propped each other up, we cheered each other on. We made each other better," said Spielberg. Lucas told the audience he was most proud of his work to usher in "digital cinema," which has largely replaced traditional celluloid reels, and has accelerated 3D and computer effects which dominate many superhero blockbusters today.

But Lucas recognized that some of his peers including Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and Christopher Nolan have still not fully joined the digital revolution and believe that traditional film still offers a richer aesthetic. "There's a whole group of them-everybody around is like 'Oh, digital, that's not movies, that's something else!'" he said, as Spielberg laughed off-stage. Lucas shared the Milestone Award

with Kathleen Kennedy, his heir at Lucasfilm, which is now owned by Disney.

Disney was this week hit by employee protests over its initially hesitant reaction to Florida's so-called "Don't say gay" bill. Kennedy said "women, artists of color, LGBTQ and differently labeled artists and producers" had given Hollywood a "more inclusive, diverse, richer, more sophisticated and nuanced sense of our responsibilities for social, racial and economic justice." The proposed law, which would prohibit discussing LGBT topics in classrooms, has been condemned as discriminatory by critics.

TV prizes

Saturday's PGAs, voted on by 8,000-odd producers, honored film as well as television, with HBO's "Succession" winning the top drama prize. "Ted Lasso" continued its comedy awards sweep, "Mare of Easttown" took limited series, and Peter Jackson's "The Beatles: Get Back" won the non-fiction prize. — AFP

Dutch sanctuary hosts 'traumatized' Ukrainian lions, tigers

Under-nourished and "extremely traumatized," two lions and two tigers from Ukraine have arrived at a refuge in northern Netherlands on Saturday, according to the animal group that collected them on the Polish border. The animals are "extremely traumatized" and under-nourished, having not been fed for between one to two weeks, Robert Kruijff, the director of the Stichting Leeuw association that rescued them told AFP.

The animals-two male lions of 3.5 and 1.5 years of age, a male six-month-old tiger and a five-year-old tigress-arrived at the Polish border in a bus filled with various other animals from war-torn Ukraine and their zoos of origin are not known. The female tiger is in the worst shape and "we don't know if she'll survive", Kruijff said.

The animals will stay in a month-long quarantine in a refuge in the town of Anna Paulowna in the north of the country. They are eventually due to be transferred to a reserve in South Africa, but only after regaining their strength, which could take up to a year or two, Kruijff said. The animals' transfer had been organized by the zoo in Poznan, in western Poland. At the start of March, other big-game felines rescued from zoos in Ukraine found refuge in Spain and Belgium. — AFP

BTS star Jin is recovering from surgery

The 29-year-old singer went to hospital on Friday after hurting his finger "during his daily activities" and was told he would need an operation to repair damaged tendons. A statement from Big Hit Music read: "We would like to provide you with some information regarding BTS member Jin's finger injury. "Jin injured his left index finger during his daily activities and visited the emergency room at a hospital nearby for examination and treatment on Friday, March 18. He consulted doctors and was told he required surgery as the tendons in the finger had been partially damaged. He underwent surgery to repair the extensor in his left index finger on the afternoon of Friday, March 18."

Jin's surgery "went well" and he is now recovering at home, though will need to keep his hand in a cast in order to help speed up his recovery. The record label continued: "The surgery went well according to the doctors. Jin was discharged from the hospital on the morning of Saturday, March 19 and has been resting.

"He will wear a cast for the time being for stabilization and a speedy recovery. Jin will focus on rest and treatment to fully recover from the injury and to resume his activities in good health. "We will continue to provide support for the rapid recovery of Jin, placing our highest priority on the health and safety of our artists. Thank you."

In December, it was confirmed Jin has tested positive for COVID-19. Big Hit Music said at the time: "Jin returned to Korea on Monday, December 6 and underwent PCR testing immediately after his return and again before his release from self-quarantine, and was found negative on both occasions. "However, feeling flu-like symptoms [Saturday] afternoon he underwent PCR testing and was found positive for COVID-19 late this evening." — Bang Showbiz

SHAHEED PARK HOSTS SINGER SALMAN AL-AMMARI



More than 1,300 people gathered to see singer Salman Al-Ammari sing Hadhramaut songs at Al-Shaheed Park. Ammari, who joined the LAPA board in 2020, was happy to meet the crowd after a long absence, saying they "motivated and encouraged me", adding heritage is the foundation of singing and societal culture.



Sports

Milan maintain title charge as Inter lose more ground

Inter's title defense takes blow; Napoli move level with Milan

MILAN: AC Milan kept hold of their three-point lead at the top of Serie A on Saturday with a 1-0 win at Cagliari, while Inter Milan fell further behind their local rivals after being held 1-1 by Fiorentina. Ismael Bennacer struck the only goal in the 59th minute of a hard-fought match in Sardinia to keep Napoli at arm's length after they briefly drew level on points thanks to Victor Osimhen's double in a 2-1 win over Udinese.

A third win on the bounce for Stefano Pioli's side stretched their unbeaten league run to eight games and increased hopes of a first Scudetto since 2011, but it was a match marred by racist abuse directed at Mike Maignan and Fikayo Tomori from a section of home fans at the final whistle which sparked a on-pitch shoving match. "Maignan said to me 'It's not possible that we're hearing these sorts of insults,'" Pioli told DAZN. "It's the first time that he's reacted and that means something bad happened that shouldn't have happened. Tomori said the same thing."

It was beautiful goal which won the game, Algeria international Bennacer meeting Olivier Giroud's inviting lay-off with a sumptuous first-time finish from the edge of the box with his left foot. However Milan would have had a less stressful final few minutes had Davide Calabria not ended a blistering counter-attack with a tame finish straight at Alessio Cragnano when one-on-one only a few yards out. Leonardo Pavoletti thumped the crossbar with a powerful header as the match crept into stoppage time, but Milan just about held on for the win.

Inter's troubles continue

With eight games to go Milan also have the gap

between them and Inter at six points as Simone Inzaghi's side continue their struggles. The champions looked set for a grandstand finish at the San Siro after Denzel Dumfries headed them level in the 55th minute, but the game ended in an unhelpful stalemate.

Simone Inzaghi's side sit third-albeit with a game in hand-after having won just one of their last seven league matches and what was a four-point lead at the start of 2022 has slowly slipped through their fingers. "I would be more worried if the team wasn't creating chances... in the second half we created a lot of opportunities," said Inzaghi. "We might not have got the results but the team have been creating."

They face Juventus next weekend in the 'Derby of Italy' and have their old rivals, who hosted bottom team Salernitana yesterday, four points behind them in fourth and breathing down their neck after a 15-match unbeaten run in the league.

Fiorentina, who silenced the home fans when Lucas Torreira smashed home the opener four minutes after half-time, are eighth and a point away from the European places. Loane Torreira carried on playing despite losing a tooth after being hit in the face, staying on the field with a cotton swab in his mouth and then posting a image on Twitter of himself with a gap in his teeth.

Osimhen saves Napoli

They were saved by VAR 10 minutes after Dumfries' leveller, when referee Daniele Chiffi over-ruled his own decision to give Inter a penalty for a foul by Lorenzo Venuti on Lautaro Martinez after an on-field review. Osimhen was the hero of the hour for



CAGLIARI: AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic goes for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Cagliari and AC Milan, on March 19, 2022.— AFP

Napoli with both goals in a 2-1 win over Udinese, his brace keeping Luciano Spalletti's side right in the hunt.

Nigeria forward Osimhen's strikes in the 52nd and 63rd minutes ensured that Napoli squeezed past Udinese at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona after Gerard Deulofeu gave the away side a shock lead midway through the first half. Napoli are chasing a first

Serie A title since the days when Maradona inspired them to their only Italian league crowns in 1987 and 1990, and Osimhen is confident they can emulate the great Argentine who died in 2020. "We keep believing, we have eight games to go, we want to continue the momentum to win every game, and at the end we'll see. I still believe in the Scudetto," he told DAZN.— AFP

Oliveira wins rain-hit Indonesian MotoGP

MANDALIKA: Miguel Oliveira held his nerve to win a rain-affected Indonesian MotoGP yesterday and then promised to give the trophy to his baby daughter. The Portuguese KTM rider finished 2.205sec ahead of current world champion Fabio Quartararo, of France, who had started from pole position on his Yamaha.

Another Frenchman, Johann Zarco, completed the podium a further 3.158sec adrift for the Pramac Racing team in a race reduced to 20 laps from 27 because of safety concerns. "It's really emotional," said Oliveira. "I promised my daughter I would get a trophy from Indonesia, so this one is for my baby." The start at the Mandalika International Street Circuit was delayed for 75 minutes by heavy rain as grand prix racing returned to motorcycle-mad Indonesia for the first time in a quarter of a century.

When it did eventually begin, Quartararo bolted into the first corner comfortably ahead but by the end of the first lap had been reeled in by Oliveira and Australia's Jack Miller, on a Ducati. It did not take Oliveira long behind the Australian to realize he had the grip and pace to stretch away on the sodden track. "I followed Jack for a couple of laps and then I understood that I could still go a bit faster," said Oliveira.

'Super happy'

"When I overtook him, I just tried to focus for the next five laps," said Oliveira, who took his fourth victo-

ry, after winning the Styrian and Portuguese Grands Prix in 2020 and the Catalunya race last season. "Then I built the gap and I was managing it the whole race but it was, for sure, not easy."

Oliveira's 25 points for victory elevated him to fourth in the standings. Quartararo was delighted to fight back to grab what he said was his first podium in the wet, after struggling in the opening laps and dropping to fifth at one stage. "To be honest, from the warm-up lap I felt like we have something extra, because we know that in the wet condition we are struggling always," said Quartararo. "So I saw an opportunity and I go for it. I think it's my first podium in the wet so I'm super happy because we found something in the wet."

Zarco was a little disappointed that he was unable to push hard early in the race and by the time he figured out the track and grip it was too late to finish any higher than third. "It's a podium in MotoGP which is always nice, but really I needed a little bit of time," he said. "So I lost too much time at least for the second place, but when the track was clear, I could be very fast. So third place, I take it." Six-time world champion Marc Marquez was earlier ruled out with concussion after a horror morning warm-up crash that catapulted him into the air on turn seven.—AFP



KUTA MANDALIKA: First-placed Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Portuguese rider Miguel Oliveira celebrates after winning the Indonesian Grand Prix MotoGP race yesterday.— AFP

Atletico dig to edge past struggling Rayo

VALLECAS: Joao Felix's superb pass set up Koke's winner as Atletico Madrid jumped to third in La Liga on Saturday with a 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano. Barcelona played Real Madrid in the yesterday as Atletico took advantage at Vallecas - their fifth consecutive victory giving them some breathing space in the fight for the top four.

They had to see out the last nine minutes with 10 men after Angel Correa, on as a substitute, was sent off. But just as they did against Manchester United on Tuesday in the Champions League, Atletico dug in and held on. They now have a five-point lead over Real Betis in fifth and sit three ahead of Barcelona in fourth, even if Betis have one game in hand and Barca two.

Diego Simeone's side certainly head into the international break with momentum for the run-in, after rounding off an excellent seven days that began with victory against Cadiz before knocking out United. The draw on Friday ensured the reward for that result will be a meeting with Manchester City in the last eight and while Atletico will be clear underdogs against the reigning Premier League champions, they are also building form and confidence at just the right time.

"I think we have found the key, we have increased

the intensity, the team is playing better and that's reflected in the results," said Koke. "We have grown together," added Simeone. Felix has been key, this his seventh goal or assist in his last seven matches, the 22-year-old repaying Simeone's faith while Luis Suarez again started on the bench. This was the sixth consecutive game Suarez has been named as a substitute and, with the quicker, more agile pairing of Felix and Antoine Griezmann up front, Atletico have hit their stride.

Rayo stay 12th, after making it 10 league games without a victory. They were in contention for the European spots only a few weeks ago but now sit just eight points above the relegation places. Felix was at the heart of the decisive moment in the 49th minute as Koke collected on the edge of the area and played inside to the Portuguese. As Rayo's defense turned to Felix, nobody spotted Koke continuing his run, except the forward, who slid the ball through first time for Koke to curl in the finish.

Griezmann should have made it two but was denied by a close-range save from Stole Dimitrievski and Atletico were almost undone when Oscar Valentin's driven cross found Randy Nteka free five yards out. Somehow Nteka skewed over. Correa was sent off in the 85th minute for what appeared to be an altercation with Rayo's Alejandro Catena and Rayo went close in injury-time, after Dimitrievski was sent up for a corner. The ball dropped loose for Ivan Balliu and he shot low, but straight at Jan Oblak.— AFP



International Shooting Grand Prix continues

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Competitions at His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Grand Prix continue at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Complex, as Kuwait participates with more than 60 shooters - both men and women including Abdelrahman Al-Faihan, Nasser Al-Miqhid, Khalid Al-Mudhaf, Talal Al-Rashidi,

Abdallah Al-Torqi, Mansour Al-Rashidi, Saud Habib, Mohammad Al-Daihani, Abdelaziz Al-Saad, Sarah Al-Hawal, Iman Al-Shammaa and Afrah bin Hussein. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations thanked on behalf of KSSC board of directors, His Highness the Amir for his sponsorship of this annual international grand prix in which a large number of Arab and foreign shooters are participating. Al-Otaibi hoped that Kuwait shooters continue their outstanding achievements.

There will be a friendship championship today between Kuwait and Japan Paralympics in celebration of 60 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Head of the Iraqi delegation Sabeeh Murad Kazem said Iraq will participate in the Trap and Skeet events. He said his team prepared well for the tournament. He thanked Kuwait and the Shooting Federation for their hospitality.

Jacobs trumps Coleman for world 60m crown

BELGRADE: Italy's Olympic 100m champion Lamont Marcell Jacobs trumped American rival Christian Coleman for 60m gold on the second day of the World Indoor Championships in Belgrade on Saturday, while Yaroslava Mahuchikh claimed a memorable high jump title for war-ravaged Ukraine. Jacobs had been a surprise winner of track's blue riband event at last summer's Tokyo Games where he also won gold as part of Italy's 4x100m relay quartet.

The Italian barely raced after his Japan exploits, but his return to the indoor circuit did not go unannounced and he lived up to all his promise in the Serbian capital. Jacobs timed a winning 6.41 seconds as he produced a savage, perfectly-timed dip at the line to nudge ahead of defending champion and current world 100m title holder Coleman, making his comeback from an 18-month ban for breaking anti-doping rules.

Coleman's teammate Marvin Bracy claimed bronze in 6.44sec. "I always have the same target: to be in best shape at the most important moment," said Jacobs after backing up his Olympic performances. "When you win two Olympic gold medals, you cannot win by chance. This win can only compliment what I did last year. The two golds of last year are the two golds of the Olympic Games."

Jacobs now has a rare chance to "win whatever is possible to win in athletics" with the European and world outdoor champs to come this summer. "My target is this goal," he said. Coleman said he had "mixed emotions" with his silver. "I can't say it's a disappoint-

ment," he said. "I came up a little short. "It was a fun race and I look forward to the rivalry, the outdoor season... competing with these guys."

The scintillating sprint brought an end to Saturday's programme that had earlier seen Mahuchikh win a dramatic high jump gold, having fled her war-torn nation after the Russian invasion and making it to Belgrade after a tortuous three-day trip. After holding her nerve amid "explosions, fires, and air raid sirens", the 20-year-old replicated her sang-froid in the Stark Arena, triumphing with a best of 2.02 metres in what she said was a "defence of Ukraine colours on the track in the international arena, to show that we are the strongest in the world".

Gun-to-tape Miller-Uibo

In what was billed as one of the battle royales of the championship, two-time Olympic 400m champion Shaunae Miller-Uibo claimed gold over the two-lap race from Dutchwoman Femke Bol. The Bahamian, not a regular fixture at indoor meets, clocked a stunning gun-to-tape 50.31sec for victory, Bol claiming silver 0.26 behind-her first indoor defeat in two years.

"It feels great. It's the first championships of a long season so I just wanted to come out here and get one in the bag," said Miller-Uibo. "I have so much respect for all the girls out here so I had to go off fast to control it. It's the best way for me to run." Among a slew of Olympic champions on show were two fancied Americans, Katie Nageotte and Ryan Crouser.

Nageotte bombed out at 4.75m in the women's pole vault, pushed into silver by US team training partner and defending champion Sandi Morris, who cleared 4.80. And Crouser, unbeaten in two seasons, suffered a rare defeat as Brazilian Darlan Romani won his first global medal with a surprise gold after a best of 22.53m, 9cm further than the American. Two-time defending champion Tomas Walsh of New Zealand claimed bronze.—AFP

Sports

Bayern brush Union aside to extend Bundesliga lead

Stuttgart pull away from the bottom three

BERLIN: Bayern Munich thrashed Union Berlin 4-0 on Saturday to open a seven-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga as Robert Lewandowski netted twice to pass the milestone of 30 league goals this season. Second-placed Borussia Dortmund were away to Cologne yesterday. "We played very well and created many chances. We wanted to win to widen the gap," ahead of Dortmund, admitted goalscorer Kingsley Coman.

Bayern went ahead at the Allianz Arena when Coman hit a superb shot into the top corner from outside the area on 16 minutes. Teenage French defender Tanguy Nianzou then headed in his first Bayern goal before Lewandowski converted a penalty to make it 3-0 at the break. After drawing their previous two league games, Bayern were all business by dominating possession and never allowing Union to settle.

Lewandowski has chalked up 43 goals for Bayern this season in all competitions. He is one of four players out of contract in 2023, yet Bayern are reportedly yet to offer him an extension. The second half had barely begun when Lewandowski, who showed no signs of a midweek knee-injury scare, made it 4-0 by sweeping in a Jamal Musiala pass. At the other end, Bayern defender Lucas Hernandez cleared a shot from a tight angle by Union striker Taiwo Awoniyi off the line.

The tempo dropped early in the second half, but Bayern were rarely tested thereafter as they cruised to the win. Even Joshua Kimmich, who is notoriously hard on his team's performances, was happy with Bayern's win. "We allowed them two or three chances in the first half that were unnecessary, but it was still a deserved victory," said Kimmich. "The

attitude and approach were right." The victory was Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer's 311th in the Bundesliga, breaking the record he previously shared with Oliver Kahn.

Hertha end winless streak

Earlier, Hertha Berlin earned their first win of 2022 to climb out of the bottom two with a 3-0 home victory over Hoffenheim despite new coach Felix Magath being sidelined by COVID. Hertha ended a nine-match winless streak in the Bundesliga by brushing aside Champions League-chasing Hoffenheim despite Magath watching in bed from his Berlin hotel. Magath, 68, is Hertha's third coach this season, having been brought in last Sunday after Torjan Korkut was sacked.

Defender Niklas Stark and striker Ishak Belfodil put Hertha 2-0 up at Berlin's Olympic Stadium before Hoffenheim defender David Raum scored an own goal. The win lifts Hertha into 16th place, the relegation play-off spot, with seven games left, while Hoffenheim stay sixth. Freiburg continued their challenge for a first Champions League qualification by climbing to fourth with a goalless draw at bottom side Greuther Fuerth.

There were curious scenes at Mainz where three different penalty takers converted spot-kicks within 14 minutes for the hosts in their 4-0 trouncing of Arminia Bielefeld. Mainz were ahead after less than 30 seconds when Jonathan Burkardt beat the defense and fired home. Austrian defender Manuel Priel came off the bench and had a 45 minutes to forget. He gave away two penalties while Bielefeld team-mate Andres Andrade also committed a foul to concede a spot-kick.



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Cameroonian forward Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting (left) vies for the ball with Union Berlin's Hungarian midfielder Andras Schaefer during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Bayern Munich v FC Union Berlin on March 19, 2022. —AFP

Mainz defender Moussa Niakhate, Burkardt, then Danish striker Marcus Ingvartsen converted the penalties. Stuttgart pulled away from the bottom three with their second win in three games as late goals by Tiago Tomas and Omar Marmoush capped

their 3-2 comeback win at home to Augsburg. On Friday, Bochum were 2-0 down at home to Borussia Moenchengladbach when the referee abandoned the match after his assistant official was struck on the head by a full beer cup. —AFP

Giakoumakis hat-trick sends Celtic six points clear; County thrashed

GLASGOW: Giorgos Giakoumakis scored his second hat-trick in five games as Celtic moved six points clear at the top of the Scottish Premiership with a 4-0 thrashing of 10-man Ross County on Saturday. The Hoops had the points wrapped up within 26 minutes as Giakoumakis headed home Jota's cross at the far post, thrashed home his second from close range and then nodded down for Daizen Maeda to make it 3-0.

"We started the game really well and our football was good," said Celtic manager Ange Postecoglou. An uphill task for County was made impossible when Kayne Ramsay was shown a straight red card from a lunge on Tom Rogic on 28 minutes. At that stage Celtic would have expected to add many more goals to their significant goal difference advantage over Rangers, which could prove vital with two Old Firm clashes to come in the final seven

league games of the season.

However, there was just one more in the second half as Giakoumakis completed his hat-trick from the penalty spot. The Greek international had a troubled start to his Celtic career due to injury, but now has 11 goals in his last 13 appearances. "The rewards are there for you as a striker with the way we play but the big thing is working hard when we don't have the ball," added Postecoglou. "He's done well and has taken his goals really well but he benefits from everyone else and he knows that."

Europa League quarter-finalists Rangers can cut the gap at the top back to three points when they traveled to bottom-of-the-table Dundee yesterday. Dundee will also be desperate for the points after Callum Hendry's double in a 2-1 win for St Johnstone over Motherwell opened up a four-point gap at the foot of the table.

In the battle to make it into the top six for the end-of-season split, Dundee United were the big winners as a 96th-minute strike from Mark McNulty beat St Mirren 2-1 to move Tam Court's side up to fourth. Aberdeen also remain in the hunt for a top-six finish after coming from behind to beat Hibernian 3-1 thanks to two Lewis Ferguson penal-



Giorgos Giakoumakis

ties. Hearts now have a 14-point advantage in third place after they beat Livingston 2-0 at Tynecastle. —AFP

France set down WCup marker with superb Grand Slam

PARIS: France's first Six Nations title for 12 years showed that Fabien Galthie's impressive team, who beat England in a party atmosphere at the Stade de France, will be hard to stop at the World Cup on home soil next year. With Melvyn Jaminet prolific with the boot, the immense Cameron Woki fast becoming the fulcrum of the team and live-wire World Player of the Year Antoine Dupont wreaking havoc on the England defence, there was only going to be one winner on Saturday.

France were dominant in the opening 40 minutes with tries from the superb Gael Fickou and Francois Cros. England hit back in the second half thanks to Freddie Steward's converted try, but once Dupont burst through in the 61st minute the Grand Slam was secured and the fireworks could be launched from the stadium roof. On this form, if the World Cup was starting tomorrow, France would be favourites.

Once the Six Nations trophy had been lifted and his players serenaded for an hour by the 79,000 crowd, Galthie said: "This was an unforgettable experience which is going to make us grow. It brought so much joy to the coaching staff. "Tonight was a bit different to other matches, there was a lot of tension. It was beautiful, marvelously tense." Dupont said he could measure the progress of the team. "It's our third Six Nations together. We came up just short in the first two. We realised how difficult it can be - each match is difficult, we were able to see that this year."

Defensive discipline

All great teams are built on defense and English coach Shaun Edwards has instilled a discipline in that



SAINT-DENIS: France's players celebrate after winning the Six Nations rugby union tournament following a win in the match between France and England on March 19, 2022. —AFP

department that many previous French sides lacked. The understated but impressively effective Gael Fickou is the defensive captain and from outside centre has overseen Edwards' approach to stifling opposing teams. That was supported by the statistics—the French did not receive a single yellow card in five games and their average of nine penalties per match was extremely low.

England coach Eddie Jones, speaking yesterday in the aftermath of his side's defeat, identified that defensive discipline as crucial. "The big difference between France three years ago, France two years ago and France now is their tactical discipline," he said. "They play a very disciplined game, play to their strengths, and play a long kicking game. They're very strong defensively around their 22." "Two and three years ago they weren't able to stick to their game plan with the same discipline they do now."

Galthie has put enormous faith in his players, keep-

ing a settled team with minimal changes. The only change to the starting XV that saw off Wales 13-9 in an attritional battle in Cardiff was Damien Penaud, who had recovered from coronavirus. In contrast, Jones had pressed the reset button, calling up five players. It was little wonder that England looked disjointed at times. France's general manager Raphael Ibanez had identified the side's first victory for 12 years against New Zealand last November as the moment he realized how much progress they had made.

He will know though that the All Blacks and reigning champions South Africa will be back with a vengeance at the World Cup next year. Dupont, the captain, admitted the prospect loomed large. "Of course this World Cup is in all of our minds. Plenty of people around us are talking about it and we talk a lot about it as well. "We're going to enjoy this victory, this Grand Slam. We'll project forward after that." —AFP

Brumbies top Super Rugby Pacific table; COVID hits games

SYDNEY: The ACT Brumbies clung on to edge the Queensland Reds in a top-of-the-table clash and clock their fifth straight win on a weekend of Super Rugby Pacific hit hard by coronavirus. In a replay of last year's Super Rugby AU final that the Reds won, Dan McKellar's Brumbies repelled late attacks in a pulsating match to win 16-12 in Canberra.

It improved their record to 5-0 for the season to move four points clear of the Reds at the top of the 12-team table as

the Queenslanders unbeaten run ground to a halt. A resurgent NSW Waratahs also tasted victory, piling more pressure on the Melbourne Rebels with a 24-19 triumph, while Western Force snatched a nail-biting 20-18 win over Fijian Drua after a last-gasp penalty in Sydney. But tournament newcomers Moana Pasifika suffered a heavy 59-12 thumping by the Waikato Chiefs at Auckland.

They were the only games played with Omicron-variant cases of Covid-19 forcing the postponement of all three round five matches originally scheduled in New Zealand. Instead, Auckland-based Moana and the Chiefs met for a clash that had been postponed last month because of infections in the Pacific islanders camp. Coronavirus has thrown the season into disarray since its launch in mid-February with six matches unable to be played and five yet to be rescheduled, raising the prospect of a fixture pile-up later in the season.

Among the round five casualties was the Canterbury Crusaders showdown against the Auckland Blues, with the 12-time Super Rugby champions slipping to fourth on the ladder behind the Waratahs, but with a game in hand. The Brumbies are the only undefeated team, but coach McKellar was not happy with the way they squeezed past the Reds. "If we had lost, we would have beaten ourselves," he told reporters. "We've played some classics with the Reds, but that wasn't one."

The Brumbies only had 35 percent possession in the first-half and were fortunate to lead 10-7 at the break, courtesy of a sensational Tom Wright try and five points off Noah Lolesio's boot. They picked up the pace in the second half, but were forced into some desperate defense at the death as the Reds pressed hard for the win. In Sydney, the Waratahs won back-to-back matches for the first time in 19 months to consign the Rebels to a fifth straight defeat. —AFP

Tunisian giants Esperance book quarter-finals

JOHANNESBURG: Nigerians Kingsley Edo and Anayo Iwuala struck the goals that gave Esperance of Tunisia a 3-0 victory at Jwaneng Galaxy of Botswana on Saturday and sealed a CAF Champions League quarter-finals place. Edo opened and rounded off the scoring in Francistown and Iwuala netted in between as the four-time title-holders cruised to another Group C victory over Galaxy, having put four goals past them when they met in Tunisia.

Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria also reached the knockout phase of the marquee African club competition thanks to a 2-0 home win over Etoile Sahel of Tunisia in the same section. The qualifications of Esperance and Belouizdad raised to seven the number of teams who have secured top-two finishes in the four groups with one matchday remaining.

On Friday, Raja Casablanca of Morocco, Entente Setif of Algeria and Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa progressed to the quarter-finals of a competition offering a \$2.5 million (2.26 mn euros) first prize. Last weekend, surprise side Petro Atletico of Angola and Wydad Casablanca of Morocco were the first teams to reach the knockout stage. With seven clubs qualifying, there is just one place to be filled, either by Egyptian defending champions Al Ahly or Al Hilal of Sudan, on April 1 or 2.

Ahly will host Hilal in Cairo and need a draw to advance, while a win for Hilal would take them through on head-to-head records after the first match between the decades-old rivals ended in a 0-0 draw. Record 10-time African champions Ahly hope to become the first club to win the competition three consecutive times. Ahly and TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (twice each) and Enyimba of Nigeria and Esperance (once each) have won back-to-back titles only to fail in bids for three triumphs on the spin.

First-place contests

While the battle for quarter-finals places is all but over, the contests for first places will rage on in the final matchday with only Group A pace-setters Sundowns assured of finishing first. The Pretoria outfit overcame the 11th-minute red-carding of Kenyan centre-back Brian Onyango to defeat Hilal 4-2 in the 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) heat of Omdurman.

Full-back Thapelo Morena, who scored the winner in a surprise triumph over Ahly in Cairo, netted twice for the South Africans and Namibian sharpshooter Peter Shalulile was also among the goals. Former Sundowns star Percy Tau put Ahly ahead in a 3-1 win over Al Merrikh of Sudan, who staged the fixture in Cairo because their ground in Omdurman does not meet international standards. The comfortable victories of Esperance and Belouizdad left them level on 11 points ahead of a final-round showdown near Tunis to decide who wins Group C.

Raja need a point from the visit of Setif to retain the Group B leadership, and the Moroccans have recovered well after losing forwards Soufiane Rahimi and Ben Malango to Middle East clubs. They were barely troubled by group debutants AmaZulu of South Africa in Durban en route to a 2-0 win via goals from Hamid Ahadad and Ilias Haddad. Setif took advantage of Guinean visitors Horoya being reduced to 10 men on 80 minutes to snatch a 3-2 win through a couple of late goals from Riad Benayah. —AFP



SOUTHAMPTON: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (2nd right) shoots a penalty kick and scores his team's second goal during the English FA cup quarter-final football match between Southampton and Manchester City yesterday.—AFP

City, Palace book FA Cup semis

Lukaku strikes as Chelsea reach FA Cup semi-finals

LONDON: Manchester City finally got the better of Southampton at the third attempt this season with a 4-1 win to move into the FA Cup semi-finals yesterday. Crystal Palace also hit four to thrash struggling Everton 4-0 to make the last four. City's bid to retain their Premier League title has been hindered by two draws against the Saints and Ralph Hasenhuttl's men held their own again for an hour at St Mary's.

Adam Armstrong nearly made the most of a rare start when he hit the post early on for the home side. But just seconds later Raheem Sterling opened the scoring with a cool finish from Gabriel Jesus' pass. Ilkay Gundogan then hit the woodwork, but Southampton got the equaliser their first-half performance deserved when Aymeric Laporte deflected Mohamed Elyounoussi's cross into his own net.

With the tie delicately poised, the Saints' good work was undone when Mohammed Salisu needlessly dived in on Jesus to concede a penalty. Fraser Forster got a hand to Kevin De Bruyne's spot-kick but could not keep it out. City's strength in depth off the bench then took the game away from the hosts as substitutes Phil Foden and Riyad Mahrez produced lethal finishes to give the scoreline a harsh reflection on Southampton.

Vieira's Palace progress

Earlier, Palace stormed into the last four for the first time in six years by seeing off sorry Everton. Marc Guehi, Jean-Philippe

Mateta, Wilfried Zaha and Will Hughes got the goals as the Eagles continued their impressive first season under Patrick Vieira. "Going to Wembley is fantastic," said Vieira. "You can hear the atmosphere in the stadium, the fans; this is what they wanted and we wanted to give it to them."

Everton's focus now turns to just staying in the Premier League as they sit perilously just above the relegation zone. "We allowed them a free pass into the semi-final without Palace even playing particularly well," said Everton boss Frank Lampard. Everton managed just a second league win in 12 games against Newcastle on Thursday and started like they could build on that confidence boost.

However, there was no way back once their frailty from set-pieces was exposed for the opening goal. Guehi was called into the England squad for the first time this week and celebrated with his fourth goal since joining from Chelsea as he headed in Michael Olise's corner. The combination of Olise, Zaha and Eberechi Eze then began to cut Everton apart, no more so than in a flowing move for the second goal.

Eze's quick feet freed Zaha down the left and his low cross was swept in by Mateta. Two more goals in the final 11 minutes set the seal on a resounding Palace win. Zaha was alert after Olise's shot looped up onto the post to slot home his 10th goal of the season. And Hughes rounded off the scoring with his first goal since 2019 on the rebound after Jordan

Pickford produced a stunning save to deny Conor Gallagher. The winners of Liverpool's visit to Nottingham Forest will complete the semi-final line up alongside Chelsea, City and Palace.

Chelsea cruise

In another development, Thomas Tuchel saluted Chelsea's focus as they reached the FA Cup semi-finals for the third successive season after Romelu Lukaku inspired a 2-0 win against Championship side Middlesbrough on Saturday. In what could have been a potential upset, Tuchel's team were never troubled as they made it six successive victories since Roman Abramovich put the European champions up for sale. Unsettled Belgian striker Lukaku opened the scoring with just his second goal in seven games. Hakim Ziyech increased Chelsea's advantage before the interval at the Riverside Stadium.

The Blues killed off the quarter-final with minimal fuss after that, ensuring a last-four appearance at Wembley in April as they look to reach the final for a third consecutive year. Chelsea are operating under a special licence allowing them to fulfill fixtures after the UK government sanctions on Abramovich in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A host of bidders submitted their offers to buy Chelsea from Abramovich before Friday's deadline, offering hope that their current predicament will soon be over.

Tuchel admits he is out of the loop with

regards to the sale, but the German has impressively kept Chelsea's players focused amid the off-field turmoil. Chelsea, third in the Premier League and through to the Champions League quarter-finals, have won 12 of their past 13 matches, with the exception the League Cup final penalty shoot-out loss against Liverpool.

"We were very focused and very serious from the beginning. We showed quality in decisive moments and scored two early goals which gave us a comfortable lead, but the effort was huge to not allow big chances," Tuchel said. "I'm impressed with the players' focus. We accepted the ownership situation because we didn't cause it. It isn't in our hands, but it was important we showed the right spirit and took responsibility. "This is very good. If you have the talent, it is a responsibility to show it."

It has not all been plain sailing and following a scathing response from Middlesbrough and even their own supporters, Chelsea had withdrawn their request for the quarter-final to be played behind closed doors after they were denied the chance to sell their full allocation of tickets due to the sanctions. Tuchel feared his squad would have to make a 10-hour bus journey to the match because of limits on the amount they can spend on away travel before the transition to a new owner. But they were eventually allowed to fly to Teesside, where they comfortably avoided any FA Cup turbulence.—AFP

Record-setter Rojas nails third world indoor title

BELGRADE: Untouchable Yulimar Rojas set a new outright world record in the triple jump at the World Indoor Championships in Belgrade yesterday en route to winning an unprecedented third title. The Venezuelan, who previously won indoor golds in Birmingham in 2018 and Portland in 2016, smashed her own previous best of 15.43 meters when she soared out to 15.74m on her sixth and final attempt at the Stark Arena. It capped yet another dominant display of triple jumping by the Venezuelan—not since the 2016 Rio Olympics has she been defeated at a global championships, and on that occasion she still secured silver.

The two-time world outdoor champion also holds the outdoor world record, 15.67m, which she set when winning gold in Tokyo last summer. "I achieved my third indoor title here which is crowned with the world record, I cannot be more thankful," said Rojas. "Coming here, I knew it was the right time to achieve this and I took the chance. I did not want to miss this opportunity today. "Now, I want to focus on the world outdoor championships in Oregon and I think there is a big chance of making a double - long jump and triple jump."

"If I am in shape and the conditions are good, I can do both. The 16-metre mark is my big goal. Every day, I am trying to add one more centimeter to get closer to it." A day after the on-looking Yaroslava Mahuchikh won an emotional gold for the six-strong Ukraine team in the women's high jump, her teammate Maryna Bekh-Romanchuk claimed silver behind Rojas after going out to 14.74m with her final jump. Jamaican Kimberly Williams took bronze (14.59).

Tamberi stutters, Barga rules

There was a mixed bag for two other Olympic champions, Gianmarco Tamberi and Selemon Barga, on show on the third and final morning session at the world indoors. Tamberi, who shared Olympic gold with absent Qatari Mutaz Essa Barshim in Tokyo, was seeking to clinch a second indoor title after previous success in 2016.

But unlike Rojas, the Italian did not have it all his own way, eventually taking away a joint bronze with New Zealand's Hamish Kerr as South Korea's Woo Sanghyeok bagged gold with 2.34m ahead of Swiss Loic Gasch (2.31). All eyes were on Tamberi the track showman, but the grinning Korean thrived in the attention of a raucous crowd treated on numerous occasions to a remix of PSY's "Gangnam Style" song pumped out on the tannoy.

"I felt like I had only one good jump today so I am happy that I ended up with the gold medal on my neck," the 25-year-old said. "The crowd was a very good factor today. "It is very important for me because this is my first indoor season and I competed quite a lot. Every competition gave me more and more energy and power and I enjoyed it a lot." Ethiopia's Barga, in the absence of teammate Berihu Aregawi who failed to qualify for the final, claimed an impressive victory in the 3000m, racing home in 7min 41.38sec to add gold to his 2018 silver.—AFP

Leclerc wins F1 season-opening Bahrain GP

SAKHIR: Charles Leclerc of Ferrari won a dramatic Formula One season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix yesterday after reigning champion Max Verstappen was forced out with an electrical issue two laps before the end. Carlos Sainz snatched a Ferrari one-two while Lewis Hamilton matched third place for Mercedes after Sergio Perez added to Red Bull's disastrous day by spinning out of the race on the last lap. George Russell, in his first race since replacing Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes, took fourth place to give Mercedes a score of 27 points that they could not have dreamed of in the middle of the race.

There was also a remarkable outcome for the Haas team, which got no points last season, only to see Kevin Magnussen, who has replaced Russian driver Nikita Mazepin as a result of the invasion of Ukraine, finish fifth in his first race since 2020. For Leclerc, who started the race on pole and faced a battle for the lead with Verstappen in the opening laps, it was pure delight. The man from Monaco told his team over the radio: "That's exactly how we should start the season. One-two baby, one-two. Mamma mia."

Once the race trophy was in his hands, Leclerc said: "I'm so happy. We knew this was a big opportunity for the team and the guys have done an incredible job building into amazing car. "A one-two today with Carlos - we couldn't hope for better. It's incredible to be back at the top." Leclerc had started on pole and in a furious early part of the race, he exchanged the lead with Verstappen



SAKHIR: Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc celebrates on the podium winning the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in the city of Sakhir yesterday.—AFP

several times under the floodlights in the Gulf.

By lap 37 of 57, Leclerc's lead was 2.3 seconds and Verstappen was arguing with his own team over their instructions from the pit lane. The race was disrupted when the safety car came out on the 51st lap after Pierre Gasly had to jump out of his Alpha Tauri before it burst into flames. When racing resumed, Sainz attacked Verstappen for second place but the Dutchman's race ended in bitter disappointment as he appeared to lose all power on the 55th lap and had to limp into the pits without a point.

While Christian Horner and his Red Bull team were digesting the champion's failure to finish, Perez suddenly spun and came to a halt, apparently due to a mechanical issue. That allowed seven-time champion Hamilton to help himself to third place. "A big, big congratulations to Ferrari, it's so good to see them doing well again," said Hamilton. "It was such a difficult race - we've struggled throughout practice and this was the best result we could hope for. We're grateful for these points," Hamilton said.—AFP