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Panel discusses amendments to residency law for foreigners

MP wants foreigners to undergo DNA test to enter Kuwait

By B Izzak



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Dar Yamama, in the presence of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who presented to HH the Amir Mohammad Al-Fares, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Ali Al-Mousa, Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity and Water And Renewable Energy, and Mohammad Al-Rajhi, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, who took the constitutional oath before him on the occasion of their appointment. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's interior and defense committee yesterday discussed sweeping amendments to the 1959 residency law for foreigners, which calls to grant foreign investors a residence permit for up to 15 years. Rapporteur of the committee MP Saadoun Hammad said the panel reviewed the government-sponsored amendments with Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah and top ministry officials and decided to hold another meeting to vote on the amendments.

The amendments allow Kuwaiti women to sponsor their foreign spouses and children, provided the woman is not a naturalized citizen. Foreign women who are divorced or widows of Kuwaiti husbands have the right to obtain residency, provided they have children.

According to the amendments, expats who are on a visit visa should leave after three months, unless the visa has been renewed, but not for more than a year. Expats can obtain a residence permit for up to five years, while children of Kuwaiti women and owners of real estate can get a residence permit of up to 10 years. Both can be renewed for a similar duration.

Continued on Page 6

Putin chose war. We remain united

By Alina L Romanowski
US Ambassador to Kuwait



This is a dangerous moment for the world. By launching his unlawful, unprovoked, and brutal war in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin has committed an assault on the principles that uphold global peace and security. This isn't the first time, of course, that Putin decided his country could invade another with impunity. Moscow's further invasion of Ukraine is part of a pattern of the Kremlin's destructive behavior: Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, occupied Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014, and has stationed troops in Moldova without host government consent for decades.

Putin's war in Ukraine evokes painful memories among Kuwaitis who lived through Saddam's brutal invasion of their country in 1990, as well as among the Americans who served during the liberation. Like Saddam, the Russian President denied the history and independence of his neighbor to justify an unprovoked military incursion with the goal of subverting that neighboring state's sovereignty to his own complete control. Just as the United States stood with Kuwait then, we stand behind Ukraine and its people today, to uphold Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of the Kremlin's flagrant violation of international law.

In Ukraine, Putin has embarked on a campaign of terror as he did in Syria, with airstrikes indiscriminately destroying hospitals and critical civilian infrastructure. On March 10 in Ukraine, Russian forces bombed a maternity and children's hospital, killing three civilians including a child. As in Syria, Russian forces escalated attacks to include humanitarian convoys and civilians, while also relying on disinformation campaigns to cover their tracks. The world is watching this conflict closely.

Continued on Page 6

Afghan girls sent home from schools

KABUL: The Taliban ordered girls' secondary schools in Afghanistan to shut on Wednesday just hours after they reopened, sparking heartbreak and confusion over the policy reversal by the hardline Islamist group. The U-turn was announced after thousands of girls resumed lessons for the first time since August, when the Taliban seized control of the country and imposed harsh restrictions on women.

The education ministry offered no coherent explanation even as officials held a ceremony in the capital to mark the start of the academic year, saying it was a matter for the country's leadership.

"In Afghanistan, especially in the villages, the mindsets are not ready," spokesman Aziz Ahmad Rayan told reporters. "We have some cultural restrictions... but the main spokesmen of the Islamic Emirate will offer better clarifications."

A Taliban source told AFP the decision came after a meeting late Tuesday by senior officials in the southern city of Kandahar, the movement's de facto power center and conservative spiritual heartland. —AFP



KABUL: Girls attend class after their school reopened on March 23, 2022, before closing just hours later. — AFP

Fleeing invasion, Ukrainian woman reaches Gaza

GAZA: After Russia invaded Ukraine, Viktoriya Saidam knew she needed to find a "safer place" than Kyiv and ultimately chose her husband's homeland - a Palestinian territory not typically associated with security: Gaza. Saidam, 21, was born Viktoria Breij in Vinnytsia, a town some 200 km southwest of Ukraine's capital. While studying pharmacy in Kyiv, she met Ibrahim Saidam, a

medical student from Bureij, a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, the Zionist-blockaded Mediterranean enclave home to 2.3 million Palestinians.

Since they married two years ago, Viktoriya Saidam had been keen to get to Gaza to meet her in-laws, but the Russian assault launched on Feb 24 accelerated that long-anticipated family gathering, she told AFP: "We understood that there was no way to know what tomorrow would bring. The number of dead and dying was rising every day," said the young woman, sobbing as she watched videos of Russian strikes destroying buildings in Ukraine.

Their first move was to pack up, leave Kyiv and head to Vinnytsia. They left the town before a March 7 Russian bombardment on Vinnytsia's airport

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: Ukrainian Viktoriya Saidam, accompanied by her Palestinian husband Ibrahim Saidam, shows an image on her mobile phone at their family home in the refugee camp of Bureij on March 22, 2022. — AFP

Water fears as Morocco hit by severe drought

RABAT: As Morocco withers under its worst drought in 40 years, experts warn that a combination of climate change and bad resource management could trigger severe drinking water shortages. "The country hasn't seen a situation like this since the start of the 1980s," said water policy expert Abderrahim Hendouf.

While it was usually farmers who bore the brunt of repeated droughts in

the North African kingdom, today water supplies to cities are under threat, water minister Nizar Baraka told parliament in mid-March. Morocco has had little rain since September, and authorities say its reservoirs have received just 11 percent of what they would in an average year.

"That's a worrying sign," Abdelaziz Zerouali, the water ministry's head of research and planning, told state television station M2, adding that some preemptive measures had been taken to mitigate the risks. Two major cities, tourist hub Marrakesh and Oujda in the east, already started tapping into groundwater reserves in December to ensure adequate supplies.

Continued on Page 6



AGADIR, Morocco: In this file photo taken on Oct 22, 2020, a farmer walks among orange trees dried out by drought on Morocco's southern plains in the country's agricultural heartland. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Al-Sadu Craft Society celebrates 30th anniversary

Supporting culture, crafts and creativity



KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Al-Sadu Craft Society celebrated on Tuesday, the 30th anniversary of its founding, by holding an exhibition (The Outfit) for design and innovation in Bait Al-Badr. The President of the Society, Sheikha Bibi Duajj Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, said they celebrate 30 years of supporting culture, crafts and creativity, and this support continues through three exhibitions of distinguished and creative people in Kuwait in the field of costume, jewelry and industry.

Sheikha Bibi Al-Sabah added that this occasion "represents thirty years of work in preserving the traditions of weaving and transferring them towards modern future horizons that will enrich the local cultural identity and contemporary creative artistic development".

She praised the experience of the 30 years of perseverance in refining these artistic methods and manual skills and passing them on to the young and future generations within

serious educational plans and programs while preserving the rights of the first female craftswomen "to stimulate and honor their artistic gifts, in addition to encouraging young people to work manual craftsmanship and innovation in the field of knitting and weaving traditions.

She stressed that the previous years also witnessed perseverance in highlighting the Kuwaiti cultural heritage and introducing it locally, regionally and globally. —KUNA



Kuwait FM attends Pakistan's Diamond Jubilee celebrations



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Wednesday attended the military parade that took place in the friendly Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the occasion of its Diamond Jubilee of Independence. The parade was attended by the Pakistani President, Prime Minister and foreign ministers participating in the Ministerial Meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, in addition to the participation of a guest Honor in the Islamic meeting, Minister of

Foreign Affairs of the friendly People's Republic of China

In another development, Kuwait FM met Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand Don Pramudwinai. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 48th session of the Ministerial Meeting of the OIC held in the capital of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Islamabad. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to enhance cooperation in all fields on the regional and international scenes. —KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Thai counterpart Don Pramudwinai. —KUNA

Kuwait supports Saudi Globe Network initiative

RIYADH: The fourth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Arab Convention against Corruption in Riyadh featured a number of important issues namely the Saudi Globe Network initiative, said a Kuwaiti official on Wednesday. Speaking to KUNA and Kuwait Television at the conclusion of the conference, head of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority

(NAZAHA) Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim said that the conferees agreed on a number of mechanism to combat corruption.

The top among the important items was the Globe Network Initiative by Saudi Arabia, Kuwaiti official indicated, adding that Kuwait was among the first nations to adopt the initiative. He revealed that during the conference, Palestine was chosen to host the fifth session of the conference. Speaking on his part, NAZAHA's acting Secretary General Dr Mohammad Bozbar said that approving the Globe Network would enhance Arab anti-corruption efforts.

He commended Saudi Arabia's hosting of the fourth session, hoping that the out-

comes of the conference would contribute to the Arab world's fight against all forms of corruption. The fourth session concluded in Saudi Arabia with a wide Arab, regional, and international participation.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (Globe Network) provides a platform for peer-to-peer information exchange and informal cooperation to better identify, investigate and prosecute cross-border corruption offences and recover stolen assets. The initiative was proposed by Saudi Arabia during its G20 Presidency in 2020. —KUNA

Kuwait, Indonesian parliament speakers seek closer relations

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem on Wednesday met with his Indonesian counterpart Puan Maharani, on the sidelines of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) 144th session, to discuss bilateral parliamentary relations and ways to boost them. They also addressed recent events that the world is witnessing and their repercussions on the Middle East, in addition the importance of increasing parliamentary efforts to finding a unified positions in this regard.

According to a statement to Al-Dustour News Network, Al-Ghanem expressed his appreciation to the Indonesian President for hosting the IPU conference. The meeting was also attended by Kuwait's Ambassador to Indonesia AbdulWahab Al-Saqer. Speaker Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation had arrived in Bali, Indonesia, last Friday to participate in the conference which lasts until Thursday. —KUNA



Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem met with his Indonesian counterpart Puan Maharani. —KUNA

Philippine Embassy closely coordinating with authorities over Filipina's murder

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippine Embassy is closely monitoring the case of a Filipina allegedly murdered by her Egyptian husband in their family flat in Mahboula. "The Philippine Embassy is closely monitoring this case. Certain individuals who are related to the victim have come forward and have provided their statements to the embassy. The embassy is coordinating with the concerned Kuwaiti authorities for the resolution of this case," an embassy official told Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity.

Authorities from the Criminal

Investigation Department confirmed the victim was a Filipino citizen. Her name based on her government-issued civil ID was Sumayya Daro Mama. Her unidentified Egyptian husband fled with two of their three children to Egypt after allegedly strangling his wife to death. The man has left the third child at a nursery, a four-month-old pending visa and passport documents.

Millet, a co-worker and a friend of the victim, said Sumayya constantly complained about her husband's abusive behavior. "All the time I heard never-ending complaints about her husband. She said if not because of her three chil-

dren, she would have gone home to the Philippines," Millet said. "She was my best friend so I listened to her personal stories and gave her some advice. I cannot believe she has left me," she added.

The media has been reporting about brutal and violent crimes that take place in Kuwait almost every week. Drug use has been found to be behind the recent rise in crime in Kuwait, a source said. Statistics show 65 percent of reported crimes in the country are due to drug abuse or drug-related activities. There is however no evidence that the Mahboula murder was drug related or attributed to any drug use.

Local

Ministers take constitutional oath; Amir urges cooperation

Amir receives Crown Prince and PM



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other top officials. —KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who presented Mohammad Al-Fares, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Ali Al-Mousa, Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, and Mohammad Al-Rajhi, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, who took the constitutional oath before His Highness the Amir on the occasion of their appointment to their new positions.

His Highness the Amir stressed the need for constructive cooperation with the legislative authority to confront all challenges. He urged them to push the wheel of development in order to achieve the hopes and aspirations of citizens and for the good, benefit and prosperity for all.

Pardon for 595 inmates

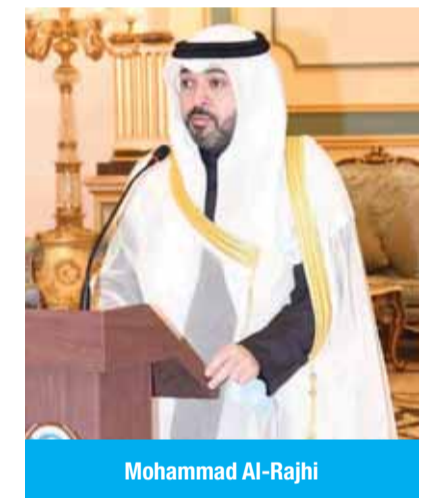
In another development, the Kuwait Ministry of Interior on Wednesday announced the implementation of the royal decree for the 595 inmates who were included in the Amiri pardon. The Amiri Diwan, the Public Prosecution and the Ministry of Interior are speeding up for the release of prisoners who are serving their sentences in prison with good behavior.



Mohammad Al-Fares



Ali Al-Mousa



Mohammad Al-Rajhi

Madrid municipality honored by Kuwaiti delegation's visit

MADRID: An official in the municipality of Madrid said that the Spanish capital municipality is honored by the delegation of the Kuwaiti Municipal Council's visit, headed by Engineer AbdulSalam Al-Randi. On the sidelines of the Kuwaiti delegation's visit, head of the Spanish municipality's international relations service Ricardo Iglesias, stated that Madrid is the only European capital founded by Muslims, and that the municipality is proud of its Islamic heritage, as it opened its doors to Kuwaitis to exchange experiences in various specializations.

Iglesias pointed out that Madrid's successful experiences in various fields makes it a station for official delegations from municipalities and countries worldwide, noting that more than 150 delegations visited the municipality to see its experiences in the previous year of the health crisis caused by

coronavirus pandemic. Iglesias expressed his gratitude to continue cooperating with Kuwait's municipality through sharing experiences that would contribute to improving the lives of residents.

In a similar statement to KUNA, Head of the cultural center (Centro-Centro) Ana Loma, welcome the Kuwaiti delegation, which she accompanied through its visit that started with Centro-Centro, as she expressed interest to find out more about Kuwait's municipality experiences and in managing and investing in cultural institutes.

The Kuwaiti delegation, headed by Engr AbdulSalam Al-Randi accompanied by two Kuwaiti Municipal Council members, held meetings with officials in several fields such as planning, transportation, infrastructure, waste management and recycling, as well as visiting the safety and emergency center in the city and were accompanied by the First Secretary at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Madrid Mohammad Al-Shahoumi. Members of the delegation traveled to Marbella, Wednesday, in the Andalusian province of Malaga to meet with Mayor Maria Angelis to learn about the municipality's experience in several fields and exchange ideas and experiences. —KUNA



MADRID: Officials pose for a group photo in Madrid. —KUNA

Interior clarifies entry visa issues

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry clarified about a new law published last week on entry visas being valid for three months, which went into effect from March 20, 2022. Brig Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari, Director of the Public Relations and Security

Media Department at the Ministry of Interior, told Kuwait Times that this decision is only related to business visas.

"MoI extended the validity of business visas up to six months in the past period since the start of the pandemic. But from last Sunday (March 20), we went back to the original period of validity of business visas, which is three months," explained Kandari. Regarding family visas, he noted it's currently limited to certain relatives. "In the present time, the family visa is only issued for wives and children with certain conditions," stressed Kandari.

On the occasion of the



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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comGCC keen on
ending conflict
in Yemen

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) invitation for holding the Yemeni talks affirms the council's keenness on achieving peace in Yemen, said Kuwait Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah yesterday. In a statement to KUNA, the Kuwaiti ambassador noted that the meeting of the GCC Secretary General, Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, with the council's ambassadors and the five permanent members to Yemen confirm that the consultations are a valuable opportunity to end the conflict in Yemen. Last week, GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf invited all Yemeni parties involved to hold consultations under the auspices of the council, set for March 29 to April 7 in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. —KUNA

AIU holds 'At The
Violet Hour'

KUWAIT: On Monday, March 21, 2022, the campus of American International University played host to a duo of acclaimed artists. Kate Daudy, world-renowned visual artist, and Kostya Novoselov, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and visual artist worked in tandem to bring 'At The Violet Hour' to the AIU community. The exhibit harmoniously ties together the disciplines of art and science creating a unique aesthetic both visually and conceptually.

The large-scale installation consisted of three exhibits, 'Anything Can Happen', 'All You Had to Do Was Stay', and 'The Evolution Project'. Students and faculty from the School of Architecture and Design took part in the memorable experience of setting up the installations during which they interacted at length with the artists. Daudy and Novoselov spoke at a full auditorium about their collaborations and the overarching theme of connectedness and peace.

The fact that people from all walks of life from all over the world are somehow all related and humans should treat one another with peace was one that resonated with all of those in attendance. During the VIP opening, which kicked off at 9:30 am with a beautifully catered buffet of traditional Arabic sweets and coffee, dignitaries from Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Korea, to name a few, were able to converse with the artists and exchange ideas.

After formal greetings and informal conversation, the artists led the guests around campus, explaining in detail their exhibits which made for a joyous and momentous event, one the AIU community and Kuwait will surely never forget. AIU looks forward to hosting more academic and culturally relevant events on its campus soon as it strives to be the beacon of culture, art, and learning in Kuwait.

Kuwait Airways launches flights to
Manchester; three flights per week

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Chief Executive Officer, Engr Maen Razouqi received the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Kuwait, HE Belinda Lewis, accompanied by Siraj Hatem, Senior Trade Adviser at the Embassy and Samantha Kerry, Events Officer, and in the presence of KAC's Chief Operations Officer, Captain Eisa Al-Haddad and the Director of Training, Captain Ali Al-Marri.

The Chief Executive Officer, Engr Maen Razouqi welcomed Ambassador Belinda Lewis at the Kuwait Airways headquarters, emphasizing on the extent of the long history of relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom. He also referred to the joint cooperation and bilateral relations between the two countries and the methods to develop them in all fields in general, and particularly to the aviation sector.

Speaking to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, Razouqi stated, "Kuwait Airways is proceeding, according to well-thought-out and effective plans in moving forward towards expanding its network of operations around the world, with the launch of new and diverse destinations that suit the preferences of its customers and meet their aspirations. Accordingly, the Company will launch its scheduled flights to Manchester in the United Kingdom from 1st May 2022, with three flights per week on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays."

Razouqi stated that Manchester as a destination is of great importance to Kuwait Airways' customers, pointing out that the selection came after an increased demand for it as a distinct destination for tourists, especially in the summer season, which is expected to witness an unprecedented boom in the tourism, travel, and hospitality sectors.

Razouqi explained that Kuwait Airways cur-



rently owns a new young fleet, supported by the latest technology that keeps pace with all the aspirations of customers in the aviation sector, including entertainment, comfortable seats, excellent service, and assistance in completing travel procedures from the entrance of Terminal 4. He indicated that the presence of the fleet and the arrival of the new aircraft will greatly contribute to the implementation of the plans, reach the desired objectives, and will also support the services offered to passengers, in providing a safe and pleasant journey on board the Blue Bird.

On his part, KAC's Chief Operations Officer, Captain Eisa Al-Haddad said, "We are pleased and honored to receive the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Kuwait, HE Belinda Lewis, at the Kuwait Airways headquarters, where the Ambassador was briefed on the history of Kuwait Airways with its achievements it has accomplished over the past 68 years, since its

establishment in 1954."

Al-Haddad added, "Kuwait Airways' choice of Manchester, in the United Kingdom as a destination came after thorough and comprehensive research of the requirements of the local and global aviation market and due to its historic and touristic attractions along with its rich, diverse culture. Moreover, Manchester stands out as a holiday destination all throughout the year due to its location as a major metropolitan city, with some of the best international universities and sports clubs in the world."

Al-Haddad highlighted that Manchester is one of the most important destinations that Kuwait Airways will launch in the coming period as it will assist a large segment of students who are awarded scholarships to study abroad in Universities in England, in addition to paving the way for those interested in learning about different and diverse cultures.

KFH participates
in K-Tech job fair

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House "KFH" continues its pioneering position in recruiting Kuwaiti youth and attracting national talents by participating in the 2-day job fair organized by Kuwait Technical College. KFH pavilion comprised a highly specialized HR team to offer vacancies, attract talents, answer students and graduates' queries and reply to all their questions on job opportunities available for the current students and graduates seeking employment at KFH.

The HR team has also presented the training and development programs which the bank offers to the students and employees. KFH team has granted current students the opportunity to work on (Part

Time) basis, to develop and encourage the students to enter the labor market with full readiness and expertise and to invest their free time in current and future beneficial activities.

KFH participation in the job fair reflects its leadership in providing job opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth seeking employment in the civil sector, namely those who have the ambition and compassion to assume highly distinguished and specialized jobs which are highly required in the market eg, information technology, artificial intelligence, cyber security and other several majors which have witnessed high demand by global institutions.

It's worth mentioning that KFH has participated last week in the job fair organized by GUST. Several employment applications were registered for the university graduates and job opportunities were presented to those who wish to work on part time basis.

Kuwait participates
in 'Arab Convention
against Corruption'

RIYADH: The fourth session of the Conference of States Parties to the 'Arab Convention against Corruption' was launched in Saudi capital on Wednesday with participation of a Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority delegation, headed by Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim, Chair of the conference's forth session and Saudi chief of Oversight Anti-Corruption Authority Mazin Al-Kahmouh stated that this meeting is part of efforts to aid countries grappling with corruption. He added that the meeting, with participation of 14 Arab countries and a number of regional and international organizations, seeks to usher in a new phase of joint Arab work in combating corruption. On his part, Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority delegation Chairman Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim affirmed that cooperation is a main fac-

tor towards achieving development and boosting expertise in field of combating corruption and achieving stability.

He stressed importance of imposing Arab regional policies to execute Arab agreement, exchange expertise and facilitate future planning. Al-Ibrahim added that challenges faced by international anti-corruption organizations must be taken into consideration, to examine cons and benefit from pros, apply what corresponds to Arab nations. He reiterated Kuwait's appreciation for Saudi Arabia's efforts in launching and supporting initiative of Globe network, concerned with dealing with corruption. Chair of third anti-corruption session, Mohammad Al-Rashedi asserted importance of continuous work to thwart corruption and boost integrity and transparency, adding that regularity in holding meetings reflects commitment. Chairman of the ninth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Hasan Abdulshafi, indicated that the session held last December rectified four resolutions put forth by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, which reflects keenness of Arab countries in contributing to international multilateral anti-corruption dialogue. —KUNA





Black box of China Eastern jet recovered

Surviving homelessness in NY City



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden speaks to members of the press prior to a Marine One departure from the White House on March 23, 2022 in Washington, DC. — AFP

Biden heads to Europe to bolster West's unity

Intense diplomacy marks a crucial moment in the dangerous standoff with Putin

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden leaves Wednesday for Europe on a mission to bolster Western unity, and ramp up unprecedented sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine and attempting to upset the post-Cold War balance of power. The conflict with Russian President Vladimir Putin is redefining Biden's 14-month old presidency as he pivots from domestic woes to leading the transatlantic alliance in the most serious crisis in Europe for decades.

After four years of Donald Trump, who treated European nations as economic competitors and scorned the traditional US role as senior partner in NATO, Biden has put the accent on unity. At back-to-back summits in Brussels on Thursday, he'll be pushing for more. White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters that Biden will seek to "reinforce the incredible unity we built with allies and partners."

Sullivan also said that economic sanctions, imposed by a global network of Western allies to cripple Russia's finances, will be deepened. A further package will be

"rolled out in conjunction with our allies on Thursday," Sullivan said. He gave no details, other than to say the package "will focus not just on adding new sanctions but on ensuring that there is joint effort to crack down on evasion on sanctions."

On Thursday, Biden will attend summits with NATO, the G7 group and the European Council. He flies Friday to Poland, which neighbors Ukraine and is now the front-line in what some call a new Cold War, and on Saturday he meets President Andrzej Duda.

The intense diplomacy marks a crucial moment in the dangerous standoff with Putin, who seeks to force Ukraine from its pro-Western path. After a month of fighting, Russian forces have laid waste to swaths of the country but have made few significant military gains, while Ukraine continues to resist.

China question

Sullivan noted Ukraine's success, which has been assisted by large-scale Western arms shipments, but he



Toughen Russia sanctions

warned against any presumption of a quick end to the war or a climbdown by Moscow. "There will be hard days ahead in Ukraine, hardest for the Ukrainian troops on the frontlines and the civilians under Russian bombardment," Sullivan said. "This war will not end easily or rapidly." If the conflict does drag on, Russia's ability to weather military losses and the crushing Western economic sanctions may partly depend on the position taken by its authoritarian partner China.

Beijing has refused to condemn Putin's war, but Washington hopes at least to dissuade China from actively helping the Kremlin, either by bailing out the Russian economy or sending weapons. Sullivan said there was no sign that China was providing military assistance in the wake of a nearly two-hour phone call between President Xi Jinping and Biden last Friday.

"This is something we are monitoring closely," he said. "The president will certainly consult on the question of China's potential participation in the conflict of Ukraine while he's in Brussels. He'll do so at NATO," Sullivan said.

"He'll also do so when he addresses the 27 leaders of the European Union, because on April 1st, the European Union is having a summit with China," he added. "We believe we're very much on the same page with our European partners." In a wrinkle for Biden's travel plans, his chief spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, will have to stay home because of a positive Covid-19 test announced Tuesday. — AFP

Russia sentences Navalny to nine years in jail

POKROV, Russia: A Russian court on Tuesday found jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny guilty of additional charges and extended his sentence to nine years in a higher security prison as Moscow seeks to wipe out remaining pockets of dissent. The sentencing came on the 27th day of what Moscow calls its "special military operation" in pro-Western Ukraine, with thousands killed and some 10 million displaced.

Following the verdict, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic who has been behind bars for more than a year said the Russian leader was afraid of the truth. "Putin is afraid of the truth. I have always said this. Fighting censorship, relaying the truth to the people of Russia always remained our priority," the 45-year-old opposition politician said in a post on Instagram after the sentencing.

With his trademark sense of humour, Navalny took the extension of his jail time on new charges of embezzlement and contempt of court in stride, joking that his "space flight is being extended-my ship has gotten caught in a time loop." He also urged Russians to resist "these war criminals".

He stood trial inside his penal colony in the town of Pokrov outside Moscow. "Navalny committed fraud-the theft of property by an organised group," judge Margarita Kotova said, according to an AFP reporter present at the hearing. The judge also found Navalny guilty of the less severe charge of contempt of court.

Navalny will serve his new sentence in a strict-regime penal colony, which will place him in much harsher conditions. His lawyers, Olga Mikhailova and Vadim Kobzev, were detained by police following the verdict but were later freed. Navalny's defence team said the new sentence replaces the one he is currently serving, meaning that he will not be freed for another eight years, instead of a year and a half.

'People are afraid'

Last year the opposition leader was sentenced to two and a half years for violating parole for old fraud charges while recovering from a poison attack with Novichok nerve agent that he blames on the Kremlin. Navalny will also have to pay a fine of 1.2 million rubles (\$11,500) and upon his release he will have to abide by various restrictions on his movement and activities for a further 1.5 years.

He appeared for Tuesday's hearing in the makeshift court wearing his black prison uniform, with journalists watching via a video link. He listened closely as judge Kotova read out the verdict, sometimes smiling.

Navalny has denied the charges against him, saying they were punishment for challenging 69-year-old Putin. Investigators accused Navalny of stealing for personal use several million dollars' worth of donations that were given to his political organisations. The prosecutors had last week called for Navalny's sentence to be extended to 13 years as well as for his transfer to a strict-regime penal colony. His wife Yulia Navalnaya said she was proud of her husband.—AFP

Marcos heir wins Philippines election misinformation race

MANILA, Philippines: Philippine social media has exploded with support for presidential election favourite Ferdinand Marcos Junior, driven by a massive misinformation campaign aimed at revamping the family brand and smearing his top rival.

False and misleading claims have flooded Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter in the lead-up to the May 9 polls, pounding Filipinos with a relentless barrage of propaganda on platforms where they rank among the heaviest users in the world. Voter surveys show the son and namesake of the country's former dictator heading towards a landslide victory—the endgame of a decades-long, well-funded effort to return the family to the presidential palace they fled in disgrace in 1986.

Critics and opponents accuse Marcos Jr and his supporters of trying to portray his father's two-decade rule as a golden age of peace and prosperity while whitewashing human rights abuses and the plundering of state coffers. But the effort to make over the family's image appears to be translating into votes among the largely young electorate and those nostalgic for the Marcos years. Al Contrata, 25, was born a decade after a military-backed popular uprising toppled the dictator from power and chased the family into exile in the United States. Facebook posts about the elder Marcos have persuaded him to vote for his son. "I learned about the infrastructure that was built during the time of president Marcos. Since then, I saw him in a positive light," said Contrata, a delivery driver near Manila, who voted for President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016. "I think maybe Bongbong Marcos can continue what his father started," referring to the candidate by his nickname.

Election-related misinformation has focused primarily on the two presidential frontrunners, Marcos Jr and incumbent Vice President Leni Robredo, analysis by AFP's Fact Check team and local fact-checking alliance Tsek.ph shows. "Data show Robredo reeling from preponderantly negative messages and Marcos Jr enjoying overwhelming positive ones," said Maria Diosa Labiste and Yvonne Chua of Tsek.ph. They said the trend was

reminiscent of the flood of posts about Duterte and his opponents in 2016 that were seen as key to his win. Marcos Jr draws support from the family's northern stronghold as well as his alliance with vice presidential candidate and first daughter Sara Duterte.

But social media's influence is critical. One major battleground is Facebook, the most popular platform in the Philippines and used by most of its 76 million internet users. Since Marcos Jr's narrow loss to Robredo in the 2016 vice presidential race, pro-Marcos pages have pumped out misinformation about everything from electoral fraud and the family's wealth to economic achievements during his father's rule.

Robredo, who trailed Marcos by 45 percentage points in the latest poll by Pulse Asia Research, has also been a major target. Among the dozens of claims about the Marcoses debunked by AFP is the popular assertion that the patriarch made his fortune when he was a lawyer via a massive gold payment from a client.

AFP also fact-checked dozens of false or misleading claims about Robredo, including doctored photos and videos that aim to portray her as stupid, unfriendly towards voters or even a communist. Activity has only intensified ahead of the 2022 elections, drowning out support for Robredo.

In the past year, there have been nearly 75 million interactions—reactions, comments or shares—with posts on more than a hundred pro-Marcos pages with at least 3,000 followers, according to data from social media monitoring platform CrowdTangle.

That compares with just over 39 million interactions for the same number of pages promoting Robredo. When Robredo announced her presidential bid on October 7, interactions on pro-Marcos pages spiked to more than 1.8 million—about nine times the daily average. Pro-Robredo pages received 487,000 interactions.

"It's hard for the other campaigns to compete with the Marcos machinery online, because this is six years in the making," said Cleve Arguelles, an assistant lecturer in political science at De La Salle University in Manila.

"They've really worked hard to dominate these spaces and they're reaping the benefits of investing early in troll armies and building these online communities." It is not possible to tell how many of the pages were created by real supporters or the candidates.

In January, Twitter suspended more than 300 accounts reportedly linked to supporters of Marcos Jr, which the social media giant said had violated its rules on manipulation and spam.—AFP



WASHINGTON: US Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson testifies during her confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee in the Hart Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill, March 22, 2022. — AFP

Biden's Supreme Court pick defends record

WASHINGTON: US Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson defended her record of sentencing in child pornography cases and advocacy for terror suspects as she was grilled Tuesday in her bid to be the first Black woman on the country's highest judicial bench.

The 51-year-old Harvard graduate has been facing what is expected to be more than 18 hours of intense scrutiny in the US Senate on her judicial philosophy and career after being named by President Joe Biden to succeed a retiring fellow liberal, Justice Stephen Breyer.

Fielding questions from Republicans on a variety of "culture war" issues on the second day of hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Jackson said she considered women's right to abortion settled law but declined to offer a view on same-sex marriage.

She stressed her backing for free speech protections for all Americans, and said the ability to bear arms is a "fundamental right" guaranteed by the US Constitution. The Miami native is already expected to have enough votes in the 50-50 Senate to succeed Breyer without much of a fight, but her elevation would still be seen as historic. Of the 115 justices seated throughout the Supreme Court's 233-year history, 108 have been white men and none have been Black women. "I stand on the shoulders of generations past who never had anything close to this opportunity, who were the first—and the only—in a lot of different fields," Jackson said.

On the Republican hard right, senators Josh Hawley, Mike Lee, Tom Cotton and Ted Cruz offered what they said was evidence of Jackson being sympathetic to people committing sex crimes against minors, particularly in sentencing child pornography cases.

Lee and Hawley brought up cases they said showed Jackson had deviated without justification from federal sentencing guidelines in offenders' favor. Independent fact checkers have pointed out that in two-thirds of child porn cases, federal judges sentence below the guidelines, which are just one element that Congress has asked judges to consider.

Democrats pointed to Hawley's own record showing he has voted several times to confirm judges with similar judicial records. Jackson remained largely unruffled, although she showed signs of frustration when Cruz, a classmate at Harvard Law School, seemed to suggest a law review note she wrote in the 1990s showed she was sympathetic to child sex offenders. She dismissed the suggestion as a mischaracterization.—AFP



MANILA, Philippines: In this photo taken on March 13, 2022, presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos, son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, greets supporters during a campaign rally in Las Pinas City, suburban Manila. — AFP

International

Russia turns to attrition one month into Ukraine war

Russia does not have complete control of the skies over Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russia's forces in Ukraine appear to be turning to a war of attrition with devastating effect on civilians, after failing to secure hoped-for swift gains when President Vladimir Putin launched the invasion one month ago. The US government says recent days have brought more intense aerial and naval bombardment as Ukrainian resistance holds up the invaders' advance on land.



Capturing Kyiv is Russia's top target

Attacking forces remain 15 kilometres (10 miles) from the Ukrainian capital Kyiv to the north-west and 30 kilometres away to the east, able only to bombard it from a distance. While US President Joe Biden has said Putin's "back is against the wall in Ukraine", US Defense Department spokesman John Kirby told CNN Tuesday that Ukrainian forces were now even "going after Russians" who were losing morale as food and fuel run out. Capturing Kyiv had appeared the Russians' top target as they entered the country on February 24, hoping to topple President Volodymyr Zelensky's administration. But despite mobilising a force of between 150,000 and 200,000 troops, Moscow failed to anticipate anything other than weak resistance—likely owing to Russian intelligence failures—and made sloppy logistical preparations.

Even now, Russia does not have complete control of the skies over Ukraine, complicating their entire offensive.



MYKOLAIV, Ukraine: A man sells second hand useful items on his 37 years old Soviet car in the center of Mykolaiv, southern Ukraine, on March 22, 2022. The southern city is a key obstacle for Russian forces trying to move west from Crimea to take Odessa, Ukraine's major port on the Black Sea. — AFP

"The Russian lack a real command and control policy," a former top French military officer told AFP, pointing to lack of coordination between ground and air forces and the strikes' lack of precision.

Siege warfare

The number of soldiers killed cannot be verified, although the Pentagon estimates as many as 7,000 Russian dead in the first month according to the New York Times. That would amount to more losses than the

US suffered in the years-long occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan combined.

"Putin's offensive is stuck despite all the destruction that it is bringing day after day," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday. For its part, Kyiv acknowledged 1,300 troops killed in action on March 12 — likely well below the real figure according to observers.

With their forces bogged down, the Russians have transformed their offensive into a string of sieges apparently aimed at wearing down and demoralising the

Ukrainian population. Around 10 million people have left their homes, while the UN human rights chief says almost 3.6 million have quit the country.

"The more the Russian infantry struggles, the higher the army climbs up the scale of brutality and the disproportionate use of air power," a European source close to NATO told AFP. "Putin needs a deal, so he needs victories." Throughout the one-month offensive, Russia has only captured one major urban centre—Kherson in south Ukraine. Mariupol to the east remains subjected to a siege that has caused international outrage. Uncaptured northern cities like Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest urban centre, are under constant bombardment, while pressure is also growing on those in the south and east. Mykolaiv, which blocks the way along the Black Sea coast towards Odessa, is also under artillery fire.

Devastation

But Russia has yet to put much emphasis on diplomatic efforts and analysts warn that even if a ceasefire were agreed it could just allow Moscow to buy time and rebuild its forces. More than 200,000 people are stuck in Mariupol, reduced in large part to corpse-strewn ruins and cut off from necessities like food, water, electricity and heat. Russia's determination to capture the port city is in proportion to its strategic worth, potentially linking annexed Crimea by land with the pro-Russian separatist territories of the Donbas. A firmer grasp on Ukraine's east could ultimately allow the invaders to encircle the Ukrainian defenders fighting there. "The next chapter in this war could prove even uglier as it will likely turn into a war of attrition, with greater bombardment of civilian areas," Michael Kofman of the US-based CNA think-tank wrote on Twitter. "Russian forces will probably try to compensate for poor performance by inflicting greater destruction." — AFP

Surviving homelessness in NY City

NEW YORK: Sekou Salaam knows all too well the dangers of living on New York's streets. Homeless for six months, he says he's been beaten with a metal pipe and repeatedly threatened with knives. "It's real out here. You can get hurt, you can get killed," the 55-year-old told AFP, after eating a free lunch at the Bowery Mission, which helps poor and hungry New Yorkers, in Lower Manhattan.

The dangers facing America's homeless were highlighted earlier this month when a man murdered two homeless men and wounded three others during a string of shootings in New York and Washington. Activists say attacks on homeless people in the United States are rising as the pandemic compounds mental illness and drug addiction and as gun crime soars. They also accuse politicians of worsening the problem with policies that stigmatize the homeless. The shootings on the second weekend of March as the men slept outdoors spread fear amongst New York's roughly 50,000 homeless. "I was alarmed, like whoa I'll be careful where I lay my head," said Salaam, who often seeks refuge in outdoor dining sheds that have proliferated during the pandemic.

"But you can't protect yourself while you're asleep," he added. "People are able to steal from you, so obviously they're gonna be able to kill you." Thirty-nine-year-old Arnie Medero, homeless for five years, says "precautions" he takes to stay safe include never sleeping in the same spot and scattering broken glass so he



NEW YORK: Homeless people and others in need receive free lunches at a canteen at the Bowery Mission, a non-profit organization caring for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, hunger and other crises, at its campus in New York City on March 16, 2022. — AFP

hears people coming. "I'm always on alert. My guard is always up," he told AFP.

Data compiled by the city show that the number of homeless murdered in New York City soared from seven in 2018 to 22 in 2021. In October 2019, four were beaten to death with a pipe by another homeless man in a killing spree in Manhattan. Although there are no nationwide statistics, because most police departments don't track housing status, the National Coalition for the Homeless believes attacks are increasing across the country.

"Anecdotally, we can say that the numbers are increasing. Violence is definitely on the rise," executive director Donald Whitehead told AFP. On March 15, Washington police charged 30-year-old Gerald Brevard III with first-degree murder for the New York and Washington shootings. He has a lengthy criminal record and history of mental illness. — AFP

US less optimistic over reaching Iran nuclear deal

WASHINGTON: US optimism that a deal to restore the 2015 agreement to limit Iran's nuclear developed has soured, with the State Department warning Tuesday it was headed toward "Plan B" if Tehran doesn't budge. Just a week ago Washington officials were hopeful that an agreement that aimed to halt Iran's march toward nuclear weapons capability, after almost one year of negotiations, was within reach.

"We are close to a possible deal, but we're not there yet," State Department spokesman Ned Price said on March 16. "We do think the remaining issues can be bridged." US officials said they thought Tehran would reach an agreement after Sunday's celebration of Nowruz, the Persian New Year.

Mood shift

But that tone suddenly changed the following day. "I want to be clear that an agreement is neither imminent nor is it certain," Price said Monday. And on Tuesday, while refusing to say the talks had reached an impasse, Price said the United States had contingency plans if a deal could not be reached and Iran's alleged plans to develop nuclear weapons were not halted.

"The onus is on Tehran to make decisions that it might consider difficult," Price told reporters. "In fact we are preparing equally for scenarios with and without a mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA," he said, referring to the formal name of the 2015 deal, the



US State Department spokesman Ned Price — AFP

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The administration of president Donald Trump unilaterally abrogated the six-party JCPOA in 2018, accusing Tehran of violating its terms and branding it a weak deal. Experts said Iran had mostly stuck to the terms, but months after the US pullout, the Islamic republic began ramping up its nuclear program with activities that would enhance its ability to build a nuclear weapon.

Last April, three months after he took office, President Joe Biden started new negotiations to revive the 2015 agreement, promising an easing of punishing sanctions in exchange for restoring JCPOA controls. But the talks have proceeded with the knowledge that Tehran has already moved much closer to nuclear weapons "break-out," which would render the JCPOA moot.

Political choices

Both sides have said in recent weeks that the other has to make tough political choices. And Tehran is believed to be holding out for two objectives: a guarantee of some protection if the United States again pulls out from the deal, and the removal of Washington's official "Foreign Terrorist Organization" designation of the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). — AFP

Panel discusses amendments...

Continued from Page 1

Foreign investors can get a residence permit for up to 15 years with guidelines and conditions to be set by the Council of Ministers, according to the amendments. Legal expat residents, with the exception of children of Kuwaiti women, owners of real estate and investors, cannot stay outside the country for more than six months otherwise it will be automatically cancelled. Domestic workers' duration of stay abroad is only four months.

Expats who resign or are sacked from government jobs can seek work with others, provided their former employers agree. The amendments state that the interior ministry will set out all fees related to residencies and their renewal.

Fleeing invasion, Ukrainian woman...

Continued from Page 1

killed nine people according to Ukraine's emergency services. "My husband and I had to look for a safer place than Ukraine," Saidam said. "We chose his homeland, Gaza." The couple fled Ukraine by minibus and then on foot, walking across the Romanian border.

They then flew to Cairo and from there headed for the Rafah crossing with southern Gaza. The young woman said she knows "the reality" of life in Gaza, a territory controlled by the Islamist group Hamas since 2007 and under strict Zionist blockade for 15 years now. The unemployment rate is above 50 percent, the electricity supply is sporadic and conflict can flare at any time.

Hamas has fought four wars with the Zionist entity since taking power in Gaza. The most recent conflict in May last year saw the Zionist entity pound the enclave with air strikes. "There was a war here, and it can start again, but we had to leave Ukraine and (Gaza) was safe,"

MP Hammad also said that the committee approved in principle a draft law by the interior ministry that calls to grant foreign wives of Kuwaiti husbands Kuwaiti citizenship after 18 years of marriage, extending the duration by more than 10 years. The bill also calls to grant widows and divorced wives of Kuwaiti husbands citizenship, also after 18 years, provided they have children. Hammad said the committee will meet later to vote on the bill.

MP Bader Al-Humaidi yesterday submitted a draft law stating that foreigners who apply to enter the country must undergo medical tests and a DNA test proving they are free of psychological diseases. The bill states that foreigners who wish to enter Kuwait for work or as a dependent or for carrying out any business activity must produce a health certificate stating they are free of chronic, infectious and psychological diseases. On top of that, a DNA test is required.

The lawmaker said the medical and DNA tests should show the foreigner is free of serious genetic and infectious diseases like hepatitis, kidney ailments and tuberculosis, in addition to psychological disorders.

Saidam said. "We don't know what will happen tomorrow," added the Ukrainian woman who converted to Islam shortly after her wedding and who so far speaks only a few words of Arabic. "We hope and pray for the best."

According to Ukraine's diplomatic office in Ramallah, in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, there are some 2,500 Ukrainians in Gaza, mostly women who have married Palestinian men who studied abroad, like Ibrahim. The impeccably coiffed 23-year-old husband, who speaks fluent Ukrainian, told AFP that, having lived through three of the Gaza wars, he has "some experience" with conflict.

In Ukraine, "a week before the start of the war, I prepared some provisions. But we didn't expect it to be so fierce," he said. "We could have gone to European countries to seek asylum, but I preferred to return to Gaza because I feel safe here and I know how things work." Comfortably settled at the Saidam family home, Viktoria Saidam said she was doing well but also that "fear and panic" grip her when she speaks to her brother and sister who are still in Ukraine. "I still cannot believe that what has happened isn't a dream, it's horrible," she said. "I'm dreaming of the day my husband and I can go home." — AFP

Putin chose war. We remain...

Continued from Page 1

and when Russian forces commit atrocities, we will pursue all international mechanisms to bring all those responsible to account.

The UN High Commission for Refugees reports that more than six million Ukrainians have been internally displaced or forced to flee Ukraine. As leaders in the humanitarian field, Kuwaitis know well the long-term toll exacted by long-term displacements of millions of civilians as in Syria and Yemen. Just as nations were poised to recuperate from the economic devastation of COVID-19, Putin's war of choice is driving up inflation and roiling global markets. Dozens of major US and global companies have shuttered their offices in Russia, in revulsion at Putin's invasion.

Putin's aggression will cost Russia profoundly — economically, socially, and strategically. Countless Russians, including prominent activists, journalists, artists, athletes, and average citizens have been targeted by the Kremlin for their anti-war sentiments, including nearly 15,000 arrested in peaceful demonstrations. President Biden's sweeping financial sanc-

Water fears as Morocco hit by...

Continued from Page 1

The government in February also released a package of around one billion euros in aid to the beleaguered agricultural sector, which makes up some 14 percent of GDP and is the top employer in the Moroccan countryside. "We need to change our vision of water," Zerouali told a conference on the right to water in Rabat. "Climate change is real and we will have to face it."

tions, coupled with an American ban on Russian energy imports, are the severest measures of their kind against a major economic power. And they're working: one Russian ruble is now worth less than one American penny or two Kuwaiti fils.

The next few days, weeks, and months will be incredibly difficult for the people of Ukraine; together with our Allies and partners across the globe, the United States will continue to support them as they defend their country. We are grateful to Kuwait, one of our closest allies in the region, for co-sponsoring a UN Security Council resolution denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the first Arab country on a list of more than 80 nations to do so. And more recently, as an act of Kuwaiti generosity, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued a directive announcing \$2 million in aid to Ukrainian refugees.

When the history of this era is written, it will show that Putin's choice to launch an unprovoked, unjust, and premeditated attack left peace-loving nations around the world more unified and Russia exponentially weaker and more isolated. Liberty, self-determination, and human dignity are forces far more powerful than fear and oppression, as countless citizens inside Russia are attesting through their acts of defiance and protest against the Kremlin's war. In the contest between liberty and autocracy, between sovereignty and subjugation, make no mistake: Freedom will prevail.

Moroccans have access to just 600 cu m of water per person per year, far below the 2,600 cu m they enjoyed in the 1960s. According to the United Nations' definition, water scarcity occurs when supplies drop below 1,000 cu m per person annually, while supplies of under 500 cu m are considered "absolute scarcity".

The decline in supplies in Morocco is a result of a mix of environmental factors, high demand and over-exploitation of groundwater for farming, according to Baraka. In a recent report for the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, Amal Ennabih wrote that "Morocco's water scarcity is deeply linked to the way water is used in irrigation, consuming around 80 percent of Morocco's water annually." — AFP

International

Rohingya in Bangladesh cheer US decision on Myanmar 'genocide'

Crackdown prompted an exodus of about 740,000 people into Bangladesh

KUTUPALONG, Bangladesh: Saying she saw with her own eyes her two daughters killed by the Myanmar military, Rahima Khatun is hopeful the US designation of the 2017 onslaught against the Rohingya as "genocide" will bring some justice. The girls, thrown into a burning house as their village was razed to the ground, were among thousands of victims of a brutal crackdown against Myanmar's long-marginalised Muslim minority.

Myanmar's junta denies the allegations and the case is currently being heard at the United Nations' highest court at The Hague, but the US declaration has provided hope for justice among many Rohingya. "The Myanmar military slaughtered and raped women. One day they came and threw our children alive into the fire. My two daughters were among them," said Khatun, 52, tears rolling down her cheeks at a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

The crackdown prompted an exodus of about 740,000 people into Bangladesh, joining more than 100,000 others who had fled earlier waves of violence. They live in a vast network of squalid camps made up of bamboo shacks, refusing to return home until Myanmar ensures the rights of the Rohingya.

Washington said this week there was clear evidence of an attempt at the "destruction" of the minority group. Community leaders in the camps, activists and victims told AFP that the US move would bring Myanmar's military to account and — perhaps — allow them to go back and rebuild their villages and lives across the border.

"We have been waiting for a long time for this day. The US is the world's most powerful nation.

Their decision will reverberate across the world. Maybe we'll get justice soon," local leader Sayed Ullah told AFP. Ullah, 33, who heads a Rohingya rights group in the camps, also lost several relatives and dozens of fellow villagers during the 2017 offensive.

Young Rohingya activist Sawyeddollah, 23, said news of the US decision spread like wildfire through the settlements, with people sharing video of Secretary of State Antony Blinken's speech on cellphones. "I hope the Biden administration will create a quick tribunal to go for action to implement their decision," Sawyeddollah said.

"America didn't say anything all these years. But yesterday's decision made all of us very happy," said Robi Ullah, 45, another refugee. Siraj Ullah, 65, said he offered prayers to God to express gratitude to the United States. "I hope they (the US) can ensure our repatriation as early as possible. If we get all of our rights back we are agreed to go back to our homeland instantly," Ullah told AFP.



'We have been waiting for this day'

'No genocidal intent'

Myanmar's junta on Tuesday said it "categorically rejects" the US declaration. "Myanmar has never engaged in any genocidal actions and does not have any genocidal intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, racial or religious group or any other group," it said.

Bangladesh, which has borne the brunt of sheltering the refugees, called the US decision overdue but still "good news", and said it would strengthen the case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice.

"I believe, hopefully after the statement of the

recovery teams found on the mountainside. State TV showed rescuers recovering the bright orange box and placing it in a clear plastic bag.

On Wednesday afternoon AFP reporters saw a small crowd of people guided by officials across the police cordon that marks entry to the site, huddled under umbrellas in the driving rain. One middle-aged man later confirmed that he was the relative of someone on the flight, and asked the media not to crowd around him.

Rescue work is ongoing across the huge 45,200 square metre crash zone, officials said at a press conference Wednesday. Orange-clad rescuers have been using dogs, drones and scanners to scour the debris scattered across the mountainside.

The Boeing 737-800 plane went down near Wuzhou in southern China on Monday afternoon after losing contact with air traffic control. Up until that point, communication with ground staff had been normal, state media reported.

Sharp drop

Flight tracking website FlightRadar24 showed the jet sharply dropped from an altitude of 29,100 to 7,850 feet (about 8,900 to 2,400 metres) in just over a minute. After a brief upswing, it dropped again to 3,225 feet, the tracker said.

The captain had more than 6,700 hours of flight experience and the first co-pilot had more than 31,000 hours of flight time, according to officials at Wednesday's press conference.

There was a second co-pilot on board, with more than 550 hours of flight time. They were all

phones blaring, and social media lit up with people posting their reactions on being woken up. "The chandelier on my ceiling shook for more than three minutes and didn't stop," local reporter Chao Li wrote on Facebook. "It's shaking so much, it scares people to death," he said in an accompanying video. An AFP reporter also felt their building in Taipei's Zhongshan district shake a few minutes just after 1:41 am. Local media on Wednesday ran footage from grocery stores that showed items flying off the shelves when the quake hit.

Taiwan's National Fire Agency confirmed on its official Facebook page that a man in the southern county of Taitung was hit by glass and had been sent to hospital. A bridge under construction in Hualien had also collapsed but there were no injuries as traffic was not allowed around the area, the agency said. Popular for its beaches and hiking spots, Hualien saw a deadly 6.4-magnitude quake in 2018 which left 17 people dead and 300 injured. "Please do not panic if there are aftershocks and we urge the residents to be prepared for disaster prevention," the county government said in a statement on its official Facebook page.

There were about 150 aftershocks, mostly under States calling for his release.

The 33-year-old said he was tortured during his month-long detention and slipped out of the country last month to seek treatment abroad for his injuries. But on Wednesday, prosecutors asked the Kampala court to issue a warrant of arrest against the satirical novelist after he failed to show up for the trial.

The magistrate ordered he "be arrested and brought to court," lawyer Samuel Wanda told AFP. It was not immediately clear if the warrant would include an extradition request to Germany where Rukirabashaija said he was exiled. The charges against him relate to unflattering comments on Twitter about Museveni, who has ruled Uganda since 1986, and his powerful son



UKHIA, Bangladesh: In this picture taken on March 22, 2022, a Rohingya refugee child walks to her home at Jamtoli refugee camp in Ukhia. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled Buddhist-majority Myanmar following the 2017 crackdown, which is now the subject of a genocide case at the United Nations' highest court in The Hague. —AFP

US Secretary of State, they (Washington) will also put more pressure on the Myanmar government so that they take back their people as they have already promised," Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said. He added however that Myanmar was continuing to stall repatriation efforts, most recently by issuing a list of 700 Rohingya who could return which he said was "defective" and likely to be rejected by the Rohingya community.

"The way the list is prepared, it feels like it lacks

goodwill and smacks of ulterior motives," he said. Mohammad Zafar, another Rohingya community leader in Kutupalong, the biggest of the refugee camps — and the largest in the world — played down the prospect of returning home any time soon. "I highly doubt whether it will bring any change to our fate. We are literally stranded in a foreign land for years, barely surviving," he said. "The damage has been done to us. Nothing can compensate unless there are visible actions," Zafar told AFP. —AFP

Black box of China Eastern jet recovered

WUZHOU, China: A black box from the crashed China Eastern airliner was recovered on Wednesday as investigators try to determine what made the jet carrying 132 passengers nose-dive into a mountainside in southern China. The cause of the disaster has mystified aviation authorities who have scoured rugged terrain for clues, finding no survivors from what is almost certain to be China's deadliest plane crash in nearly 30 years.

A flight recorder was found from China Eastern flight MU5735 on Wednesday, Liu Lusong, a spokesman for China's aviation authority, told reporters. State media later said it was badly damaged. The stricken jet, a Boeing 737-800, was equipped with two flight recorders: one in the rear passenger cabin tracking flight data, and the other a cockpit voice recorder.

"At present, it is unclear whether it is a data recorder or a cockpit voice recorder" that has been found, said Mao Yanfeng, an official at the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC), according to state media.

Officials have refrained from declaring all of the passengers dead despite the pulverised mass of twisted metal and charred belongings that

6.7-magnitude quake rattles Taiwan, one hurt

TAIPEI, Taiwan: A magnitude 6.7 earthquake that struck off the coast of Taiwan early Wednesday rattled buildings and roused people from their sleep, leaving one injured and causing a half-constructed bridge in the island's east to collapse.

Taiwan is regularly hit by earthquakes as it lies near the junction of two tectonic plates. It does not issue tsunami warnings unless a quake registers at more than magnitude 7.0. The US Geological Survey initially estimated the 1:41 am (1741 GMT Tuesday) quake to be magnitude 6.9, but downgraded it to 6.6 before finally assessing it back up to 6.7.

It also revised the depth from an initial 10 kilometers (six miles) to 24 km. The quake hit off Taiwan's east coast-near the island's scenic tourist city Hualien-but was felt over much of the island.

Government-issued alerts sent people's cell

Uganda issues arrest warrant for author

KAMPALA, Uganda: A Ugandan court has issued an arrest warrant for an award-winning author who fled the country after being charged with insulting President Yoweri Museveni and his son, his lawyer said Wednesday.

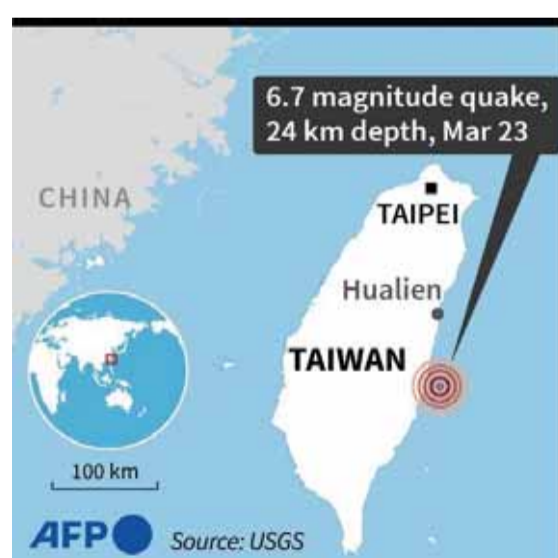
Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was arrested shortly after Christmas and charged with "offensive communication" in a case that raised international concern, with the European Union and the United



WUZHOU, China: Volunteers look on near the entrance to Lv village which leads to the crash site of China Eastern flight MU5735 in Wuzhou in southwestern China's Guangxi province on March 23, 2022. —AFP

in good health with no known personal problems. Rescuers were forced to pause the search on Wednesday as rains raised risks to teams working in the zone, where a large pit had been bored out by the impact of the aircraft. A reporter for state broadcaster CCTV given access to the crash area said there were risks of "small-scale landslides" as rain had destabilised the steep slopes.

President Xi Jinping was swift to order a probe into the crash, dispatching senior Communist Party officials to the scene, including close aide Vice Premier Liu He. The CAAC said it would conduct a two-week safety inspection across the industry. —AFP



3.6 magnitude, following the initial quake, said Chen Kuo-chang, head of Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau's Seismological Center. Earthquakes of 6.0 or more can prove deadly, although much depends on where it strikes and at what depth. —AFP

Muhozi Kainerugaba.

In one post, he described Kainerugaba, a general who many Ugandans believe is positioning himself to take over from his 77-year-old father, as "obese" and a "curmudgeon". The author was awarded the 2021 PEN Pinter Prize for an International Writer of Courage, which is presented annually to a writer who has been persecuted for speaking out about their beliefs.

Rukirabashaija has been repeatedly arrested since the publication of "The Greedy Barbarian", which describes high-level corruption in a fictional country. At the time, he was accused of breaching Covid-19 social distancing rules, inciting violence and promoting sectarianism. —AFP

News in brief

Burkina attacks kill 24

OUAGADOUGOU: Twenty-four soldiers have been killed as violence surges in Burkina Faso, 13 in a suspected jihadist ambush and 11 after a roadside bomb exploded, the army said. The soldiers were killed Sunday in the sixth and seventh attacks of their kind in the landlocked West African nation in under two weeks. An armed forces communique late Tuesday said that in a "complex attack" around Napade in the eastern region on Sunday 11 soldiers had died. To the south of Natiaboani, close to the border with Togo and Ghana, "a security forces vehicle... hit an improvised explosive device (IED)," a security source had told AFP. The source had on Monday given a provisional toll of five dead. The army had also reported 13 killed Sunday during a security operation in the east near Natiaboani. —AFP

Vietnam jails activist

HANOI: A Vietnamese activist has been sentenced to five years in prison on charges of propaganda against the state, his lawyer said Wednesday. The communist state has strict curbs on press freedom and moves swiftly to stamp out dissent and arrest critics, especially those who find an audience on social media platforms. Le Van Dung, who had discussed Vietnam's socio-economics and politics in live Facebook and YouTube videos, was arrested in June last year on anti-state charges. "Dung consistently rejected the allegations that his speeches on his clips were illegal," said his lawyer Ha Huy Son. The activist, who also discussed Vietnam's sometimes fractious relationship with neighbouring China, was sentenced to five years imprisonment and five years probation. His lawyer confirmed that he would appeal. The 51-year-old's arrest last year—which came after he spent a month on the run—was condemned by international rights organisations. —AFP

Six children killed in Colombia

BOGOTA: Six children died and over a dozen were injured on Tuesday after their school bus rolled down a cliff in northeastern Colombia, a regional official said. "Unfortunately I have to confirm (the) school bus accident on the Laguna de Ortices-San Andres road, where 6 minors died and there are more than 15 injured," tweeted Mauricio Aguilar, governor of the mountainous Santander department, where the tragedy occurred. The students had left a rural school and were on their way back to the town center of San Andres when the bus went off the road, said Mayor Jose Rosember Rojas, without adding further details into the cause of the accident. Images published by Colombian media show the bus in a steep wooded area with its roof detached and several dislodged seats. Traffic accidents are one of the main causes of death in Colombia. In 2021, the country of 50 million experienced 7,200 road deaths. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 2022



Waleed Al-Khashti with the first place winner



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti and the judging panel with one of the winners

Zain strategic partner of SpeakUp Kuwait

Program empowers and develops youth's public speaking skills

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership with SpeakUp Kuwait, the first of its kind program in Kuwait that aims at empowering and developing the youth's public speaking skills. The company hosted the program throughout a month and a half at the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) in its main headquarters in Shuwaikh.

Zain's support to this unique program came as part of its comprehensive corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy, which centers around actively participating in the most vibrant sectors within the community, most importantly education, youth, and entrepreneurship. Zain always seeks to shoulder any entity that embraces young people and works to

Zain's support to the program is part of its comprehensive corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy

develop their skills, ultimately empowering them to enter the business world and contribute to progressing the socio-economic wheel in the nation.

Throughout a month and a half, Zain hosted SpeakUp Kuwait's workshops and seminars at its Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) in the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The workshops featured some of the top local speakers, experts, academics, and media

personalities who shared their experiences with the participants to mainly develop their public speaking skills.

Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti took part in the judging panel that selected the qualifying finalists. Al-Khashti also attended the closing ceremony, held at Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyah in Yarmouk Cultural Center,

which witnessed final speeches by every finalist.

By supporting this unique program, Zain seeks to offer the best environment for the youth to nurture their talents - especially their public speaking skills - and promote innovation within them. Zain believes in the important role the youth play in building the future and progressing national economy.

Zain is keen on playing a vital role as an integrated digital service provider in light of the rapid digital changes witnessed by the modern world. The company always seeks to reach new levels of excellence with its customers through offering the best innovative services, meeting their needs and aspirations, as well as supporting programs and initiatives that embrace innovation and aim at developing the youth.



IBAF0, Nigeria: A roadside vendor sells Tigernuts lit up with torchlight at a market without electricity at Ibafo, Ogun State southwest Nigeria, on March 22, 2022. — AFP

Power blackouts, soaring fuel prices shut Nigerian businesses

IBAF0, Nigeria: For eight years, Nigeria hairdresser Damy Idowu ran her business in a commercial district of Lagos, surviving growing inflation, recession and the global pandemic. Last week, she closed up shop, victim to soaring diesel costs and the country's latest spate of prolonged power shortages.

Blackouts are common in Africa's top petroleum producer, where dilapidated infrastructure often fails to distribute even insufficient electricity supplies. But extended collapses of the power grid over the last several weeks have combined with a global hike in diesel prices to create one of the country's worst recent energy crises. Many businesses rely on diesel generators to keep the lights on when power is out, and since Ukraine's crisis doubled fuel prices in Nigeria, operating costs are sky-high.

"My business depends largely on electricity and I could no longer afford the price of diesel to power my generator," Idowu told AFP, explaining she had started offering home visit hairdressing as an alternative. In Lagos, the commercial capital of Africa's largest economy, some small businesses are struggling to stay open and offices now often operate for several hours without power. In the north, some factory owners say they have wound down from operating limited shifts to closing up completely as generator costs make business financially untenable.

The power struggles came just after weeks of fuel shortages caused lines at filling stations, angering Nigerians struggling with the weak naira and high cost of living. At home, Nigerians operate small petrol generators to provide light when the power is off, even if only for a few hours. In wealthier neighbourhoods, buildings run larger, diesel generators. Last week, the national grid collapsed twice in 48 hours.

Markets by torchlight

Some major streets in Lagos were without light at night this week while market traders in some parts of the city sold at night by torch and the light of their mobile phones. After 20 years in business, guest house owner Femi Afolabi has almost had enough. He was about to sell up or convert his building to a residence as the diesel hike and power crashes increased his operating costs 200 percent. "Regular electricity has been a mirage. Supply has been so abysmal that we now run the business on 24-hour generator," he told AFP, at the southwest

town of Ota, outside Lagos. "We can no longer cover our costs not to talk of making profits."

Structural problems

Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari has apologized over the fuel shortages and on Monday he summoned his minister of power to discuss the electricity crisis. Hitting out at Buhari's ruling APC party less than a year before 2023 elections, the opposition Peoples Democratic Party warned the power crisis may lead to popular protests. But many energy problems are structural.

Nigeria produces 1.4 million barrels of crude a day, but it refines little. It relies almost completely on fuel imports, making the local market vulnerable to disruptions. With a population of 210 million people, Nigeria has seen a boom in commercial and industrial activities in the last decade that relies extensively on electric power. Though the power sector was privatized in 2013, over the years, demand for electricity has outpaced generation, transmission and distribution capacity.

Six generation companies and 11 distribution companies are run by private investors while the state manages transmission. But the reforms failed to resolve power problems. According to the state-run Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN), generation companies blame current outages on poor gas supply, faults in generating units and maintenance. In the last two months, 14 gas-powered generating stations were either not generating at all or had limited generation.

The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), a lobby body, on Sunday urged Buhari to probe corruption in the sector. "The staggering amounts of public funds alleged to have been stolen over the years in the electricity sector have had catastrophic effects on the lives of millions of Nigerians," SERAP said in a letter to Buhari.

Power costs are clear to Umar Sani Marshall, the owner of Marshall Biscuits, a factory based in the northern commercial hub of Kano. The factory normally operates two shifts, but he was forced to cut back to one using two thirds of his 300 work force. Now he has left the factory idle until the situation improves. "The situation now is beyond comprehension," he told AFP. "We have stopped production in the last two weeks because there is no way we can break even."

CBK launches second cohort of Risk Management Leaders Program

KUWAIT: As part of the Central Bank of Kuwait's efforts to support the Kuwaiti economy and develop national cadres through building capacity of staff in risk management, which has great importance in enhancing the banking environment and in fortifying financial operations, and within the Kafa'a initiative undertaken by the CBK in collaboration with Kuwaiti banks and managed by the Institute of Banking Studies (IBS), the second cohort of the Risk Management Leaders Program begins.

In a statement by Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel, Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait and Chairman of the Institute of Banking Studies, Al-Hashel indicated that the program aims to provide participants with the necessary knowledge and skills when making appropriate decisions and develop effective risk management strategies in the banks and financial institutions.

The program will extend over a period of six months, divided into four discrete phases, the first and second phases are based in Kuwait and include training programs and practical lectures in the field of risk management, in cooperation with the London Institute of Banking and Finance in the United Kingdom and the Professional Risk Managers' International Association in the United States of America to obtain accredited and specialized certificates in this field. The program includes multiple training tracks with local and international professional lecturers. The third phase includes the submission of case studies and graduation projects, followed by the fourth phase, over two weeks of hands on field training through the Centre of Governance, Risk and Regulations, at the London Institute of Banking, which provides trainees with practical experience and professional competencies through workshops and interactive educational



Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel

experiences, as well as field visits to the most important financial institutions in the UK. The program covers the costs of travel, accommodation and transportation.

With regard to eligibility for admissions to the program, the Governor indicated that the criteria for selecting participants are: the applicant must be Kuwaiti, possess an appropriate university qualification and have practical experience of no less than five years in the financial sector in Kuwait. It is also required to pass qualifying exams and interviews.

The Kafa'a initiative is a comprehensive strategic initiative that aims to build highly qualified national cadres and provide them with the necessary knowledge to progress in their careers and ready them with the necessary skills for the labor market in line with the ever-changing needs of the financial and banking industry. The initiative also aims to create a pipeline of qualified nationals able to fill leadership positions in major economic, financial and banking institutions. The initiative include a number of programs such as: Kuwaiti Economic Researcher Award, the Kuwaiti Economic Student Award, the Certified Sharia Auditor, and the Cyber Security Leaders Program.

Those wishing to apply can access the program details and submit applications starting March 23, 2022 until Thursday, April 21, 2022, through the Kafa'a website: www.Kafaakw.org



Business

UK slashes 2022 growth forecast on Ukraine and raging inflation

Budget targets living costs as prices skyrocket



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak gesturing as he presents the Spring budget statement to MPs at the House of Commons, in London on March 23, 2022. — AFP

LONDON: Britain's economy will grow far slower than expected this year owing to the Ukraine war and soaring global inflation, Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said Wednesday in a government budget update.

The UK economy was set to grow 3.8 percent this year, down from an official estimate of six percent made in October, Chancellor of the Exchequer Sunak told parliament. He said that the Office for Budget Responsibility - the government's official economic forecaster - "has not accounted for the full impacts of the war in Ukraine and we should be prepared for the economy and public finances to worsen, potentially significantly".

"Their initial view combined with high global inflation and continuing supply chain pressures means" the UK economy is forecast to grow 3.8 percent this year. Gross domestic product was estimated to expand a further 1.8 percent next year, down from an official prediction of 2.1 percent. Britain's annual inflation accelerated to 6.2 percent in February from 5.5 percent in January, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

"The further rise in inflation... adds to the pressure on

the Chancellor to offset more of the cost of living crisis," noted Capital Economics analyst Paul Dales. The last time the British inflation rate was higher was in March 1992 when it stood at 7.1 percent.

Countries across the world are battling surging inflation fuelled by rocketing commodity prices over the Ukraine war and after nations exited pandemic lockdowns. The Bank of England has warned that inflation will surge even higher in the coming months as Russia's Ukraine invasion sparks major price gains for crude oil, domestic energy and food prices. Sunak faces widespread calls, even from fellow Tory MPs, to help ease household living costs, with reports suggesting he could delay a jobs tax hike due next month. Spiking domestic electricity and gas costs were a key factor in February's broad-based price gains, according to the ONS.

Prices 'rising steeply'

"Inflation rose steeply in February as prices increased for a wide range of goods and services, for products as diverse as food to toys and games," added ONS chief

economist Grant Fitzner. "The price of goods leaving UK factories has also been rising substantially and is now at its highest rate for 14 years." Spiking global inflation has forced central banks around the world to lift interest rates, including the BoE which last week lifted borrowing costs to 0.75 percent.

Sunak has also hinted at cutting motor fuel duty to help ease household budgets. However, his hands could be tied regarding major giveaways. "The Chancellor may try to mitigate the upward pressures," noted EY economist Martin Beck. "Measures such as a temporary cut to fuel duty would not fundamentally alter the outlook, which remains heavily dependent on geopolitical factors and global commodity markets."

The government also faces surging debt repayments on its borrowing, which jumped over the past two years on vast pandemic costs. "The Chancellor is clearly under huge pressure to fork out to help out with the cost of living crisis, but record levels of borrowing, combined with rising interest rates, will probably temper his generosity," said AJ Bell analyst Laith Khalaf. — AFP

Palestinians in Gaza give up studies for Zionist wages

GAZA CITY: The moment Hussein got permission to work in Israel, the Palestinian resident of Gaza City said he was ready to quit university to seek the attractive wages offered for menial Zionist entity jobs.

"I felt that the doors of heaven were opened for me," said Hussein. Like other Gazans who have abandoned their studies to take low-skilled work inside Israel, embarrassment led him to ask that his full name be withheld. Gaza, a Palestinian territory of some 2.3 million people under Zionist entity-blockade since 2007, suffers from an unemployment rate above 50 percent, where even those with post-graduate degrees can struggle to get by.

And Zionist entity work permits have become a rarity for Palestinians in the last decade or so-making the few on offer seem like gold dust. Hussein was pursuing a masters degree and hoping to boost his earnings potential, but said that with three children to feed and student debts of \$3,500, continuing to study was proving untenable. "I hadn't worked in years," he said, explaining his decision to leave Gaza several months ago. He got a job as a delivery person in Jaffa, south of Tel Aviv, one of several places in Zionist region where Palestinian laborers say they can earn between 250 and 700 shekels (between about \$75 and \$215) per day, far more than most could hope for from equivalent work in Gaza.

Hamas, which is considered a terrorist organization by much of the West, took power in Gaza in 2007. Before the Islamist takeover, roughly 120,000 Gazans

had permission to work inside Zionist territory. But Hamas and Zionists have fought repeatedly over the last 15 years and, due latterly also to the coronavirus pandemic, Zionist entity has at times fully closed its land crossings with the enclave while completely curbing cross-border work. Since reopening a few months ago, the Jewish state has issued 12,000 work permits to Gazans-mostly six month visas, with the option to renew.

'No pre-conditions'

The parking lot at the Erez crossing through which Gazans enter Zionist territory is now teeming with taxis and minibuses, waiting to take Palestinians to work. Among them was Mahmud, who found work at a restaurant in Herzliya, an affluent town north of Tel Aviv. He had previously worked for international organizations in Gaza-highly coveted employers.

But he said ultimately he decided that he could not turn down the chance to earn up to 550 shekels (\$170) a day, including overtime-on top of room and board-in Zionist territory, even if the work had no connection to his masters degree in social work. While many Gazans welcome higher Zionist entity pay, the head of Gaza's workers union, Sami Al-Amsi, called for the permits to include mandatory social security protections. Under current terms, workers from Gaza entering the Zionist territory are only covered for accidents if their Zionist entity employer agrees to pay for insurance-a rarity, according to the Zionist entity's labor rights organization Kav LaOved.

A few weeks ago, a Gazan was run over by a car at his place of work, Amsi told AFP, explaining that "his family did not receive any compensation." That doesn't scare Adham, 35, who despite having three degrees, including in public health and computer science, said he was ready to take any job on offer in the Zionist region. "I could work in a restaurant, a supermarket or a factory," he told AFP. "I have no pre-conditions." — AFP



TOKYO: A pedestrian walks past an electronic share price board showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo on March 23, 2022. — AFP

Oil prices jump, stocks mixed with focus on inflation

KUWAIT: Oil prices rallied on Wednesday, adding to soaring inflation concerns, while stock markets diverged. Crude futures jumped 2.5 percent with Brent North Sea headed towards \$120 per barrel.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak on Wednesday warned that a ban on Russian oil and gas imports over the Ukraine war would drive the world's energy markets to a "collapse".

"It is absolutely obvious that without Russian hydrocarbons, if sanctions are introduced, there will be a collapse of the oil and gas markets," Novak told Russia's lower house State Duma as reported by Russian news agencies. "The rise in energy prices may be unpredictable," Novak added. On stock markets, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index was up after official data showed UK annual inflation had surged to 6.2 percent last month, the highest level in 30 years.

While inflation increases company costs it can boost their revenues by sizeable amounts. The British

data were published ahead of a UK budget update Wednesday that could ease a cost-of-living crisis for millions of Britons as inflation rockets worldwide largely owing to soaring energy prices.

"Today's data confirm a worsening squeeze on consumer incomes," said Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK. "These price rises were dominated by increases in energy, and we expect further rises this year as global energy, food, and other commodities markets are impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

Elsewhere, eurozone stock markets fell Wednesday after Asia's top indices closed higher.

Wall Street had rallied Tuesday on optimism that the Federal Reserve's plan to hike interest rates would help to bring inflation under control. While there remains plenty of concern about the war in Ukraine, analysts said some confidence had seeped back into trading floors as investors bet on consumer resilience and economies continue to reopen.

Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell this week said that the US central bank was prepared to act more aggressively on lifting borrowing costs should American inflation-already at a 40-year high-not fall quickly enough. Officials lifted US rates last week by a quarter of a point but some have advocated bigger increases, a view Powell suggested he was open to believing that the world's biggest economy was strong enough to withstand such a move. — AFP

How Russia's war in Ukraine rocked the global economy

PARIS: In a month of conflict in Ukraine, global oil prices have soared, foreign companies have exited Russia and Moscow faces the specter of default. Here is a look at the economic fallout from Russia's February 24 invasion of its neighbor:

Commodities soar

Oil and gas prices have surged over supply fears as Russia is one of the world's biggest producers and exporters of the fossil fuels. Brent North Sea crude, the international benchmark, stood at around \$90 in February. On March 7, it jumped to \$139.13, close to a 14-year high and prices remain highly volatile.

Prices have risen at the pump, too, prompting governments to take measures to ease the financial pain for consumers: A lower VAT in Sweden, a price cap in Hungary, or a discount in France. Gas prices have also skyrocketed, with Europe reference Dutch TTF leaping to an all-time high at 345 euros on March 7. The United States, Canada and Britain have announced Russian oil bans.

The European Union has avoided sanctions on Russia's energy sector as countries such as Germany rely heavily on Moscow's gas supplies. Other commodities massively produced in Russia have soared, including nickel and aluminum. Auto industry supply chains face disruptions as key parts come from Ukraine.

Food threat

UN chief Antonio Guterres has warned that the conflict could reverberate far beyond Ukraine, causing a "hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food

system". Russia and Ukraine are breadbaskets for the world, accounting together for 30 percent of global wheat exports.

Prices of cereals and cooking oils have risen. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization says the number of undernourished people could increase by eight to 13 million people over the course of this year and next. Ships are not leaving Ukraine and there are concerns about the upcoming sowing season in the country. The United States, India and Europe could cover wheat shortages. But it could be more complicated to replace sunflower oil and corn, of which Ukraine is the world's number one and number four exporter, respectively.

Markets rattled

Stock markets had started off 2022 on a good note as economies recovered from the Covid pandemic and companies posted healthy results. But the war has brought volatility to the markets while Moscow's stock exchange closed for three weeks and only partially reopened on Monday. Western sanctions have paralyzed the Russian banking sector and financial system, while the ruble has collapsed. The measures include efforts to freeze \$300 billion of Russia's foreign currency reserves held abroad. Russia now faces the risk of defaulting on debt for the first time in decades. Moscow paid interest on two dollar-denominated bonds last week, giving the government some breathing room until the next debt payments in the coming weeks.

Firms flee

Hundreds of Western firms have closed shops and offices in Russia since the war started-due to the sanctions, political pressure or public opinion. The list includes famous names such as Ikea, Coca-Cola and MacDonald's. Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised the threat of nationalizing foreign-owned companies. Some companies have chosen to stay in Russia, citing their social responsibility to not abandon their local employees and deprive the population of essential goods. — AFP



GAZA CITY: Palestinian workers enter a minivan at the last station in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip, before reaching Zionist territory through the Erez crossing to work. — AFP

Scientists helping farmers kick the chemical habit

MOUGON, France: In a field in western France, the small purple and white flowers quivering among tender shoots of wheat are a clue that this is not conventional single-crop farmland. In fact, this whole area is part of scientific work to help farmers cut down on their use of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. "I felt that these products were dangerous," said farmer David Bonneau as he hunched over the little wildflowers-veronica and hickweed. And "the general public is asking for reductions". One of his experimental plots is treated the standard way, with chemical weedkiller; another he weeds mechanically with a narrow whose teeth tear up the wild plants; while a third will not be treated at all. He is part of a project involving 400 farms and around 40 villages in the Deux-Sevres region of western France, where scientists are experimenting with different techniques to cut pollution.

Researchers from the French research agency, CNRS, support volunteer farmers to reduce the use of pesticides-probable sources of cancer and fatal to birds-as well as water-polluting chemical fertilizers,

the prices of which are exploding. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised the specter of food shortages, policymakers in Europe should not waver in their commitment to green agriculture, experts say. And protecting Nature, a central task of biodiversity negotiations currently taking place in Geneva, is also a matter of safeguarding the water we drink, the food we eat and the air we breathe. "It's important from a political point of view to show long-term engagement," said Robert Finger, head of farming systems research at ETH University of Zurich.

And greener could even mean more profitable. "In many parts of the world, we are at a point where fertilizer use is very inefficient in terms of additional yield," he said, referring to Europe and parts of Asia. Excessive use of fertilizers or pesticides can affect small and large crops.

Meanwhile, Pepijn Schreinemachers, a researcher at the World Vegetable Center, said farmers in countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were misusing pesticides with potentially harmful consequences. "It is important to realize that it is farmers themselves who are most affected by the misuse of agrochemicals," he said. This could be using too much of a chemical, unsafe techniques or the use of the wrong products.

"Every farmer can share details about pesticide-poisoning incidents they have experienced, ranging from skin rashes to vomiting and unconsciousness. Still, most farmers strongly believe that pesticides are necessary for farm production." — AFP

Business

Musk dances with joy as he opens electric car 'gigafactory' near Berlin

First 30 'made in Germany' Teslas roll out of plant



GRUNHEIDE, Germany: Tesla CEO Elon Musk (third right) rolls out an electric vehicle of the model Y as he attends the start of the production at Tesla's "Gigafactory" on March 22. —AFP



GRUNHEIDE, Germany: Visitors take pictures of Tesla CEO Elon Musk (left), German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (second right) and Brandenburg State Premier Dietmar Woidke (second left) as they attend the start of the production at Tesla's "Gigafactory". —AFP

BERLIN: Tesla CEO Elon Musk danced with joy at the inauguration of his "gigafactory" electric car plant near Berlin on Tuesday, shrugging off two years of bureaucracy and delays to watch customers drive off with the first Model Y vehicles made in Europe.

"Danke Deutschland!" (Thank you, Germany) Musk tweeted after the red ribbon ceremony, where he joined workers in applauding the first 30 drivers to get behind the wheel of their new cars.

The US billionaire even broke into a little dance during the handovers, reviving memories of the slightly awkward jig he did at a launch event in Shanghai in 2020 that lit up the internet. The factory opening caps an arduous two-year approval and construction process that saw Tesla run into a series of administrative and legal hurdles, including complaints from locals about the site's environmental impact.

Having started construction at its own risk, Tesla finally won the formal go-ahead from regional authorities to begin production earlier this month.

The "gigafactory" in Gruenheide, in Germany's eastern state of Brandenburg, is Tesla's first production site in Europe and local officials are hoping it will help the region position itself as a hub for electric vehicle production. The Californian company aims eventually to employ some 12,000 workers at the site who will churn out around 500,000 Model Y cars annually, the firm's all-electric, compact SUVs.

"We are extremely confident that the world can transition to a sustainable energy future with the combination of solar, wind, plus battery storage and electric vehicles," Musk said in a speech at the ceremony. "I really want to assure everyone that you can have hope in the future, you should have hope in the future," he added.

'New era'

Tesla's arrival is expected to jolt Germany's flagship car industry, setting the stage for fierce competition with rivals Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz as they pivot from traditional

engines to cleaner electric vehicles. "The new era in the auto industry has now arrived in Germany," said analyst Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer from the Center for Automotive Research.

Tesla's focus on Europe comes as the continent grapples with sky-high energy costs that have sent petrol prices soaring, prompting some drivers to take a closer look at electric alternatives.

The "Giga Berlin-Brandenburg" is "one of the biggest strategic endeavors for Tesla over the last decade and should further vault its market share within Europe over the coming years as more consumers aggressively head down the EV path," analysts at investment firm Wedbush said. But Tesla has not been spared the pain from shortages of key materials and supply chain disruptions, linked in part to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, that are also plaguing other carmakers.

Musk tweeted last week that the company was seeing "significant recent inflation pressure" in raw materials and logistics.

Away from Russian oil

Economy Minister Robert Habeck, who attended Tuesday's inauguration along with Chancellor Olaf Scholz, said it was "a special day for Germany's mobility transformation".

In a nod to efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy, Habeck said electric cars took Germany "one step further away from oil imports". He also called for more "Tesla speed" in other infrastructure projects, including the expansion of renewable energies.

Although Musk was frequently frustrated by the red tape that slowed down his Gruenheide plans, by German standards the factory was up and running in record time.

The inauguration was not universally welcomed, however, with environmental campaigners protesting near the site. Among their demands was a call for better and free public transport instead of "yet more cars", said spokeswoman Lou Winters from the Sand in the Gears environmental group. —AFP

Al-Muzaini Exchange introduces Visa Direct service

KUWAIT: Al-Muzaini Exchange Co has announced the launch of Visa Direct, a new remittance service, which is a cross border fund transfer service that allows fund transfers to overseas Visa debit, credit or prepaid cards via Al-Muzaini's 120 branches. The launch event was attended by Hugh Fernandes, General Manager - Al-Muzaini Exchange Co and Uttam Nayak, Visa's Senior Vice President for Visa Direct for CEMEA region.

The first-of-its-kind remittance service in Kuwait will allow Al-Muzaini customers to transfer funds to overseas Visa cards in near real-time.

This Visa Direct service leverages Kuwait's most popular brand - Al-Muzaini Exchange Co, as well as Visa's extensive global reach to offer a seamless and secure option to move money globally.

Al-Muzaini customers will be able to send funds

to Visa cards in 125 countries such as UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Europe, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, many countries in Africa and South America. Additional countries will be added to this service periodically. Hugh Fernandes, GM, Al-Muzaini Exchange Co, said: "We are pleased to be partnering with one of the world's largest electronic payment networks to launch Visa Direct services. Visa Direct service is a great addition to Al-Muzaini's remittance proposition where a customer will be able to send money almost instantly to fast funds enabled cards. The service will be available at all our 120 locations spread across Kuwait and will soon be available 24x7 on Al-Muzaini Mobile App. We are absolutely elated to be the first in Kuwait to launch Visa Direct Service."

Ankush Devadason, Visa's Country Manager for Kuwait, said: "We are delighted to see Al-Muzaini Exchange Co be the first exchange house in Kuwait to launch Visa Direct. Our partnership strives to bring digital-first solutions that meet Kuwaiti consumers' increasing expectations for seamless and secure payment and remittance experiences. With Visa Direct, Al-Muzaini



Exchange's customers will have access to our billions of Visa cardholders worldwide and the backing of our trusted global network for fast, easy and secure transfers."

Al-Muzaini is committed to implementing new and innovative remittance solutions for a fast, safe, and secure experience, new corridors will be added to the Visa Direct service periodically.

ABK concludes training program in partnership with Euromoney

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) successfully concluded a comprehensive series of Relationship Management (RM) and Credit Skills training programs for its staff in partnership with Euromoney Learning.

More than 25 ABK Corporate Banking staff members participated in the program which was designed to advance their banking skills by covering three streams: relationship management analysis, relationship management structuring, and relationship management issues. Each stream involved 45 hours of learning, in addition to coaching, access to virtual platforms, group reviews, as well as pre and post-session projects and assignments.

The trainers from Euromoney are banking professionals with experience ranging between 26 to 30 years in the field. They provided participants with a customized structured program with tailored material that promotes an intellectually stimulating and challenging learning environment. Euromoney closely worked with ABK's top management and Human Resources Division to ensure alignment of technical and behavioral training content with ABK's business strategy and plan. Furthermore, the program focused on addressing current industry challenges and creating solutions for a win-win approach to enhancing participants' innovative thinking skills.

Afrah Al-Arbash, Acting General Manager of Human Resources at ABK said, "Our employees are our greatest asset and they drive our success. We strongly believe in fostering a learning culture and we continuously invest in training and developing our workforce. In addition to ensuring our staff are highly trained to meet our customer's needs, we also believe this training to be essential to fuel the Kuwaiti banking sector and to support Kuwait's 'Vision 2035'."

Mike Gale, Soft Skills Trainer at Euromoney said: "ABK's commitment to the development of its people was strongly evidenced throughout the recent RM program. Abdulla Behbehani, Senior Manager - Learning and Development, and Jamil Girgis, Assistant General Manager of Human Resources, worked closely with us on designing the program and together we further tailored it to the participants' emerging needs."

Adiran Grant, Technical Skills Trainer at Euromoney said: "The participation of top management, in the credit committee-style presentations that concluded each stage of the program, was extremely useful in reinforcing their commitment to the process in addition to giving the teams feedback and guidance. I would like to thank ABK management and staff for their commitment and engagement throughout, which made for a great learning journey."



Afrah Al-Arbash

Huawei launches nova 9 SE in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) announced the launch of the Huawei nova 9 SE, a new mid-range addition to the dynamic chic and trendy Huawei nova 9 product family tailored for the younger generation. The device is defined by innovative features and fashion forward design elements that will spark new inspirations thanks to its powerful camera system and integrated videography features.

The Huawei nova 9 family is tailored for young consumers, offering quality, well-designed mid-range smartphones that are equipped with flagship features. The Huawei nova 9 had caused a frenzy amongst users and was an instant hit that captured the hearts of consumers. It debuted with an all-new colorway which Huawei named - Color No. 9. It also boasted an incredible 50MP Ultra Vision Camera with innovative vlogging features in addition to many cool and peculiar features which made it stand out from the crowd.

This new member of the nova 9 family, Huawei nova 9 SE packs a powerful 108MP High-Res Camera system that delivers exquisite picture quality in the high-pixel mode. Whether you are shooting scenery, portraits, architecture, or more, be it day or night, the Huawei nova 9 SE captures what you see before your eyes in detail. It also supports blazing fast charging speeds with 66W Huawei

SuperCharge ensuring a fluid experience. Moreover, new EMUI 12 optimizations provide smooth performance and synergy between the smartphone and other Huawei products.

The Huawei nova 9 SE will be available in three shimmering colorways - Crystal Blue, Pearl White, and Midnight Black in Kuwait on March 28, 2022 with pre-orders starting on March 21-03-2022 with the price of KD 84.9 from Huawei's online platforms as well as certified retailers[MIAOI]. Customers who pre-order Huawei nova 9 SE will get FREE GIFTS worth KWD 39! The gifts include: Huawei FreeLace, Gift Box, Petal One (FREE VIP Subscription), and 1-year warranty (Multi-Country support).

Customers who purchase Huawei nova 9 SE in retail will get FREE GIFTS worth KD 34.!! The gifts include: Huawei FreeLace, Petal One (FREE VIP Subscription), and 1 year warranty (multi-country support).

HUAWEI nova 9 SE

"With the launch of Huawei nova 9 SE, Huawei is delivering Kuwait an excellent social photography experience to young users," says Jason Jiang, General Manager of Consumer Business Group in Kuwait, "The nova 9 family is designed to connect Huawei with a younger generation of consumers, and we are glad today to expand our smartphone product portfolio further with the launch of the Huawei nova 9 SE. Through powerful hardware updates and operating system integration, the Huawei nova 9 SE boasts a staggering 108MP AI Quad Camera system as well as exciting array of vlogging features, offering more ways for users to create engaging videos and ultimately spark new inspirations."

Capture your story with AI Quad Camera

Huawei nova 9 SE features the 108MP AI Quad Camera system which comprises a 108MP main camera, an 8MP ultra-wide-angle lens, a 2MP Bokeh lens, and a 2MP macro lens. With more pixels, the 108MP ultra-high-definition main camera (f/1.9 aperture) helps users better retain detail and produce exciting, high-definition photos. It also delivers extremely clear shots in High-Res mode: creating images that are lossless even when they are zoomed in three times. The main camera has a large 1/1.52-inch sensor, to provide excellent resolution and light sensitivity. Ensuring the utmost clarity on all images, while enabling outstanding low light performance.

The Huawei nova 9 SE also features a front wide-angle camera (equivalent to 2.0um, f/2.2 aperture) with AI Beauty to make you look good in your shots. It also supports auto switch to wide-angle mode when turning the phone sideways from upright, making group selfies easier.

Power at your fingertips

With the Huawei nova 9 SE charging time is kept to a minimum, with the support of 66W Huawei SuperCharge, which takes only 15 minutes to charge the phone up by 60 percent, or 36 minutes to fully charge it. Vouched for by the TÜV Rheinland Safe Fast Charge Certification, Huawei nova 9 SE brings users a fast and safe charging experience. The Huawei nova 9 SE is complemented by an equally powerful cooling system - a graphene heat dissipation system. This means the device can run at full throttle while remaining cool to the touch - even when streaming videos.



A thoroughly breath-taking design

The Huawei nova 9 SE has a stunning 6.78-inch Huawei FullView Display that supports the P3 color gamut, ensuring spectacular viewing experiences with smooth visuals, vivid colors and incredible details. Designed with respect to the same aesthetic standards set by its predecessor, the Huawei nova 9 SE features ultra-thin bezels measuring just 1.05mm thin each and ultra-thin body measuring only 7.94mm thin. There is a new Crystal Blue colorway available, crafted from 3D glass for a glossy effect and crystal-clear texture using the dual-film dual-plating nano texture technology. What's more, the nova Star Orbit Ring's camera module offers a star-like glare refraction that accentuates the device's refined style.

Lifestyle | Features



Dog trainers present police dogs during an auction at the Institute of Police Dogs Training in Tirana. — AFP photos



Dog trainer Enver Hoxha strokes Brandi, a police dog serving for finding lost people in disasters at the Institute of Police Dogs Training in Tirana.



Police dogs bark at the breeding place at the Institute of Police Dogs Training in Tirana.

SETTLING ALBANIA'S 'HERO' POLICE DOGS INTO RETIREMENT

After years of sniffing out illicit cash in Albanian airports, German shepherd Konti has a lot to look forward to in retirement. He will enjoy it by the side of his partner in fighting crime, his handler Ilir Balla. The 10-year-old canine is lucky. Unable to part ways with the dog, Balla officially adopted him following his retirement from the police force, vowing to take care of it "until the last days of his life".

"The relationship with the animal is special for everyone but our attachment is different," Balla told AFP, speaking at the Institute of Police Dog Training in the capital, Tirana. "We are a team and the bond between us is very strong, very special." The institute has more than 80 dogs working with police, including German shepherds and Malinois. Different dogs have different skills, from detecting drugs, weapons or banknotes. Among the best-known is Brandi, a German shepherd who rose to prominence during the search-and-rescue efforts following an earthquake in Albania that killed around 50 people in late 2019.

Canine connection

Konti-who was pulled from the force due to his failing vision-still has an "exceptional nose", said Balla. During the course of his career, he helped detect large volumes of undeclared cash at Tirana airport. Konti is one of nearly 20 dogs that have recently retired from a career with the Albanian police due to advancing age or performance issues.

Once retired, the dogs are officially open to adoption to the public, with prices ranging from 60 to 170 euros (\$66-187) or sometimes even higher. The meticulously trained dogs offer obvious advantages to prospective owners. Saimir Hasmataj, looking for a retired police dog for his family, eventually adopted Osra. He chose Osra, who is already nine years old, because she had "quite the story" compared to the average dog, he said, having saved lives during the course of her duties. But for many of the police officers who have worked so closely with them over the years, leaving behind their trusted com-

panions when they are retired is difficult.

'Our heroes'

Narcotics officer Dritan Zela does not have the option of taking home his partner Diksi because he does not have the space. But he will remember the 11-year-old German shepherd as an "excellent" partner who saved his life on multiple occasions. One time, he recalled, Diksi threw himself on top of him when they came under fire. "Diksi had a real instinct to protect me, which pushed him to face the worst," he said, visibly moved at the memory.

But with age, his capacity to sniff out drugs waned, so he could not continue. "I regret his departure, we have been together for years, we are like a family," said the 51-year-old officer. "I will miss him but wherever he is, I will go to visit him. They are all our heroes." — AFP

Police dogs play in the breeding area at the Institute of Police Dogs Training in Tirana.



A dog trainer leads a police dog during their daily training at the Institute of Police Dogs Training in Tirana.



How black and white became Hollywood's favorite new color

Black-and-white is the hot new trend in Hollywood, where directors of Oscars-contending films such as "Belfast" and "The Tragedy of Macbeth" are embracing monochrome for its storytelling power. Kenneth Branagh's childhood drama and Joel Coen's Shakespeare adaptation are among a batch of recent acclaimed movies shot either entirely or mainly without color, as filmmakers seek to tap into the medium's inherent sense of historical authenticity and humanizing intimacy. "Color allows you brilliantly to describe people, but black-and-white allows you to feel people," Branagh said of his deeply personal drama about violence in 1960s Northern Ireland, which is up for seven Oscars on Sunday including best picture.

While a "sweeping landscape of a desert or a mountain range" can be made epic by color, "an epic dimension of black-and-white photography, on a massive screen, is the human face." The choice "makes for a poetic dimension to things that can otherwise seem a little banal," he told AFP. Meanwhile, "Tragedy of Macbeth" cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel told The New York Times the effect was "meant to bring theatricality" and give the film a timeless quality. Its star Denzel Washington is in the running for best actor.

Monochrome movies have of course continued to exist since they fell out of mainstream favor during the 1950s, when cheaper color technology enabled more directors to emulate the bright tones that

had dazzled audiences years earlier in "The Wizard of Oz" and "Gone with the Wind." In 2012, "The Artist"—a film that was not just black-and-white but also silent-won best picture at the Oscars, while the likes of "Roma" and "Mank" have won Oscars for best cinematography more recently. But this year's colorless contingent has grown.

"We all got together... it was a DGA [Directors Guild of America] meeting," joked Mike Mills, whose family drama "C'mon C'mon" starring Joaquin Phoenix also comes in grayscale, and was nominated at this month's BAFTAs.



In this file photo British filmmaker Kenneth Branagh arrives at the 94th Annual Oscars Nominees Luncheon at the Fairmont Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. — AFP

"I love black-and-white. I'm super pretentious. I watch a lot of black-and-white films—they're my heroes' films, right? I just adore them," Mills told AFP. In "Passing"—whose star Ruth Negga has been nominated for a batch of awards, winning at the Film Independent Spirit Awards earlier this month—the format is used to tackle the issue of racism. Rebecca Hall's directorial debut explores "racial passing," as two childhood friends of mixed racial heritage have a chance encounter in 1920s New York while both are pretending to be white.

"It wasn't just a stylistic choice. I felt that it was a conceptual choice—to make a film about colorism... that drains the color out of it," Hall said at its Sundance film festival premiere. "We look at faces, and then we immediately put them into these categorizations... the categorizations become important, but they are also in some senses absurd. 'Nobody is actually black-and-white. Film isn't black-and-white. It's gray.'"

'Crazy abstraction'

So, why are directors getting on the black-and-white bandwagon now? Is it simply a coincidence? Experts have pointed to broader trends such as the rise of Instagram and social media, that may explain why audiences—which in recent times may have seen black-and-white films as "old-fashioned" or "boring"—are now more willing to give it a go. "Most Americans have become their own filmmakers and photographers with the ability to slap a filter onto an image and render it in grayscale or sepia or heightened color," wrote Alissa Wilkinson, who covers film and culture for Vox. "Getting used to seeing color-adjusted images, including black-and-white videos and photos, could make us associate them with the past less. Instead of being bound by history and time, we start to see them as simply aesthetic choices."

The idea that black-and-white is a choice to deliberately look less real than the color-filled world we actually live in has been embraced by several of this year's efforts. "Black-and-white is such a crazy abstraction, so does a great sort of magic trick on the viewer," said Mills. "I'm not in the real world anymore. I'm a little kicked off into a story, into art." And there was a more specific reason for his choice in "C'mon C'mon," a movie about an absent uncle-played by Phoenix-bonding with his precocious nephew. "I have this really cute kid-black-and-white helped just take the cute sting off of it." — AFP

Cyrus' plane makes emergency landing after lightning strike

Miley Cyrus is "safe" after her plane was struck by lightning and had to make an emergency landing. The 29-year-old singer and her encourage were on a flight to Asuncion, Paraguay when they got caught in a "major unexpected storm", and now she has reassured fans after the scary incident. Alongside a video of the terrifying storm on Instagram, she wrote: "To my fans and everyone worried after hearing about my flight to Asuncion. 'Our plane was caught in a major unexpected storm and struck by lightning. 'My crew, band, friends and family who were all traveling with me are safe after an emergency landing. We were unfortunately unable to fly into Paraguay.' Fans have responded with messages of support after hearing the news.

One follower replied: "THANK GOD YOU ALL ARE SAFE (sic)" And another added: "WE LOVE YOU MILEY IM SO HAPPY THAT EVERYONE IS OKAY (sic)" She is currently performing around

South America on the 'Attention' tour, which her most recent show being a performance at Lollapalooza Argentina on March 19. She also took to the stage Lollapalooza Chile, where she co-headlined the event with A\$AP Rocky and DJ Alesso. Miley - who is set to finish her South American tour in Brazil - previously wrote about the Chilean date: "I knew that these festivals were going to be extra special because I am so inspired by all of you and inspired by the culture, all of the color and the tradition. 'And I love... a culture that respects and honors everything that was before us...' I see a lot of evolution also, I see a lot of Pride flags out here... I see a lot of cute boys with some makeup on, a little bit more makeup than me if that's humanly possible. 'I wanted to put together a show that, like you, honors every part of my history, my present and my future.'" — Bang Showbiz





Cruise tourists arrive at the port of La Goulette in Tunis as Tunisia welcomes the first cruise from Europe.



Tunisian men lead camels at the port of La Goulette in Tunis as Tunisia welcomes the first cruise from Europe, with more than 800 tourists on board, after a stop recorded since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP photos

First cruise ship in three years docks in Tunisia

A cruise ship docked in a Tunisian port on Wednesday for the first time since 2019, carrying over 700 passengers and rare good news for tourism operators battered by the Covid pandemic. The Spirit of Discovery, run by UK operator Saga, landed at La Goulette port on the edge of Tunis where it was welcomed by camels and a band playing traditional Tunisian music. "We were not trading for about 18 months... but we've been back in business since last July and this is our first call here to northern Africa," said Captain Kim Tanner.

"We're certainly pleased to get out and see some of the world and get to some of the places that we haven't seen," he said. The ship was carrying 724 passengers, mostly British but also German, Italian and Spanish, according to Tourism Minister Moez Belhassen. He said the cruise liner was the first of at least 40 expected to dock in Tunis this year. "This is very important for many sectors... especially given the spending power of tourists," he said. After two disastrous seasons, Tunisian authorities are hoping to bring visitor numbers and spending back to 60 percent of 2019 levels, the best season since the North African country's 2011 revolution. In

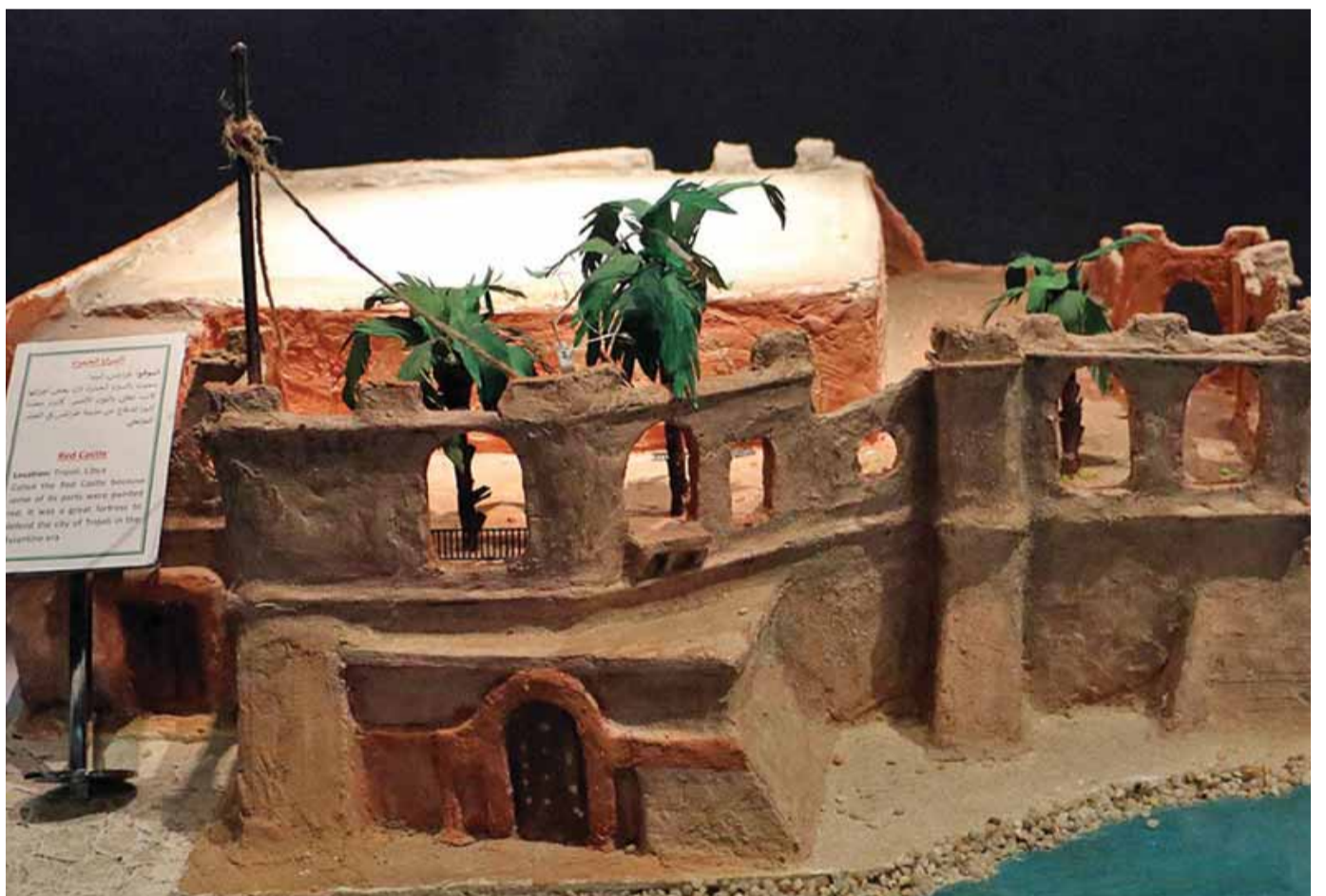
normal years, tourism makes up around 14 percent of Gross Domestic Product and provides a living for two million Tunisians, around a sixth of the population. But the sector has suffered several crises since the 2011 revolt, which inspired revolutions across the Arab world. In 2015, Islamic State group-linked militants waged a string of deadly attacks at key tourist hotspots. The sector had started to recover when the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns sent visitor numbers and revenues tumbling by some 80 percent. — AFP



Cruise tourists wave at the port of La Goulette in Tunis as Tunisia welcomes the first cruise from Europe.

Libya recounts founding story to Expo visitors

Libya is relating its founding story to visitors of its pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai by exhibiting mini sculptures of its cultural and historic landmarks and attractions. A simple and brief sign was posted at the entrance of the Libyan pavilion, attributing that the appellation of Libya came from the old tribe Libo, which inhabited this area during ancient ages. Located in north Africa, Libya boasts a strategic position bordering Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Chad and Nigeria. — KUNA



Lifestyle | Features

Ukrainian filmmaker says fighting 'not like the movies'

Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov spent five years in a Russian jail for protesting against its seizure of Crimea, and now he is on the frontline fighting for revenge. Instead of being behind a camera, the winner of the EU's Sakharov rights prize has signed up as a territorial defense volunteer to fight back Moscow's invasion. "This fighting is not how you imagine it from the movies," says Sentsov, wearing khaki camouflage and a beanie, a beard covering his previously clean shaven face.



Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov

"Close contact, shooting from small arms, there is not so much of it. Most of the time this is artillery and your task is to hold the frontline in the trenches, and not to die from the shelling," he tells AFP. The 45-year-old coughs repeatedly from an illness he says that came on during a break of a few days from serving on the front against Russian forces in freezing conditions.

Sentsov was forging a successful

career as an independent film director when the Maidan protests in 2014 and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea turned his life upside down. He wrote and directed his first film "Gamer" in 2011 on a budget of just \$20,000, and at the time of his arrest in 2014 was planning to make another film, "Rhino". Convicted of planning arson attacks, he was sent to a penal colony in the Russian Arctic where he staged a 145-day hunger strike during which he lost 30 kilos (66

pounds) before his release in 2019.

Russian 'cruelty'

Leaning against a barricade, Sentsov says his long years behind bars in Russia had shown him that Moscow would not be satisfied with just taking Crimea. "Some of my friends after I was released from the captivity would say 'Oh, you're so radical, hating Russians, they are not so bad,'" says the filmmaker. "But now they understand me, because I spent five years there, I saw how they treat Ukrainians, Europeans, with their imperial ambitions, their cruelty."

The director had no hesitation joining up when Russia's President Vladimir Putin launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24 "From the first days of war I joined the Territorial Defense," he says, and spent two weeks manning checkpoints on the outskirts of Kyiv. But he was then pushed up to the "first line of defence" alongside military units in the

forests in an undisclosed location outside Kyiv.

Russia "made a Vietnam" for the Ukrainian forces with intense barrages of shelling and rocket fire that they resisted, says Sentsov. But he believes that with Moscow's forces trying push on with their stalled offensive and encircle the Ukrainian capital, the fighting will get even heavier. "If the offensive starts in our direction, we will be the first line to stop it and there will be more close combat," he says.

'Simple soldier'

For now, the promising directing career that saw Sentsov's films screened at European film festivals seems a long way off. "I am not filming now. First of all there is no time. Second of all, I don't wish to," he said. Ukrainian officials offered him work in the press office "because of my famous name, but this was not my path. My path is one of a sim-

ple soldier." He said he had received letters of support, including from the European Film Academy and Ukrainian filmmakers "but now during the wartime it does not matter if you are a filmmaker or a bus driver or a simple worker—we are all soldiers".

But he hopes to return to filmmaking one day, even if it may take time to have the "cold head" to make a movie about the war. "I am not sure what kind of movie I will make. I had already written many scripts before the war. Perhaps I will come up with some ideas here," he said. For now though, he will continue to view the war through a rifle sight instead of a camera viewfinder. "I lived different lives, my life changed, my activity changed. Filmmaking is only one part of my life—now my life is where I believe it to be most helpful to my country." — AFP



French chef Arnaud Donckele (center left), French chef Dimitri Droisneau (center right) and his wife Marielle Droisneau (center) celebrate after being awarded a third Michelin star during the 2022 edition of the Michelin guide award ceremony at the Avant Scene theatre in Cognac, western France. — AFP photos

Michelin fetes 'resilient' French cuisine but calls for more women

The Michelin Guide launched its 2022 edition on Tuesday, celebrating the resilience of the French food industry after two difficult years of pandemic, but calling for more women chefs. Expected each year with apprehension by chefs and gourmets, the famous red guidebook revealed this year's winners in Cognac in southwest France, the first time in its 122 years the ceremony has taken place outside Paris. Two restaurants were awarded the highest distinction of three stars.

Arnaud Donckele, 44, known for his extraordinary sauces, shot straight to the top ranking for his new restaurant Plenitude in the Samaritaine department store in Paris. Husband-and-wife team Dimitri and Marielle Droisneau also joined the top rank for their Mediterranean restaurant, La Villa Madie, in Cassis, near Marseille, which judges praised for its "poetic home-style cuisine".

"2021 was another difficult year for restaurants. The impact of the pandemic continues to weigh on them. Prices for ingredients are rising enormously, and recruiting and keeping staff is a challenge for everyone," said the guide's director Gwendal Poullennec at the ceremony. "Despite everything, we have a great selection, but I see that we have too few women," he said, calling on



French chef Arnaud Donckele (center) and French chef Dimitri Droisneau (right) celebrate after being awarded a third Michelin star during the 2022 edition of the Michelin guide award ceremony.

restaurants to continue the "profound changes" they have been making to improve the imbalance.

Much focus in recent years has been on more minimalist, sustainably sourced cooking, which the guide has been rewarding with 'green stars' since 2020. There are now 87 green star restaurants in France, with six new additions in the new guide.

Back to business

Last year's ceremony, in the midst of a months-long shutdown caused by the pandemic, was a low-key affair with only one chef—Alexandre Mazza—promoted to three stars. But this year marked a rejuvenation, with a maskless crowd packing out the theatre in Cognac, a small town with a huge international reputation for its namesake spirit. Controversies have long swirled around the Michelin Guide and the pressure it places on chefs.

In 2020, foodies were shocked when the Auberge du Pont de Collonges—the oldest three-starred restaurant in the world—was downgraded following the death of legendary chef, Paul Bocuse. A year earlier, Marc Veyrat became the first to sue the guidebook, after losing the third star of his Alps restaurant La Maison des

Bois just a year after it was awarded. He lost the case and said he never again wanted to see a Michelin inspector in his restaurants.

Poullennec said demotions were vital if the guidebook was to "remain relevant to customers." Judging by the tears and emotion onstage in Cognac, the guidebook continues to be a major source of motivation for chefs and their teams. France is currently in a new golden age for cuisine after a long period in which it was accused of growing stale and lazy.

The past 15 years have seen an influx of young chefs more open to global influences and new approaches, said Paris-based food writer Lindsey Tramuta. "Michelin is still very important for chefs and owners. If it motivates their kitchen staff and team, and brings more diners and curiosity, then it has value," she said. Created in 1900 by tyre manufacturers Andre and Edouard Michelin as a guide for motorists, it now has editions across Europe, Asia, North and South America. In March, it announced it was suspending operations in Russia due to the war, just a few months after launching its first guide in Moscow. — AFP



French chef Victor Mercier (center) celebrates after receiving the Michelin Young Chef Award.



Chefs celebrate on stage after being awarded a first Michelin star.

Beyonce to sing at Oscars but Van Morrison skipping gala



Beyonce

Beyonce and Billie Eilish will perform during Sunday's Oscars, but outspoken vaccine skeptic Van Morrison is skipping Hollywood's biggest night, organizers said Tuesday. All three performers are nominated for best song at the 94th Academy Awards—along with Lin-Manuel Miranda and Diane Warren, whose songs will also be performed on the broadcast. Pop superstar Beyonce's Oscar-nominated ballad "Be Alive" was penned for tennis biopic "King Richard," which stars Will Smith as the father of tennis greats Serena and Venus Williams.

Hollywood trade publication Variety reported that Beyonce will perform live from the tennis courts in Compton where the sisters played as children. Organizers did not respond to AFP request for comment. Eilish and her brother Finneas will perform "No Time To Die" from the recent James Bond movie. But while Morrison, who wrote "Down to Joy" for Kenneth Branagh's black-and-white childhood drama "Belfast," was invited to perform at the star-studded gala, he "will not attend the Oscars due to his tour schedule," organizers said.

The singer, known as "Van the Man" to his fans, is due to tour England in late March, before arriving in the US next month for further dates. Morrison's high-profile criticism of pandemic restrictions-

including three anti-lockdown "protest songs"—and opposition to vaccine mandates had led to questions about whether he would be welcomed at the Oscars. The ceremony taking place Sunday in Hollywood requires nominees, guests and press to be vaccinated, although performers and presenters are reportedly able to attend without proof of vaccine if they undergo rigorous testing.

Miranda's "Dos Oruguitas" from Disney animated movie "Encanto" will be performed by Sebastian Yatra. Best known for creating Broadway sensation "Hamilton," Miranda will attain the coveted and rare EGOT status for winning an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony award if he wins on Sunday. Warren's song "Somehow You Do" from "Four Good Days"—which will be performed by Reba McEntire—is her 13th Oscar nomination, but she has never won. Also performing at the Oscars will be an "all-star band" including Blink-182 drummer Travis Barker, and DJ D-Nice. — AFP

How Coppola nearly refused 'Godfather' offer 50 years ago



In this file photo US director Francis Ford Coppola arrives for "The Godfather" 50th Anniversary premiere screening event at Paramount Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Released 50 years ago this week, "The Godfather" broke all box office records, won best picture at the Oscars and introduced millions of fans to a world of mafia bosses, murder-for-hire and cannoli. But when director Francis Ford Coppola—then "about 29 years old"—was offered the job of adapting Mario Puzo's best-selling mob novel, he says he very nearly refused. "I was greatly disappointed when I first started to read... it was really a potboiler that Mario Puzo had written to get some money (for) his kids," Coppola told a 50th anniversary screening event at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles late Monday.

"When they did offer me the opportunity of doing it—mainly because everyone else had turned it down—I turned it down also." Fortunately, a young associate by the name of George Lucas insisted that Coppola take the job, as their fledgling, counter-cultural film studio American Zoetrope was heavily in debt. "Francis, we need the money! The tax authority is going to chain the front door... You've got to take a job like this," Coppola recalled the future "Star Wars" creator saying. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Godfather—released on March 24, 1972, in an unusually large number of theaters from day one—was by September the highest grossing film of all time, supplanting "Gone with the Wind." In doing so, it helped usher in the blockbuster era, which truly took flight when Steven Spielberg's "Jaws" took over the box office record three years later. According to Peter Biskind's book "Easy Riders, Raging Bulls," Coppola won a bet that Paramount would buy him a stretch limo if the film grossed \$50 million. It grossed more than \$130 million. Coppola became the first superstar director, with the financial clout to back up his artistic credentials. "It was the beginning of a new era for directors," wrote Biskind.

'Not happy'

But in many ways, "The Godfather" was an unlikely hit. By 1972, gangster films

had fallen out of fashion. Paramount had released "The Brotherhood" starring Kirk Douglas four years earlier, and it had bombed. But Mario Puzo's mafia novel was soaring in popularity, and the same studio held the rights.

Still, Paramount had trouble finding a director—Hollywood's reigning auteurs like Elia Kazan, Costa-Gavras and Peter Bogdanovich turned it down. Though he was a leader in the New Hollywood movement of hot-shot, anti-establishment young directors, Coppola did not have a major hit to his name, and was approached in part due to his Italian ancestry. "If it got a lot of pushback from offended Italian Americans who felt that it was casting aspersions on Italians, I would get the heat, you know?" said Coppola. While Paramount wanted a quick, cheap adaptation, Coppola fought for a bigger budget, insisting the film be shot in New York, in its original 1940s setting rather than the present day.

"The budget was about \$2 million, \$2.5 million. And by my wanting to make it in New York and make it in period 1945, it meant that probably that was going to at least get doubled," recalled Coppola. "Which they were not happy about at all." — AFP

Sports

Unrepentant Folau eyes Rugby World Cup return with Tonga

'No regrets' over the homophobic comments

TOKYO: Controversial Israel Folau is "definitely interested" in playing for Tonga at next year's Rugby World Cup and has "no regrets" over the homophobic comments that ended his Wallabies career. The devoutly Christian full-back-part of the Wallabies team that lost the 2015 World Cup final to New Zealand at Twickenham was sacked by Rugby Australia in 2019 for saying that "hell awaits" gay people and others he considers sinners in a post on social media.

The dual-code international moved to Japan at the end of last year to resume his rugby union career after a brief return to rugby league, and he is hoping to take advantage of a new rule that allows him to represent the country of his parents' birth. The New South Wales-born 32-year-old is eligible to play for Tonga and he told AFP that it would be "special" to make the switch after being soundly out by head coach Toutai Kefu.

"Representing your heritage and where you're from, representing your parents is something that is quite close to not only myself but to many other Polynesians," said Folau, Super Rugby's all-time top try-scorer. "It would be a huge honor if I got the opportunity. We'll see if that opportunity comes about but I'd love to put the Tongan jersey on and represent Tonga."

'Moved forward'

Governing body World Rugby approved a landmark change to its international eligibility rules in November last year. Players can now switch teams if they have not

been selected for their national side for at least three years and have a parent or grandparent born in the country they wish to represent. Folau meets that criteria, having won the last of his 73 caps for the Wallabies in 2018 before he was booted out for a "high-level breach" of Rugby Australia's code of conduct.

He said he has now "moved forward from what's happened in the past" and was enjoying playing again after joining Japanese club NTT Communications Shining Arcs Tokyo-Bay Urayasu on a two-year deal. "I have no regrets about anything but it's led me here to Japan and I'm grateful for the opportunity," said Folau, who has scored eight tries in seven games for his new team, who are bottom of the first-division table.

"I'm just stoked to be playing rugby again. It's a different experience to what I'm used to back in Australia but it's something that I'm really enjoying." Folau's anti-gay post can still be seen on his Instagram account and has been liked almost 75,000 times. He had previously been embroiled in a similar row and he went on to cause further offence in 2019 when he suggested that bushfires and drought ravaging Australia were "God's judgement" for the legalization of same-sex marriage and abortion.

'Outside noise'

His sacking by Rugby Australia sparked a backlash from supporters of free speech and religious expression. Folau took the governing body to court for unfair

dismissal, demanding AU\$14 million (\$9.5 million) in compensation under employment legislation that bans sacking someone because of their religious beliefs. The case was settled out of court with Rugby Australia reported to have paid Folau AU\$4 million (\$3 million) and the player claiming he had been "vindicated". Now Folau says he is keen to block out the "outside noise" and "can't be sitting there worrying about what people think" of him.

"I don't see myself as a symbol or anything like that—I'm just a regular person," he said. "I've been blessed to have a talent to play the game of rugby. Everyone will have different opinions but that's up to them. I'm here and I'm focusing really hard on playing rugby." Folau said that his move to Japan had been "positive" and he would "love to play beyond next year" if he was still in good enough physical condition. He has not thought about what he will do when he retires, but he laughed off reports that he could enter politics as "definitely not true".

Next year's World Cup in France could give him the chance to end his career on a high if Tonga qualify, and he thinks the new eligibility rule could be a game-changer for Pacific Island teams. "It's only going to raise the standard across the board of world rugby and strengthen those Tier Two nations," he said. "It's going to strengthen Tonga, it's also going to strengthen Samoa, Fiji—all those guys will be available to represent their nations." —AFP



TOKYO: Shining Arcs Tokyo-Bay Urayasu's Australian Israel Folau controls the ball during the Japan Rugby League One match between Tokyo Sungoliath and Shining Arcs Tokyo-Bay Urayasu at Chichibunomiya Stadium.—AFP

Barty: Down-to-earth star of many talents

SYDNEY: Multi-talented Ashleigh Barty excels at so many sports that she has played professional cricket and even won a golf tournament, but it was in tennis where she rose to become the best in the world. In January she took her place among the giants of Australian sport by winning her home Grand Slam. It was fitting that Chris O'Neil, the last home-grown player to win the Australian Open, in 1978, was in the stadium to witness Barty ending a 44-year hoodoo and thrilling a nation glued to their televisions.

Less than two months later, Barty on Wednesday announced her shock retirement from tennis aged just

25. She leaves the sport having been world number one for more than two years and with three Grand Slam singles titles, having also won the French Open in 2019 and Wimbledon last year. It is unclear what she will do next, but it would be no surprise if Barty ended up becoming a champion in another sport, because few athletes can boast such a varied sporting CV as the down-to-earth Barty.

Tennis to cricket

Widely respected as one of the nicest players in women's tennis, Barty began playing the sport as a child in the Queensland state capital Brisbane. But it was a trip to the Australian Open for a training camp at the age of about 12 that proved to be the spark that drove her to the summit of the sport. "To see how professional it was and to see everyone going about their business was really eye-opening. My

first taste of it was in the juniors and I loved it," she said at the Australian Open in January. "That kind of lit the flame." Barty went on to win the junior Wimbledon title as a 15-year-old in 2011. But the expectations that came with success took their toll and she made a surprise decision three years later to ditch tennis for cricket, signing for Brisbane Heat in the inaugural Women's Big Bash League. "In short, I think I needed just to find myself," said Barty who, while never shrinking in the limelight, hardly appeared to revel in it.

She said that while cricket gave her "a different perspective about sport", the lure of tennis was never far away. She returned after a season out. Barty broke through for her maiden Grand Slam triumph at the French Open in 2019, became Australia's first women's world number one since Evonne Goolagong Cawley and finally won a cherished Wimbledon crown last year.—AFP

Crunch time for Portugal and Italy in World Cup play-offs

PARIS: The World Cup hopes of the last two European champions are on a knife edge with Portugal and Italy on a collision course in decisive qualifying play-offs over the next week. A potential clash in Porto between the Euro 2016 winners, captained by Cristiano Ronaldo, and an Italy team who succeeded them as continental champions last year is a mouth-watering prospect.

However, both must first come through semi-finals on Thursday that are far from foregone conclusions, with Portugal hosting Turkey and Italy facing North Macedonia. Failure to reach this year's World Cup would be a catastrophe for the Azzurri, who had gone to every finals since 1958 until missing out in 2018 when they lost a play-off to Sweden.

It would be all the more remarkable given that they bounced back from that under Roberto Mancini to win Euro 2020 while on a world record 37-game unbeaten run. Yet four draws in their last five World Cup qualifiers last autumn saw them finish second in their group to Switzerland, and now they must come through these two one-off ties to secure a place in the April 1 draw in Doha. "Our goal is to win the World Cup, and to win the World Cup we have to win these two matches. There's nothing else to say," Mancini said on Monday.

North Macedonia plot shock

Italy host North Macedonia in Palermo, and they will know not to take the Balkan nation of two million people lightly. After all, they beat Germany away in qualifying last year before appearing at their first major tournament at Euro 2020, and they also held Italy to a damaging draw in Turin in qualifying for the last World Cup. "We are not going to Italy as tourists, but to outplay (them) and to win," said coach Bobi Milevski, who is aiming to take North Macedonia-born in 1991 out of the break-up of Yugoslavia—to their first World Cup.

Portugal skipper Ronaldo will be 41 come 2026, so Qatar surely represents his last chance to win the World Cup. Missing out altogether is unthinkable for the all-time top scorer in international football with 115 goals. "We know the road will not be easy and we have full respect for our opponents, who share the same objective as us. But together we will fight to take Portugal where we belong." Ronaldo posted on Instagram this week. Portugal, who are ranked eighth in the world, two places behind Italy, must beat Turkey in Porto to reach the play-off final, in which they would have home advantage. However, their two first-choice centre-backs have been ruled out—Manchester City's Ruben Dias succumbed to injury before 39-year-old veteran Pepe tested positive for coronavirus.

Russia excluded, Ukraine game postponed - Three World Cup berths from Europe remain up for grabs, with 10 teams led by holders France having already qualified. The play-offs were meant to feature 12 teams, split into three separate paths, but they have been impacted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with both of those countries initially due to take part. Hosts of the 2018 World Cup, Russia were excluded after being suspended by FIFA and UEFA until further notice.

That meant Poland getting a walkover to a final against either 2018 quarter-finalists Sweden or the Czech Republic, who meet in Solna on Thursday. Ukraine were due to face Scotland in Glasgow, but that match has been postponed until June. Therefore, whoever wins Thursday's clash between Wales and Austria in Cardiff will also have to wait until June for their play-off final. Wales have impressed at the last two European Championships but have not been to the World Cup since 1958.—AFP



Women International Boxing Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait the First Women International Boxing Championship will be launched on Thursday with the participation of 32 boxers from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Germany, Nigeria, Jordan and Tunis. Kuwait's boxer Noura Al-Mutairi said Kuwaiti boxers are competing for top places, adding that the moral is

high while technical and physical conditions are at a satisfactory level. The team, led by Tunisian coaches Fathi Al-Mousawi and Mohammad Al-Hamrani hope to display good show in this noble sport.

Al-Mutairi, who holds the bronze medal in Asia Women Championship said that Fedda Al-Asfour, Latifa Buarki, Moudhi Al-Muzaiel, Maha Al-Mutairi, Iman Al-Mudhaf and Rawan Al-Musaallam hope to win the gold medals in their first participation despite the expected tough competition. She lauded the support of the Kuwait Olympic Committee and its Chairman Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser and the women sports committee chairwoman Fatima Hayat.



International Shooting GP

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The finals of the Skeet event for men and women at the HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Grand Prix will take place on Thursday. The competition is expected to be very strong. The Skeet finals will be played on Friday. Meanwhile, Shooter Nayef Al-Harby won the Horse Riding Archery competition. Abdelaziz Al-Sharekh grabbed the second position, followed by Ibrahim Al-Enezi, Abdallah Al-Daihani, Usama Yaseen and Abdelmohsen Dlam.

Acting Technical Director and Ranges Manager Mishfi Al-Mutairi said that preparations of the ranges were completed at a record time. He said Kuwait 'Shotgun Shooting' is now number four in the world and have gained the respect of the federations due to the unlimited support by officials. Sudanese Shooter Khadeeja Omar said that the organization of the event is at its best adding that there were no problems at all.



Sports

Putellas shines; Barca beat Real in Women's Champions League

Katoto scores twice as PSG edge past Bayern

PARIS: Alexia Putellas' second-half double sank Real Madrid on Tuesday as reigning champions Barcelona came from behind to win 3-1 in the first leg of the Women's Champions League quarter-finals. Madrid took a surprise lead against their all-conquering rivals when Olga Carmona fired in early at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium and the home side had chances to extend their advantage, with Esther Gonzalez hitting the post.

Instead, Barca came storming back, aided by a soft penalty, which was converted by Ballon d'Or winner Putellas, before Claudia Pina and then Putellas' second completed a devastating turnaround. "We knew it would be a difficult tie but we didn't expect such high pressure from Madrid," said Barcelona coach Jonatan Giraldez.

"We took time to react but in the second half we controlled the game better and we were more clinical in attack." It will take a monumental effort from Madrid to prevent the Catalans reaching the semis, particularly as the second leg will be played at Camp Nou, in front of what is set to be a world-record crowd. Real Madrid said they were unable to use the Santiago Bernabeu for this first leg due to ongoing renovation work at the club's main ground.

Barcelona came into the women's Clasico as hot favorites after winning all five of their competitive meetings since Madrid officially launched their women's team in 2020. They retained their Primera Division title earlier this month with six games to spare, by thrashing Real Madrid 5-0. But Madrid were far from over-awed this time, their performance offering hope they can continue to close the gap next season, even if their chances of progress look remote.

Putellas missed an early chance at the back post and then it was the Spaniard who was at fault for the opener, her sloppy pass allowing Real Madrid to break. Esther weaved through and as Barca's defense were drawn inside, she shifted the ball left for Olga, who guided a cool finish into the corner. Esther struck the post from a hooked effort towards goal and then she went through again, this time shooting straight at Sandra Panos. But Barcelona improved in the second half, rejuvenated by their equalizer in the 53rd minute.

Fridolina Rolfö's cross reached the back post and as the ball bounced, Olga arrived late, her knee making contact with Barca's Caroline Graham Hansen, who made the most of the fall. After consulting the replay, Finnish referee Lina Lehtovaara gave the penalty. Misa confronted Putellas on the spot but the attempted mind-games had no effect, Putellas finding the corner. With the score level, Barcelona were suddenly sharper and more assertive and by the final 10 minutes a weary Madrid were hanging on.

Barca would not be denied as Hansen's cut-back found Aitana Bonmati in the area and her shot fell kindly for Pina, who drove low and into the corner. Madrid had lost the match and in injury-time they likely lost the tie, as Barcelona broke down the right and Putellas was left free. She scooped in a delightful finish to make it three. Prolific striker Marie-Antoinette Katoto earlier scored twice as Paris Saint-Germain won 2-1 away to Bayern Munich.

Katoto, who is PSG's all-time top scorer at the age of just 23, netted a 20th-minute opener and then headed home in the 71st minute for the French champions at the Allianz Arena. However, German interna-



MADRID: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Alexia Putellas (center) scores her team's third goal during the women's UEFA Champions League quarter final first leg football match between Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona on March 22, 2022. —AFP

tional Klara Buehl smashed in a late free-kick to keep Bayern's hopes alive going into the return. PSG's women are hoping to go all the way in Europe after ending Lyon's run of 14 consecutive French titles last season. —AFP

Short but sweet: Key moments in Barty's brilliant career

SYDNEY: Reigning Wimbledon and Australian Open champion Ashleigh Barty announced her shock retirement from tennis on Wednesday aged 25. Here are a few highlights from her short but illustrious career:

'Dream' Wimbledon triumph

The Australian wins Wimbledon on the 50th anniversary of fellow indigenous Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley's triumph there. Barty's victory in 2021 fulfils a dream that leaves her wondering how long she wants to carry on. In her retirement message Barty—who won the French Open in 2019 — described her Wimbledon crown as her "one true dream". "I've had a lot of incredible moments in my career that have been pivotal moments and Wimbledon last year changed a lot for me as a person," she said, describing the emotion of an athlete who has worked hard her entire life "for one goal". "To be able to win Wimbledon—which was my dream, the one true dream that I wanted in

tennis—that really changed my perspective."

Australian Open at last

Even after Wimbledon "there was just a little part of me that wasn't quite satisfied, wasn't quite fulfilled", Barty now says. "And then came the challenge of the Australian Open." In January, Barty became the first Australian to win her home Grand Slam in 44 years. The world number one was 5-1 down in the second set against fearless American Danielle Collins but came storming back to win on a tiebreak and sweep past the 27th seed in straight sets.

"It's a dream come true for me and I'm just so proud to be an Aussie," she said on the day. "But for me it's about the memories more than the trophies, it's the memories we make from the whole journey." Taking the Australian Open title is "my perfect way to celebrate what an amazing journey my tennis career has been", Barty said as she revealed her decision to leave the sport. "As a person this is what I want. I want to chase after some other dreams."

Leaving tennis, Act I

Barty decides out of the blue aged 18 to take a break from tennis—she had won the junior Wimbledon title in 2011 and reached three Grand Slam doubles finals. "I know I've done this before, but in a very different feeling," she now says of that decision. At the

went to Hussein Abdelreda and Yaqoub Mohammad from Yarmouk; Second place went to Fawzan Al-Khashan and Ahmad Al-Humaidan from Khaitan and third place went to Othman Al-Ansari and Abdallah Humoud from Khaitan.

The final standings of the clubs are as follows: Yarmouk - First with 305 points; Khaitan - Second with 167; Salmiya - Third with 151 and Kuwait - Fourth with 45 points. In the U12 singles, Mohammad Qilli grabbed the first position; Abdelaziz Ahmad took second and Mohammad Al-Humaidan third.

The U12 doubles' first spot went to Abdelaziz Ahmad and Fahad Al-Daihani; Second place went to Mohammad Qilli and Saud Al-Sabah while the third position went to Mahdi Abbas and Mohammad Funaisan. Here is the final standing of the clubs: Khaitan - First with 261 points; Kuwait - Second with 206; Yarmouk - Third with 190 and Kazema-Fourth with 66 points.



MELBOURNE: This file photo shows Australia's Ashleigh Barty posing with the trophy after her victory in the women's singles final match against Danielle Collins of the US on day 13 of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. —AFP

time she received the full support of her mentor and role model Goolagong Cawley. "Hey Darl, go and wet a line," texted Goolagong Cawley, suggesting she go fishing. After putting down her tennis racquet, Barty tries her hand at cricket and turned out for the Brisbane Heat in the inaugural Women's Big Bash League. "What attracted me as a coach to her as a player was her ability to pick up things really quickly," said Heat coach Andy Richards. —AFP

United hold talks with Ajax's coach

LONDON: Manchester United have held "positive" talks with Ajax coach Erik Ten Hag about the vacant manager's job at Old Trafford, it was reported on Wednesday. Ralf Rangnick has been in charge of the misfiring Premier League giants on an interim basis since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was sacked in November after nearly three years in charge. Sky Sports said the talks with Ten Hag had been "positive", reporting that club chiefs were believed to be impressed by his vision. But it is understood to be too early to talk about favorites for the job.

Other names in the frame include Paris Saint-Germain boss Mauricio Pochettino, Sevilla manager Julen Lopetegui and Spain coach Luis Enrique. Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel was mentioned as a possible candidate due to the turmoil at the London club following sanctions imposed on Russian owner Roman Abramovich but he has reaffirmed his commitment to the Blues.

Ten Hag, who took over at Ajax in 2017, won the Dutch league title in 2019 and 2021 and his team are currently two points clear of PSV Eindhoven at the top of the table. The 52-year-old's contract at Ajax runs until 2023 but United have good links with the Dutch club, where former goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar is chief executive. Whoever takes over at Old Trafford will have a major rebuilding job, with a clutch of senior players including Paul Pogba, Jesse Lingard and Edinson Cavani all out of contract at the end of the season. —AFP

Kuwait Under-16, Under-12 tennis championships

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Under-16 and Under-12 tennis championships concluded at the Yarmouk Club courts in the presence of Kuwait Tennis Federation Secretary General Faleh Al-Otaibi, Technical Director Abbas Al-Busairi and Board Member Hussein Al-Ghareeb.

The singles U16 was won by Abdelreda Al-Shatti from Yarmouk; (Second place) Abdelrazaq Abdal from Salmiya and Abdelrahman Al-Abdal from Yarmouk respectively. In the doubles, first place



Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Syed Ahamed Basha currently holder of Indian Passport L1430059, have changed my name from Syed Ahamed Basha to Shaik Ahamed Basha & now i would be known as Shaik Ahamed Basha, address Alimabad Street, D.No. 29/10-c, Rayachoty,

Kadapa Dist, Pin 516269, Andhra Pradesh, India. (C 1433)

I, Ikbaluddin (old name), holder of Indian Passport No. N8642932 issued in Kuwait on 28/04/2016 and Civil ID 262071302823, hereby declare that I have changed my name to Sharifuddin.

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MELBOURNE

MELBOURNE: This file photo taken on Jan 29, 2022 shows Australia's Ashleigh Barty posing with the Australian Open trophy. —AFP

Barty announces shock retirement at 25

SYDNEY: Top-ranked Ashleigh Barty stunned the tennis world yesterday by retiring from the sport aged just 25, saying she had fulfilled her dreams and was "spent physically". Barty dropped the bombshell weeks after becoming the first home Australian Open champion in 44 years, joining only a handful of players to win a Grand Slam on three different surfaces.

In an emotional social media video message with her close friend and former doubles partner Casey Dellacqua, the world number one said she was "so ready" to call it quits after achieving her life-time ambition of winning Wimbledon last year. "Success for me is knowing that I've given absolutely everything, everything I can. I'm fulfilled, I'm happy and I know how much work it takes to bring the best out of yourself," said the three-time Grand Slam winner.

"It's just I don't have that in me anymore. I don't have the physical drive, the emotional want and kind of everything it takes to challenge yourself at the very top level anymore. I think I just know that I'm absolutely, I am spent. I just know physically I had

nothing more to give and that for me is success." One of the most respected and popular players in women's tennis, Barty also became the best, with her dizzying array of slices, pinpoint serving and seamless forehand typifying her all-round game.

Sporting talent

Few athletes can boast such a varied sporting resume as the down-to-earth Australian. Barty began playing tennis as a child in Brisbane and went on to win the junior Wimbledon title as a 15-year-old in 2011. But the expectations that came with success took their toll and she made a shock decision three years later to ditch tennis for cricket, signing for Brisbane Heat in the inaugural Women's Big Bash League.

But the lure of tennis was never far away and she returned after a season out, breaking through for her maiden Grand Slam triumph at the French Open in 2019 and becoming Australia's first women's world number one since Evonne Goolagong Cawley 50

years ago. Barty finally won a cherished Wimbledon crown last year before her Australian Open triumph at Melbourne Park in January, storming back from 5-1 down in the second set against American Danielle Collins to triumph 6-3, 7-6 (7/2).

"It's something I've been thinking about for a long time," she said of retirement. "To be able to win Wimbledon, which was my dream, the one true dream that I wanted in tennis, that really changed my perspective. And I just had that gut feeling after Wimbledon and had spoken to my team quite a lot about it. "And there was just a little part of me that wasn't quite satisfied, wasn't quite fulfilled. And then came the challenge of the Australian Open and I think that for me just feels like the most perfect way."

'No 1 role model'

Praise poured in for Barty as tennis took in the shock announcement. The Women's Tennis Association praised her as "an incredible ambassador for the sport". "For your love of the game thank you

@ashbarty for the incredible mark you've left on-court, off-court and in our hearts," the WTA said, while Tennis Australia added: "Forever a world number one role model."

Some of the sport's top names also paid tribute with fellow Grand Slam winner Simona Halep tweeting: "Ash, what can I say, you know I have tears right? My friend, I will miss you on tour." British star Andy Murray tweeted that he was happy for Barty but "gutted for tennis. What a player". Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison thanked her for "inspiring a country".

Barty has been world number one for more than two years and said after her Australian Open win that she wanted time to consider her next move, withdrawing from the prestigious early season hardcourt tournaments at Indian Wells and Miami. Late last year she became engaged to long-term boyfriend Garry Kissick, who was ever-present courtside when she played and often posted supportive messages on social media. —AFP



MILWAUKEE: Zach LaVine #8 of the Chicago Bulls shoots the ball during the game against the Milwaukee Bucks on March 22, 2022. —AFP

Bucks crush Chicago Bulls

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from injury to score 25 points as the Milwaukee Bucks crushed the Chicago Bulls 126-98 on Tuesday. Antetokounmpo, who missed the Bulls' 138-119 mauling by Minnesota on Saturday after complaining of knee soreness, came back with a vengeance as the Bucks pounded the Bulls line-up. The Greek star hauled in 17 rebounds and added five assists, while Jrue Holiday also posted a big game with 27 points. Seven Milwaukee players finished the night in double figures.

The Bucks, who led from midway through the first quarter, surging 35 points clear late in the game, improved their season record to 45-27 to stand second in the Eastern Conference. In Florida, German rookie Franz Wagner scored 18 points as the Orlando Magic sent the Golden State Warriors sliding to a third straight defeat on Tuesday.

Wagner, chosen with the eighth overall pick in last year's draft, also chipped in with three assists, two steals and a block as the Warriors slumped to an upset 94-90 defeat. The Warriors fell to 47-25 to remain third in the Western Conference while Orlando, already eliminated from playoff contention, are one off the bottom of the Eastern Conference

at 20-53. Wagner was backed with 19 points from Wendell Carter Jr, while Cole Anthony added 14.

The Warriors, missing the injured Stephen Curry, were led with 26 points from Jordan Poole while Klay Thompson finished with 15. Orlando had roared into an early lead after outscoring the Warriors 25-17 before taking a 46-38 lead into the half-time break. But Golden State exploded for 36 points in the third quarter to build a 74-65 lead thanks to a 12-point burst of scoring from Poole. Yet, the momentum flipped back to Orlando in the final quarter, with the home side taking the period 29-16 to complete an unexpected victory.

"I thought we were scattered in the fourth quarter a little bit," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said after the loss. "I thought we were a lot out of whack ... just a really disappointing fourth quarter. "But give them credit. They were hyped. They've had a long difficult year and they got after us and did a great job. "They earned the win and the right to feel good about that game tonight. But we've got to do better." In New York, Trae Young delivered a 45-point masterpiece as the Atlanta Hawks downed the New York Knicks 117-111 at Madison Square Garden.

Young made seven-of-15 from three-point range with eight assists while Bogdan Bogdanovic added 32 for the Hawks, who improved to 36-36 to remain 10th in the Eastern Conference and firmly on course for a place in the postseason play-in tournament. "It's a fun atmosphere to play in but any night you're allowed to play basketball is fun, so I try to enjoy it," Young said afterwards. —AFP

Rooney and Vieira join Premier League Hall of Fame

LONDON: Manchester United great Wayne Rooney and former Arsenal captain Patrick Vieira were on Wednesday inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame. The pair are the ninth and 10th players named in the select group, joining David Beckham, Steven Gerrard, Dennis Bergkamp, Frank Lampard, Roy Keane, Eric Cantona, Thierry Henry and Alan Shearer.

Rooney, currently manager of Championship side Derby, is second on the list of all-time Premier League goalscorers, with 208 goals for Manchester United and Everton. "It's a huge honor for me to be named in the Premier League Hall of Fame, alongside an incredible group of players who have already been inducted," said the 36-year-old former forward.

"Growing up, I watched the Premier League as far back as I can remember. My dream was always to become a professional footballer, score goals, and win trophies and I was lucky enough to win the Premier League five times. "I have so many brilliant memories from my years playing for Everton and Manchester United and I'm really proud of what we achieved."

Vieira, now manager of Crystal Palace, played 307 times in the Premier League, winning the competition three times including as captain of the Arsenal "Invincibles" team, who remain the only club to have won the title without losing a game. "Being inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame is a fantastic achievement," said the French World Cup winner, who finished his playing career at Manchester City.

"When I received the news, I thought about being a young boy playing in Senegal, or in a suburb of Paris." The former midfielder, 45, added: "To be there with the best players in the Premier League, the best league in the world, is bigger than what I was ever thinking about. To have my name around those players makes me



Wayne Rooney

proud and makes me realise how good I was." The Hall of Fame recognizes the top players who have graced the Premier League since its launch in 1992.

Rooney and Vieira are the first two inductees of 2022, with a public vote opening up on Wednesday to decide another six to join them from a shortlist of 25 former players. Richard Masters, the Premier League's chief executive, said: "Wayne Rooney and Patrick Vieira are two of the finest players to have played in their respective positions and are worthy additions to the eight players who entered the Hall of Fame last year." —AFP