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8 Zain hosts virtual discussion series on latest tech concepts, Metaverse



16 Japan beat Australia to reach World Cup, Saudis also qualify



G7 warns against use of chemical weapons

Russia, Ukraine exchange prisoners; Ukraine demands unlimited NATO aid



KYIV: This photograph taken on March 24, 2022 shows smoke rising from a burning warehouse hit by a Russian shell in the suburbs of Kyiv. — AFP

BRUSSELS: The Group of Seven most industrialized countries warned on Thursday against any use of weapons of mass destruction against Ukraine, noting that Russia was bound by international treaties. "We warn against any threat of the use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons or related materials," the G7 said after a crisis summit in Brussels. "We recall Russia's obligations under the international treaties to which it is a signatory, and which protect us all."

Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine have exchanged prisoners, Kyiv announced Thursday, in what it said was the first swap of soldiers since Moscow ordered troops into Ukraine one month ago. "Following an order from President Volodymyr Zelensky, the first fully-fledged exchange of prisoners of war has taken place," Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk wrote on Facebook. "In exchange for 10 captured occupiers we res-

cued 10 of our servicemen," she said, referring to Russian and Ukrainian troops.

Vereshchuk also said that 11 Russian civilian seamen rescued near the Black Sea port city of Odessa were exchanged for 19 Ukrainian civilian ship crew members held by Moscow. Russia's foreign ministry said earlier this week that Moscow had completed two prisoner swaps since it launched its invasion of Ukraine late last month. On Monday Russia's human rights ombudsman Tatiana Moskalkova said nine Russian prisoners were exchanged for the mayor of Melitopol, a city in southeastern Ukraine captured by the Russian army. Vereshchuk on Wednesday confirmed the Melitopol swap but denied any others had taken place.

Unlimited NATO aid

A month since Russia launched its shock invasion, Ukraine's leader Thursday demanded

NATO "save" his shattered country with all-out military aid to let its armed forces turn their dogged defense into attack. After relentless Russian bombardment of Ukrainian cities, the vast scale of civilian suffering was made stark as the UN said more than half of all Ukraine's children have been driven from their homes.

In a video speech, President Volodymyr Zelensky told NATO leaders that Russia had unleashed phosphorus bombs on Ukraine along with indiscriminate shelling of civilians. "A month of heroic resistance. A month of the darkest suffering," he told the leaders including US President Joe Biden, at the first of three Brussels summits that were tightening the sanctions screws on Russia. "To save people and our cities, Ukraine needs military assistance without restrictions," Zelensky said. "In the same way that Russia is using its full arsenal without restrictions against us."

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Will Russia use nuke weapons?

PARIS: Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised the specter of something considered almost unthinkable until recently: the use of a small nuclear weapon during a conflict in Europe. AFP looks at the risk that Russian President Vladimir Putin would authorize a so-called "tactical" nuclear strike against a country he has repeatedly claimed forms "one people" with Russia.

Why is there concern?

On February 27, three days after the start of the invasion, Putin ordered his defence chiefs to put Russia's nuclear forces on high alert in a highly choreographed meeting in front of TV cameras. Western countries quickly condemned the move, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling it "provocative" and "the height of irresponsibility." Most Western analysts believe the rhetoric was designed to deter the United States and its allies from increasing their support for Ukraine beyond existing economic sanctions and weapons supplies. "Not only is this meant to instil fear in the whole world; it's also meant to scare anyone from helping in Ukraine," Beatrice Fihn, who leads the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, told AFP.

How big is Russia's nuclear arsenal?

Russia has the largest number of nuclear warheads of any country, according to the SIPRI peace research institute in Stockholm, which puts the figure at 6,255. Experts say the risk in Ukraine is not the deployment of a giant "strategic" weapon, which pose a threat to the entire planet. Instead, Putin might be tempted to use a "tactical" weapon, with a smaller warhead that causes localized devastation but without threatening life across Europe.

These weapons come in various sizes, and their impact depends on whether they explode at ground level or above the Earth's surface. US President Joe Biden also claimed this week that Moscow was considering the use of chemical and biological weapons in Ukraine. "Chemical weapons would not change the course of the war. A tactical nuclear weapon that reduces a Ukrainian city to rubble? Yes," Mathieu Boulegue, an analyst at the London-based Chatham House, told AFP.

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Arabs denounce 'double standard' of sports bans

BEIRUT: Russia's war on Ukraine has drawn unprecedented sanctions that have seen it banned from most international sports in a Western-led break with the long-standing convention against politics mixing with sport. For many Arabs, who have seen their own sportsmen and women punished for refusing to compete with Zionists in protest at successive wars, the exception made for a European conflict smacks of double standards.

Egyptian squash champion Ali Farag said "nobody should be happy about what's going (on in

Ukraine)." "We've never been allowed to speak about politics in sports but all of a sudden now it's allowed," he said this month. "Now that it's allowed, I hope that people also look at oppression everywhere in the world. The Palestinians have been going through that for the past 74 years but I guess because it doesn't fit the narrative of the media of the West, we couldn't talk about it." Days after Russia invaded Ukraine, football governing bodies FIFA and UEFA swiftly suspended Russia from all international competitions.

Formula One suspended its contract with Russia, barring it from hosting its Grand Prix in Sochi. Accompanying the bans was an officially sanctioned outpouring of support for Ukraine. The blue and yellow colors of its national flag were displayed at all English Premier League matches in the first weekend of March in a show of solidarity.

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DUBAI: In this file photo, Egyptians Mohamed El-Shorbagy (left) and Ali Farag compete during the PSA Dubai Squash World Series Finals. — AFP

WCup hosts offer steel beds, luxury villas

DOHA: Qatar World Cup organizers on Wednesday unveiled fan accommodation for the event that ranges from a steel bed in a studio at \$84 a night to luxury villas costing nearly \$1,000 and luxury cruise ship suites.

Visitors to the Gulf state will also have to buy a match ticket before they can get official accommodation and to register for a special pass to get access to stadiums and fan zones.

Qatari officials said. Organizers of the football extravaganza, that runs from November 21 to December 18, have sought to reassure 1.2 million visitors expected from around the world that there are enough rooms and they will fit all pockets.

Despite the doubts, and some criticism of Qatar's record of handling migrant workers, there have been nearly 20 million applications for the three million tickets.

The government and world body FIFA have reserved 130,000 hotel and apartment rooms for the tournament. But they will also have two cruise ships in Doha port and could set up desert camps for fans.

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DOHA: Picture shows a room at the JW Marriott Marquis hotel in the Qatari capital Doha. Qatar World Cup organizers have unveiled fan accommodation for the event that ranges from a steel bed in a studio at \$84 a night to luxury villas costing nearly \$1,000 and luxury cruise ship suites. — AFP

North Korea fires largest-ever ICBM

SEOUL: North Korea fired what could be its largest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) Thursday, Tokyo and Seoul said, a dramatic return to long-range testing that sparked outrage from neighbors and the United States. South Korea's military fired a missile barrage into the Sea of Japan in response to the ICBM launch, the first full-range test of Kim Jong Un's most powerful missiles since 2017.

Pyongyang has conducted an unprecedented blitz of nearly a dozen sanctions-busting tests this year. But long-range and nuclear tests have been paused since Kim met then-US president Donald

Trump for a bout of doomed diplomacy, which collapsed in 2019. Thursday's launch was a "breach of the suspension of intercontinental ballistic missile launches promised by Chairman Kim Jong Un," South Korea's President Moon Jae-in said in a statement.

"It poses a serious threat to the Korean peninsula, the region and the international community," he said, adding that it was a "clear violation" of UN Security Council resolutions. The United States strongly condemned the launch as a violation of Security Council regulations that "needlessly raises tensions and risks destabilizing the security situation in the region." "This action demonstrates that the DPRK continues to prioritize its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs over the well-being of its people."

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SEOUL: A woman walks past a television report showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on March 24, 2022. — AFP

Local

Speaker meets IPU Secretary-General

BALI: The Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem met on Thursday with the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Duarte Pacheco on the sidelines of the 144th session of the IPU meeting held in Bali, Indonesia. The meeting discussed a number of issues related to the union's work system and the importance of amending the union's statute, Al-Dustour News Network said in a statement.

It also discussed the latest development on the regional and international levels and emphasized the need to mobilize parliamentary efforts towards just and deserved humanitarian issues and urged a greater mediation role in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Speaker Al-Ghanem also met with the IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong, where both sides stressed the importance of enhancing inter-parliamentary coordination and exchanging views, and developing action plans that would achieve the desired goals.

The meetings were attended by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Indonesia Abdulwahab Al-Saqer and the Secretary-General of the National Assembly, Adel Al-Loughani. Speaker Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation had arrived in Bali, Indonesia, last Friday to participate in the conference which lasts until Thursday. — KUNA



BALI: The Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem met on Thursday with the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Duarte Pacheco. — KUNA



BALI: National Assembly Speaker Al-Ghanem meets with (IPU) Secretary-General Martin Chungong. — KUNA

Kuwait FM reiterates support to peaceful solution in Ukraine

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met with the ambassadors of European Union (EU) countries and different regional groups in Kuwait on Thursday, focusing on the Ukrainian crisis. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti foreign minister reaffirmed Kuwait's stance on the Ukrainian crisis, calling for compliance with the principles of international law and the UN Charter and underlining the principles of states' sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity according to their internationally recognized borders.

He also stressed the significance of backing international efforts for a ceasefire, de-escalation and a peaceful solution to the crisis in line with the principle of resolution of disputes and disagreements by peaceful means through dialogue in accordance with international law and the UN Charter.

The Foreign Minister and his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba discussed via phone Thursday the latest developments connected with the crisis in the Ukraine. During the conversation, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser reiterated the State of Kuwait's stance on the crisis.

He stressed the importance of international efforts aimed at reaching a ceasefire and de-escalation to provide grounds for a peaceful solution. On his part, Minister Kuleba lauded Kuwait's stance with the Ukrainian people especially within the humanitarian level, commending the Gulf country for supporting international efforts to lessen the humanitarian impact of this conflict.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-

Sabah met with Russian Ambassador to Kuwait Nikolay Makaro on the Ukrainian crisis on Thursday. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti foreign minister reaffirmed Kuwait's stance on the Ukrainian crisis, calling for compliance with the principles of international law and the UN Charter and underlining the principle of states' sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity according to their internationally recognized borders. He also stressed the significance of backing international efforts for a ceasefire, de-escalation and a peaceful solution to the crisis in line with the principle of resolution of disputes and disagreements by peaceful means through dialogue in accordance with international law and the UN Charter.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met Thursday with Kazakhstan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tleuberdi and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides shed light on the bilateral ties between the two friendly countries. The two sides also agreed to establish a joint committee between the Kuwaiti government and the government of Kazakhstan at the level of the two foreign ministers, which will be a comprehensive umbrella for all sectors of cooperation. Moreover, the two sides expressed their happiness with the start of direct flights between Kuwait and Kazakhstan, which will contribute significantly to advancing trade, investment and tourism between the two countries. — KUNA



Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah



KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with the ambassadors of European Union (EU) countries and different regional groups in Kuwait on Thursday, focusing on the Ukrainian crisis. — AFP



KUWAIT: Participants from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries take part in the 11th GCC sailing championship in Kuwait City on March 24, 2022. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Local



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet meeting Thursday.— KUNA

Cabinet holds extraordinary meeting

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Cabinet held an extraordinary meeting Thursday at Seif Palace headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. HH the Prime Minister welcomed the heads and representatives of the regulatory bodies, stressing the cabinet's keenness on the need to avoid violations and adhere to observations contained in the reports of the regulatory bodies on ministries, institutions and government bodies, and the need to take serious steps to implement this directive.

The Council of Ministers decided to assign the Civil Service Bureau to prepare studies and special mechanisms to develop and organize the administrative structures of government agencies. The bureau also commissioned a study for a mechanism to encourage citizens to engage more in the private sector, in coordination with the Public Authority for Manpower. The Council of Ministers praised the performance of the Financial Controllers Authority in its control over all exchange operations in government agencies.—KUNA

Amir sends condolences cable to Bahrain King

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences on Thursday to Bahrain King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa on the demise of Sheikhha Sheikhha bint Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables. Meanwhile, the Amiri Diwan mourned Thursday the demise of Bazzah Mubarak Sabah Al-Duaij, the wife of Sheikh Adel Ibrahim Homoud Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, who passed away at the age of 68. The deceased will be laid to rest today afternoon.—AFP

Health minister shares Kuwaiti experience in dealing with COVID

Al-Saeed, WHO official discuss 'health for all' initiative

CAIRO: Kuwait's Minister of Health Khaled Al-Saeed shared the Kuwaiti experience in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing the 56th regular session of the Council of Arab Health Ministers at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo, the minister noted that many Arab countries have different experiences in combating the COVID pandemic, pointing out that the pandemic revealed the need for the world to cooperate to fight diseases. He stressed, in this context, that there will be no country in the world which is immune from disease, epidemics and pandemics.

He stated that rich countries are trying to give vaccines to poor countries to help them, because if the epidemic is not eliminated in the poor and developing countries, it will be difficult for the rich and developed countries to get rid of the pandemic. Al-Saeed explained that the meeting discussed 14 items. The most important of which was the establishment of a promising Arab center for medicines and an Arab agency for Arab medicines, in addition to paying attention to the lessons learned from a pandemic.

He stressed the importance of transferring ideas in light of attempts to transfer vaccine technology to Egypt and Tunisia - expressing the aspiration that there will be something similar in Kuwait. Al-Saeed explained that the meeting discussed everything related to epidemiology and how to deal with the coming epidemics in light of the great importance of establishing institutions and organizations under the umbrella of the League of Arab States and the Council of Arab Health Ministers.

A high-level delegation led by Dr Khaled

Al-Saeed, Minister of Health, Kuwait and accompanied by senior officials of the ministry of health visited World Health Organization's (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office in Cairo, Egypt where they met with Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean and senior officials at WHO.

WHO resident representative in Kuwait Dr Assad Hafeez was also present during the deliberations to elucidate on details of collaborations. During the visit, Dr Al-Mandhari expressed his appreciation of WHO's valued collaboration with Kuwait.

"Honored to meet Dr Khaled Al-Saeed, Minister of Health, to discuss future collaboration. WHO and Kuwait have worked together on key public health projects such as the healthy cities initiative to advance translation of our vision: health for all by all."

The delegation reflected on the previous period of the pandemic reiterating the strong commitment of both parties in enhancing global efforts to end the pandemic, in that regard Dr Khaled Al-Saeed noted "Our visit to WHO EMRO today was very fruitful. We are committed to work in synergy with the Country & Regional Offices to enhance our joint work, and document successful experiences especially during COVID-19 for the benefit of member states."

The collaborative partnership between WHO and Kuwait aims to strategically target support towards enhancement of national capacities, "We look forward to the support of WHO in establishing Center of Disease Control (CDC) Kuwait, enhancing quality

research in health, and jointly tackling major issues like pandemic preparedness and impact of climate change," noted Dr Al-Saeed.

The visit ended with a joint reaffirmation to continue to work together strategically for positive impact on population health. Dr Al-Saeed shared his enthusiasm on the upcoming joint work in developing the Kuwait Country Cooperation Strategy, noting that "Kuwait Ministry of Health will work with WHO to develop the next Country Cooperation Strategy based on national vision and global targets to meet health challenges of the future."



CAIRO: Kuwait's Minister of Health Khaled Al-Saeed addresses the 56th regular session of the Council of Arab Health Ministers at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States.— KUNA



Dr Khaled Al-Saeed and his accompanying delegation at WHO's regional office in Cairo



Dr Khaled Al-Saeed touring WHO's regional office

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.netDWC discusses
role of women in
Kuwaiti society

KUWAIT: The Ambassador of the French Republic invited Sheikha Halah Bader Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the honorary chairperson of the Diplomatic Women's Committee (DWC) and Madam Narges Al-Shatti, the advisor of the Committee, at her residence for a meeting.

During the meeting, many social issues were discussed and reviewed especially with regard to the role of Kuwaiti women in social services and their pioneering role in volunteer work. The discussion also centered around what DWC offers as a voluntary work to serve the diplomatic community in Kuwait by organizing events and activities to strengthen the relationships and create bridges between the State of Kuwait and many other countries in the cultural, historical and social aspect. DWC also introduces the Kuwaiti culture and heritage to other nations, especially when Islamic world is embracing the holy month of Ramadan in the coming two weeks. The ambassador expressed her admiration for the role of the Diplomatic Women's Committee as this indicates the civilized role of the women's society in Kuwait.



KUWAIT: The boy who lost his foot after it was caught in an escalator returned to Kuwait after getting a prosthetic limb fitted abroad. Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, spokesperson of the Health ministry, received the boy on arrival.

Kuwait oil edges
83 cents higher
to \$114.57pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil edged 83 cents higher during Wednesday's trading sessions to reach \$114.57 per barrel (pb), compared with \$113.74 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent futures surged \$6.12 to reach \$121.60 pb and West Texas Intermediate jumped \$5.66 to reach \$114.93 pb.

The price for OPEC's daily basket of crude jumped by \$2.34 to \$114 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared to \$114.60 pb the day before, the cartel said. The monthly average for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' basket of crude last month was about \$70 last month, it said in a statement on Thursday. OPEC and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, agreed last month to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd), keeping their current policy of slight monthly increases in output. The OPEC+ alliance also agreed to follow up on the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic to monitor its repercussions on the market, making immediate adjustments if necessary. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles pass through a partially clouded street after a dust storm swept through Kuwait on Thursday. — Fouad Al-Shaikh

GCC chief condemns boat attacks
against Saudi Arabia in Red Sea

Arab MPs sound alarm on mounting threats to Yemen's security

RIYADH: Secretary General of the GCC Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf condemned on Thursday the heinous boat attack by the Houthis militias against Saudi Arabia carried out in the Red Sea. In a statement, Al-Hajraf lauded the efforts to intercept the attack carried out by two booby-trapped boats against marine targets in southern Saudi Arabia.

The GCC stands in solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against such vicious assaults. The Saudi-led coalition in support of the legitimate government in Yemen on Wednesday intercepted the attack, which tried to attack oil vessels near Bab Al-Mandab Strait.

Meanwhile, the Arab Parliament Thursday cau-

tioned against the perils of growing terrorist operations in Yemen, which target civilians and underline Yemen's security and stability. In a press statement, the parliament called on the international community to step up urgent efforts and moves to fight terrorist groups and put an end to their terrorist acts.

The parliament also condemned a recent attack on an army general's convoy in Yemen's southern Aden City as a blatant breach of all heavenly religions and serious defiance of international laws and norms. It, further, reiterated that it stands side by side with Yemen while fighting terrorist groups that are seeking to destabilize the region. — KUNA



Secretary General of the GCC Dr. Nayef Al-Hajraf

ABK kicks off
participation
in career fairs

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to support young talent in Kuwait and assist them in navigating their careers, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently participated in the career fairs organized by Gulf University for Science & Technology (GUST) and Kuwait Technical College (KTECH).

The career fairs took place in mid-March and were held on the respective university's campuses. Representatives from the Human Resources Division were present at the ABK booths to provide industry insights and share tips on how to succeed in the banking industry. With numerous students attending the career fair, ABK's team introduced them to the nature of working at a bank and showcased examples of how to embark on a professional career at ABK.

ABK representatives also discussed job opportunities and conducted on the spot interviews with applicants. Additionally, ABK conducted a skills development workshop which focused on

helping students create their CVs, as well as offering tips for succeeding in job interviews. As part of its Simplified Banking direction, prospective employees could scan QR codes to see available opportunities and apply directly online.

In order to attract top talent, ABK provides employees with competitive packages, a clear potential career path with fast progression, and tailored development plans. At the KTECH career fair, ABK highlighted the opportunities for fresh graduates in the bank's Information Technology academy and Retail Academy. Furthermore, ABK elaborated on ongoing internal initiatives that successfully managed diversity, nationalization, training and development, and ensuring equal opportunity for all.

ABK also highlighted the 'Diraya' campaign at its booth, with the aim of building awareness of financial and banking transactions. The 'Diraya' campaign was initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association to

highlight customers' rights and banking awareness when dealing with the Bank.

Afrah Al-Arbash, Acting General Manager for Human Resources said, "At ABK, we strongly believe in supporting Kuwait's cadres. Participating in career fairs such as GUST and KTECH provides us with a platform to interact with Kuwaiti youth and lay the foundation for engaging with the best talents in the country. We enjoy meeting with aspiring Kuwaiti youth at the career fairs and extending opportunities that significantly contribute to their career development. Nurturing and developing the skills of our workforce at the bank is a crucial element in our business strategy and is in line with Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait", therefore will continue to participate in such events as part of our ongoing efforts to champion youth and provide them with the necessary training and skills to achieve their career goals, particularly within the banking sector."

Commenting on ABK's training and development program, Afrah Al-Arbash added, "The Bank remains unwavering in its commitment to creating a workforce capable of meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow. The shift from physical classroom training to shorter virtual equivalents and online resources resulted in cumulative 50,000 hours for ABK staff."



Afrah Al-Arbash

Cultural committee's
53rd session begins

RIYADH: The 53rd session of the Gulf Cultural Committee meetings kicked off on Wednesday in Riyadh with Kuwaiti participation. In a statement to KUNA, the Director of Foreign Cultural Relations Department at the National Council of Culture, Art, and Literature (NCCAL) Mohammad Bin Redha said that the meeting discussed many Gulf cultural topics, activities and events that would enrich and enhance the cultural cooperation among GCC States.

The meeting urged participating countries to follow up the implementation of the decisions issued by the 25th meeting of the Ministers of Culture in the GCC countries. The participants discussed the final statement and the (Al-Ula) declaration, issued by the GCC Supreme Council at its 41st session, and the efforts spent by the GCC countries to confront the pandemic and its impact on the cultural sector.

Bin Redha pointed out that the meeting reviewed the cultural strategy of the Gulf States



RIYADH: Participants are pictured during the 53rd session of the Gulf Cultural Committee meetings on Wednesday in Riyadh. — KUNA

(2020-2030), and the translation and Arabization center. On Thursday, the meeting was scheduled to discuss the annual plan for joint cultural activi-

ties, events, rules, regulations, and international cooperation including book fairs in the GCC countries. — KUNA



'China's Fauci' calls for protecting 'normal life' in Omicron fight

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Parents fear for children's future in war-hit Ukrainian



MOGADISHU: Political leaders pray in front of the two bodies of the local lawmakers including Amina Mohamed Abdi after being airlifted from Beledweyne, at Aden Adde International Airport in Somalia. —AFP

Terror attacks kill over 30 in Somalia

Al-Shabaab insurgent targeting politicians

MOGADISHU: The death toll from twin attacks in central Somalia on Wednesday night has climbed above 30, the Beledweyne district police chief told AFP on Thursday, with the Al-Shabaab insurgent group saying it was targeting politicians ahead of elections. The first attack in Beledweyne district was carried out by a suicide bomber, and killed two local lawmakers including Amina Mohamed Abdi and several of her guards as she campaigned for re-election. Minutes later, a car bomb exploded outside Beledweyne's main hospital where the injured were being taken for treatment, killing dozens and leaving vehicles in charred, twisted ruins.

"The terrorists carried out the first attack using a suicide bomber and readied a car loaded with explosives in front of a hospital to cause more casualties," said Colonel Isak Ali Abdulle. "We are still trying to establish the overall number of casualties, but so far we have confirmed that more than 30 people were killed in the second blast alone," he said. "These were devastating simultaneous attacks which damaged property as well as causing mass civilian casualties."

The bombings occurred the same day as three people were killed in a separate attack near Mogadishu's airport that was also claimed by Al-Shabaab. The Al-Qaeda-linked militants frequently target civilian, military and government targets in Somalia's capital and outside. Witnesses described carnage outside the hospital in Beledweyne. "The second blast was very huge, it occurred in front of the hospital and my brother and one of our neighbors were among the dead," said Mahad Yare, a Beledweyne resident.

Al-Shabaab said it carried out the attacks to target politicians contesting ongoing elections. The British ambassador to Somalia, Katie Foster, shared her condolences on Twitter, saying: "We strongly condemn the use of violence to intimidate and disrupt the elections." The European Union's ambassador to the country, Tiina Intelmann, also offered condolences, writing on Twitter: "Violence is not a way forward for #Somalia. #EU condemns terrorism and politically motivated killings."

Earlier on Wednesday, security forces shot dead two gunmen who attempted to storm a heavily fortified

area of the Somali capital Mogadishu near the city's main airport. The airport complex houses the United Nations, aid agencies, foreign missions and contractors, and the headquarters of the African Union military mission, AMISOM. Three people were killed in that attack—a policeman, an AMISOM soldier and a civilian.

Election delays

Al-Shabaab has been seeking to overthrow the country's fragile government for over a decade. The Horn of Africa nation has seen a spate of attacks in recent weeks as it hobbles through a long-delayed election process. Somalia's key foreign backer, the United States, has already imposed travel sanctions on key political figures for undermining the electoral process.

The lower house election is now due to be completed on March 31, paving the way for lawmakers to pick a president. Somalia's international backers have warned the election delays distract from the fight against Al-Shabaab. The jihadists controlled Mogadishu until 2011 when they were pushed out by AMISOM troops, but still hold territory in the coun-



LAGOS: A container with goods on fire at Apongbon market in Nigeria. —AFP

Fire damages main Lagos bridge, dozens of shops burnt

LAGOS: A fire on Wednesday badly damaged a main bridge in Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos, razing dozens of shops and risking more traffic chaos, the emergency services and witnesses said. The blaze broke out during an extended nationwide electricity shortage, which along with a spike in global fuel prices is already hurting households and businesses in Africa's largest economy. "The blaze gutted the Eko bridge. A section of the bridge at Apongbon in Ebute Ero was affected. The bridge has been physically damaged," Ibrahim Farinloye of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) told AFP.

Eko bridge is one of three flyovers linking mainland Lagos to the upscale and business districts on the islands of the city which sits between a lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean. Many small businesses and shops operate around and under parts of the bridge. "Lots of shops have gone," Farinloye said, adding that traders selling baking materials and ingredients were mostly affected.

Farinloye said no one was hurt in the incident but due to the damage to the bridge, authorities would have to conduct integrity tests to see if the flyover can reopen. Rukayat Balogun, a market leader, said a sudden surge of electricity caused the fire. "We have not had light for six days. So when they brought the light around two am, there was a spark that caused the fire," she said, showing AFP burnt wires and cables at the scene. Oil-producer Nigeria has suffered nation-wide blackouts in the past few weeks, with homes and businesses forced to rely on fuel-powered generators to keep the lights and power on. The cost of diesel, gas and fuel have gone up, in part due to the Russia-Ukraine war which has also distorted global supplies of grains and petroleum products. Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil producer, but the country imports the bulk of its fuel for domestic use due its current lack of fully functioning refineries. —AFP

Ethiopia declares 'indefinite humanitarian truce'

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's government on Thursday declared "an indefinite humanitarian truce effective immediately", saying it hoped to help hasten delivery of emergency aid into the Tigray region, where hundreds of thousands face starvation. Since war broke out in northern Ethiopia in November 2020, thousands have died, and many more have been forced to flee their homes as the conflict has expanded from Tigray to the neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government "is committed to exert maximum effort to facilitate the free flow of emergency humanitarian aid into the Tigray region," it said in a statement. "To optimize the success of the humanitarian truce, the government calls upon the insurgents in Tigray to desist from all acts of further aggression and withdraw from areas they have occupied in neighboring regions," it said.

"The government of Ethiopia hopes that this truce will substantially improve the humanitarian situation on the ground and pave the way for the resolution of the conflict in the northern Ethiopia without further bloodshed." The conflict erupted when Abiy sent troops into Tigray to topple the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the region's former ruling party, saying the move came in response to rebel attacks on army camps.

Fighting has dragged on for over a year, triggering a humanitarian crisis, as accounts have emerged of mass rapes and massacres, with



MEKELE: In this file photo people who fled the violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region wait to receive injeras, in Mekele, the capital of Tigray region. —AFP

both sides accused of human rights violations. Tigray itself has been subject to what the UN says is a de-facto blockade. The United States has accused Abiy's government of preventing aid from reaching those in need, while the authorities in turn have blamed the rebels for the obstruction.

Nearly 40 percent of the people in Tigray, a region of six million people, face "an extreme

lack of food", the UN said in January. Meanwhile, humanitarian organizations have been forced to increasingly curtail their activities because of fuel and supply shortages. The government previously declared a "unilateral ceasefire" in Tigray in June last year, after the TPLF retook the region from federal forces. But fighting intensified in the second half of 2021 before reaching a stalemate. —AFP

Uber to integrate its network with New York yellow cabs

NEW YORK: Uber said Thursday it will collaborate with New York taxi networks, a longtime transportation rival, boosting driver supply as the city emerges from the pandemic. Under the partnership, Uber will

integrate its smartphone app with those used by the city's 14,000 iconic yellow cabs, an Uber spokesperson told AFP, confirming a report in the Wall Street Journal. The taxi apps, run by Creative Mobile Technologies and Curb Mobility, allow riders to pay with a credit card. Passengers will pay roughly the same under either system, while cab drivers will be able to decline rides if they aren't lucrative enough.

As was the case in other cities, Uber's arrival in New York in 2011 pressured its cab network, which had operated under a quasi-monopoly. City officials froze new licenses for rideshare drivers in 2018 after

surging Uber and Lyft use lifted the number to more than 120,000. The partnership comes as Uber has struggled to find enough labor after some drivers took other jobs during the pandemic. The industry has also been tested lately by spiking gasoline prices, which has prompted both Uber and rival Lyft to add fuel surcharges to fares.

Andrew Macdonald, senior vice president for mobility and business operations, said the company's ventures with taxis "look different around the world" and that the latest alliance "will benefit taxi drivers and all New Yorkers." —AFP

International

'China's Fauci' calls for protecting 'normal life' in Omicron fight

'We hope that we can minimize the impact on our lives as much as possible'

SHANGHAI: A top doctor in China's pandemic fight who came under pressure last year for questioning the country's zero-COVID policy has called again for balancing anti-virus measures with maintenance of normal life as China struggles with an Omicron surge. Shanghai infectious disease expert Zhang Wenhong—who has been called "China's Fauci" after US disease expert Anthony Fauci—also said in a blog post that the city's medical resources were becoming "strained" as cases climb, but he expects the metropolis to turn the corner soon.

Zhang's comments may indicate officials' growing tolerance for those questioning zero-COVID as patience with draconian lockdowns wears thin. "In the future pandemic fight, maintaining normal life should be placed in a position of equal importance with (virus screening)," Zhang posted on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform Thursday. "We hope that we can minimize the impact on our lives as much as possible." The post was liked, reposted or commented on more than two million times by midday Thursday. China is experiencing its worst COVID-19 outbreak since the start of the pandemic more than two years ago, with Shanghai, the country's biggest city, an epicentre.

More than 4,800 new cases were reported nationwide Thursday—a figure that while minuscule compared to other countries, has frustrated Beijing's zero-COVID strategy of keeping cases low through targeted lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions. While some northeastern

Chinese cities have imposed full lockdowns on millions of people, Shanghai has sought to minimize disruption with targeted neighborhood quarantines and mass testing of the roughly 25 million people.

But residents have expressed alarm online as cases rise, and have complained of difficulty accessing hospitals that have imposed tight restrictions to prevent the virus from spreading inside. Criticism of the government's zero-COVID policy has met political backlash in the past. Similar comments last year by Zhang, head of infectious diseases at a leading Shanghai hospital, drew attacks from nationalists who accused him of "pandering to foreign ideas".

China's doctors have had to weigh their comments carefully since the virus' emergence in Wuhan in late 2019 when a group of medical workers in the central city came under police pressure for trying to raise alarm. But the highly transmissible Omicron variant appears to be softening official attitudes. Authorities on Wednesday urged the public not to spread rumors that cause "panic", after a surge in orders for groceries and basic supplies by anxious consumers fearing continued lockdowns.

Zhang said he had made his rounds in Shanghai's viral hotspots and acknowledged that the rolling, localized lockdowns had imposed public hardship and that medical resources were "strained". The city's battle against COVID-19 was at a "stalemate" and faced "great difficulties," he



SHANGHAI: Health workers wearing protective gear prepare equipment before testing people for the COVID-19 coronavirus at a compound in Shanghai. —AFP

said. But Zhang added that screening measures were beginning to turn up fewer cases in previous-

ly untested neighborhoods, indicating that the Omicron-fueled surge could be waning. —AFP

Singapore to lift virus travel curbs in 'milestone'

SINGAPORE: Singapore will lift restrictions for all vaccinated travelers from next week, with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Thursday hailing it as a "major milestone" in the aviation hub's efforts to live with COVID-19. The city-state is the latest Asian country to ease travel restrictions in a region that has generally been more reluctant to lift barriers than Europe and North America. A gateway for many travelers arriving in the Asia-Pacific, Singapore had already started quarantine-free travel schemes with some countries in recent months.

From April 1, fully vaccinated adults and unvaccinated children will be allowed to enter the country without quarantining, as long as they take a pre-departure test, officials said. Lee said Singapore had reached a "major milestone" in its efforts to live with the virus. Easing travel curbs will "reconnect Singapore with the world," he said in a televised address. "It will give a much-needed boost to businesses, particularly the tourism sector, and it will help Singapore reclaim its position as a business and aviation hub."

Only travelers on a "restricted list" will face curbs in entering Singapore, although there are currently no countries on the list. A raft of other coronavirus measures were also eased, with people in Singapore no longer required to wear masks outside, and limits on group sizes raised to 10, up from five previously. —AFP

North Korea's banned weapons: What's new?

SEOUL: North Korea has fired a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Seoul and Tokyo said Thursday, as part of an unprecedented recent spree of weapons tests in defiance of UN sanctions. The firing made good on a threat by Pyongyang to resume long-range tests after a pause was agreed during a bout of negotiations with former US president Donald Trump that collapsed in 2019. North Korea has embarked on a string of launches this year, from cruise missiles to hypersonic, but Thursday's ICBM is Pyongyang's most powerful launch since 2017. The latest test is the fourth ICBM launch in five years despite North Korea being subject to a ban under UN Security Council sanctions. What new capacity has leader Kim Jong Un's regime developed? AFP takes a look at North Korea's long-range ballistic missile technology:

Hwasong-17

ICBMs have a minimum range of 5,500 kilometers (3,400 miles) and are primarily designed for nuclear weapons delivery. Nuclear-armed North Korea has long coveted an ICBM that can carry multiple warheads and, the US and South Korea say, has been testing the Hwasong-17, a giant ICBM, since October 2020. Last week it test-fired what analysts said was likely a Hwasong-17 but the launch ended in failure, exploding mid-air in the



SEOUL: This handout photo shows an ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile System) projectile being launched from an undisclosed location around the East Sea (Sea of Japan), during a live-fire exercise after North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile. —AFP

skies above the capital. Thursday's launch was likely an attempt to "make up for that failure", said Go Myong-hyun, senior researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

The missile was first unveiled on a 22-wheeled vehicle at a military parade two years ago and dubbed a "monster" by analysts, who said it was a new iteration of predecessor Hwasong-15, with technical improvements. The US and South Korea believe two launches in February and March this year likely involved components of the Hwasong-17.

North Korea claimed it was testing components for

a reconnaissance satellite. The Hwasong-17 is believed to have the capacity to carry multiple warheads, making it harder to intercept. North Korea has not demonstrated this capability before.

Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15

Pyongyang has also fired an ICBM called the Hwasong-14, in 2017, claiming it reached an altitude of 2,802 kilometers and flew 933 kilometers during a successful test. The launch date of July 4 coincided with US Independence Day, which Pyongyang called a gift for the "American bastards". —AFP

North Korea fires largest-ever...

Continued from Page 1

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement, referring to North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The missile was fired on Thursday afternoon from Sunan—likely the same site as a failed test last week—and had a range of 6,200 kilometers, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

Japanese authorities said it appeared to be a

"new type" of ICBM that flew for 71 minutes and landed in Japan's territorial waters. "This is such an outrageous, unforgivable act," Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in Brussels where he was due to meet with members of the Group of Seven. North Korea was threatening "the peace and safety of Japan, the region and the international community," he added. "This cannot be accepted."

The North has carried out three ICBM tests, the last in November 2017, of a Hwasong-15 - deemed powerful enough to reach the continental United States. It has long coveted an ICBM that can carry multiple warheads and, Seoul and Washington say, has been testing the Hwasong-17, a giant ICBM first unveiled in October 2020. —AFP

Luzin, an expert at the Russia-focused think-tank Riddle, said the first step would see a tactical weapon used over the sea or an uninhabited area, as an act of intimidation.

"After that, if the adversary still wants to fight, it may be used against the adversary in the direct way," he said—meaning over a city. Christopher Chivvis, who served as the top US intelligence official for Europe from 2018 to 2021, said recently that there were "only two paths" to end the war. "One, continued escalation, potentially across the nuclear threshold; the other, a bitter peace imposed on a defeated Ukraine," he wrote in The Guardian newspaper. —AFP

the cheaper prices. When AFP went to the accommodation website an hour after it opened, there was a 50-minute wait to access the list of hotels and rooms. The cheapest was a studio with two steel single beds and a shared kitchen in an alcohol-free campus at Al Wakra, a Doha suburb. The \$84 a night room at Barwa Barahat Al Janoub Cluster A includes an ensuite shower but the kitchen is shared.

Beer and strong drinks are mainly banned in Muslim Qatar. But the government plans to allow drinking in World Cup fan zones. The studios-near the Al Janoub stadium, where some matches will be played—and most of the accommodation, is virtually new. There are also luxury villas near the Al Khalifa stadium in Doha for \$920 a night. —AFP

Arabs denounce 'double standard'...

Continued from Page 1

It has been a remarkable transformation for a sports establishment long so wedded to the idea of keeping politics out at all costs.

'What about Yemen?'

"International sports associations, including FIFA, have banned any political or religious expression on the sports field," said James Dorsey, a senior fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute. "What they have done now is - they effectively have lifted that for Ukraine. There is Palestine of course, but what about Yemen? Syria? Libya?" In the past, sports governing bodies have tolerated some exceptions to the general ban on making political statements, but they have all been short-lived.

During a flare-up of fighting between Palestinians and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza last May, England's Football Association said players would not be punished for raising the Palestinian or Zionist flags. But in November, FIFA fined the Scottish Football Association 10,000 Swiss francs (about \$10,700) after Scotland fans booed Zionist anthem and raised Palestinian flags during an October match between the national sides. The head of the Palestinian Football Association, Jibril Rajoub, urged FIFA to commit to applying its standards equally.

"There are Zionist clubs registered in the (Football) Association and registered on occupied (Palestinian) territories since 1967," he said. "This contravenes the laws of the United Nations, but FIFA does nothing." Several of the Jewish settlements that Zionists have built in the West Bank since 1967 in contravention of international law have football clubs that the Palestinian FA says should be banned from competition unless they relocate inside Zionist entity.

At the Tokyo Olympics in July, Algerian judoka Fathi Norine refused to face off against a Zionist opponent out of solidarity with the Palestinians, earning him and his trainer 10-year bans. But on February 27, the International Judo Federation suspended Russian President Vladimir Putin as its honorary president and ambassador over his invasion of Ukraine.

'Cheaper lives'

In early March, Palestinian midfielder Mohamed Rashid refused to stand with his Indonesian club Persib Bandung when they raised a sign reading "Stop War" at a game. "I am against any war in any country, but people are dying every day in Palestine and in Syria and Yemen," he said in video remarks published by an Egyptian sports website.

"When war erupted in a Western country, everyone stood with it, but when people die in Palestine, we are not allowed to show solidarity and are accused of mixing politics and sports. "It makes us feel like our lives are cheaper than the lives of those in the West." Dorsey said keeping politics out of sports was always an impossible goal. "The idea that politics and sports are separate is fiction. They are Siamese twins inseparably linked at the hip.—AFP

Will Russia use nuke weapons?...

Continued from Page 1

Yes, but Ukraine and Western capitals fear that Putin finds himself cornered, sustaining major battlefield losses and economic problems at home that put his political survival in doubt.

A tactical nuclear strike would be intended to break the resistance of Ukrainian forces and force President Volodymyr Zelensky to surrender. Pavel

WCup hosts offer steel beds...

Continued from Page 1

Omar Al-Jaber, executive director of accommodation for the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the main organizing body, said the aim was to have prices for all fans.

"As for the average price, it starts from \$80 and varies according to the location and the type of housing chosen," he told a press conference. But he warned that rates would be based on "supply and demand" and those who book early would get

phorus bombs in the village of Rubzhne.

Britain's ITV network showed footage of the incendiary weapons—which cause horrific burns—dropping in a white haze overnight on the commuter town of Irpin near Kyiv. "(Russian President) Vladimir Putin has already crossed the red line into barbarism," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in Brussels.

Zelensky wants NATO to help Ukraine go on the offensive with more advanced fighter jets, missile defense systems, tanks, armored vehicles and anti-ship missiles. Ahead of the summits of NATO, the G7 and the European Union, he said: "At these three summits we will see: Who is a friend, who is a partner, and who betrayed us for money." —AFP

G7 warns against use of chemical...

Continued from Page 1

Long-range Russian strikes on the eastern city of Kharkiv killed at least six civilians and wounded more than a dozen, Ukrainian authorities said. At least four people including two children were killed in strikes elsewhere in the east. Lugansk governor Sergiy Gayday said, accusing Russian forces of using phos-

International

Parents fear for children's future in war-hit Ukraine

Regional maternity hospital badly damaged by blast

ZHYTOMYR: An air raid siren blares and tears fill Vasily Kravchuk's eyes as he surveys the wreckage of the school his six-year-old son was meant to start at next year. "It's hard, it's very hard," sobs the 37-year-old who works at the tourism organization for Zhytomyr, a garrison town west of Kyiv where no tourists now come. The city with its broad, picturesque river spanned by a suspension bridge has suffered a series of devastating Russian strikes since the start of the war. The regional maternity hospital was badly damaged by a blast on March 2, while School Number 25 was destroyed on March 4.

Zhytomyr has been spared the devastation of cities like Mariupol in the south, but it remains in Russia's sights as its troops attempt to encircle Kyiv from the west. "Every day it's 20, 30 times we go to the basement (to shelter). It's difficult because my wife is pregnant, I have a little son," says Kravchuk, wearing a bright pink hoodie and rubbing his eyes. His son had been looking forward to starting at the school, but now it is a pile of concrete, with a shelf full of schoolbooks hanging over a void where a wall used to be.

'Genocide'

Russian President Vladimir Putin says the "special military operation" launched on February 24 is aimed at the "demilitarization and denazification" of Ukraine. But Ukraine's prosecutor general has said Russia is committing genocide in Mariupol, and many in Zhytomyr believe the violence Moscow has unleashed across the country amounts to the same thing. "This is indeed genocide of the Ukrainian people," Svitlana Kovalchuk, a 50-year-old chemistry teacher at the school, says during a visit arranged by the Ukrainian government.

"Because the civilians suffer, innocent children suffer, newborn children, children from our school, children from the whole country suffer." At the Zhytomyr regional maternity centre on the other side of town, mothers cradle their newborn babies in tiny rooms in a sweltering basement where they hide from bombs. The windows of the hospital were blown in by powerful strikes that hit a nearby residential area, leaving the maternity wards unuseable.

"They (Russia) want to rip us off of our future," says



ZHYTOMYR: A child walks in front of a damaged school in the city of Zhytomyr, northern Ukraine. — AFP

Nadia Skutelnik, 29, showing off her four-day-old daughter Stephania's tiny fingers. The hospital has moved most of its equipment underground and has even set up its own operating theatre. Medical director Olena Ostryko says she "cannot understand" why "the enemy" bombed so close to the hospital. "Why the civilians, why the children, why the kindergartens, why hospitals, why? I cannot understand. But we know that the enemy's aim is the genocide of Ukrainian people," she says.

'Not giving up'

One reason may be that they are collateral damage in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Children and parents stroll in the sun and skateboarders rattle down the pavements until the air raid sirens ring, but Zhytomyr is partly an army town. The maternity hospital is near a military base, while residents said that a building near the school had been used by the army many years ago.

Mayor Sergiy Sukhomlyn said Zhytomyr was being targeted despite being 70 or 80 kilometers from the front-line because of its military history.

"Russia very well remembers our famous 95th brigade, which is at war since 2014 in Donbas", the eastern Ukrainian region held by pro-Russian separatists, Sukhomlyn told a press conference. The city was also under attack because it was on the route for aid from Europe to the worst-hit cities such as Mariupol, Kharkiv and Chernihiv, he says. "Zhytomyr is definitely not giving up," he said at the sand-bag surrounded city hall, by the entrance to a scenic shopping street with the words "Zhytomyr I love you" in fairy lights. In the basement maternity room she shares with a refugee from a town near Kyiv, new mum Nadia Skutelnik is not giving up either. "Every day that you wake up it is a good day. And as for what comes next—who knows what the future holds for us," she says.—AFP

Another US state passes abortion 'bounty hunter' law

LOS ANGELES: Another US state passed a law allowing abortion providers to be sued in civil court Wednesday, as conservatives across the country ramp up their effort to overturn long-held reproductive rights. The bill in Idaho allows families of women who have had abortions—and the father of the fetus—to sue providers, taking enforcement out of the hands of the state, in a move modeled on a controversial Texas law. Governor Brad Little, who signed the bill Wednesday, said he was an ardent supporter of the rights of "pre-born babies," but feared this approach rendered the law unconstitutional.

"While I support the pro-life policy in this legislation, I fear the novel civil enforcement mechanism in this short order be proven both unconstitutional and unwise," he wrote in a letter to the state legislature. "Deputizing private citizens to levy hefty monetary fines on the exercise of a disfavored but judicially recognized constitutional right for the purpose of evading court review undermines our constitutional form of government and weakens our collective liberties." As critics of the Texas law also pointed out, Little said framing legislation in this way rendered vulnerable rights that conservatives hold dear, such as the right to own guns.

Civil rights groups and the White House lambasted the Idaho law. "Lawmakers openly touted this bill as a 'clever' way to undermine abortion access by evading judicial review," said Lauren Bramwell of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). "It is irresponsible and politically motivated governing that will harm real people who deserve to decide for themselves what is best for them and their families, without political interference." White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the Texas bill and copycat initiatives like the one in Idaho were a blatant attempt to undermine rights settled in the touchstone Roe v. Wade Supreme Court ruling that cemented a woman's right to abortion.—AFP

With war next door, Finland, Sweden train with NATO

SETERMOEN, Norway: In a muddy car park in Norway's Far North, Finnish troops show off their military might, lining up rocket launchers, artillery and snowmobiles as they prepare to train alongside their NATO brothers-in-arms. While Finland and Sweden's partnership with the Atlantic Alliance is nothing new, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has pushed the two militarily non-aligned nations to deepen their cooperation with NATO even further.

Norway's Cold Response exercise, normally held every two years, is aimed at training NATO troops to cooperate in challenging wintry conditions. Like the previous times Norway has organized the exercise, Stockholm and Helsinki have sent large contingents: 1,600 Swedish troops and 680 Finns. "This is even more important this year because of Ukraine and the situation in our part of the world," Lieutenant Colonel Stefan Hedmark, head of the Swedish military's exercise planning, told AFP.

Double lung transplant saves US man with terminal cancer

WASHINGTON: US doctors announced Thursday they had successfully performed a double lung transplant on a patient with terminal lung cancer, giving new hope to others who also have advanced stages of the deadly disease. Albert Khoury, a 54-year-old non-smoker, underwent a seven-hour surgery to receive his new lungs at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago on September 25, 2021. Six months on, the lungs are working well and he has no signs of cancer in his body.

"Lung transplantation for lung cancer is extremely uncommon with few cases reported," Ankit Bharat, chief of thoracic surgery at Northwestern Medicine, said in a statement. "For patients with stage 4 cancer, lung transplantation is considered a complete 'no-no,' but because Albert's cancer was confined only to his chest, we were confident we could clear all the cancer during surgery and save his life." Surgeons are generally reluctant to proceed with such transplants because if there are even a few cancerous cells remaining, there is a strong chance they will regrow in a patient taking immune-suppressing medications to prevent organ rejection.

The few such procedures in the past have not been successful, but since then, advances have allowed doctors to better understand cancer's spread. In early 2020, Khoury was working as a cement finisher for the city of Chicago, when he began to experience back pain, sneezing, chills, cough and mucus. At first he assumed it was COVID, but called his doctor when he coughed up blood. "They discovered stage 1 lung cancer, but due to the COVID-19 surge, I couldn't begin treatment right away," he said in a statement. By July 2020, his cancer progressed to stage 2, and, despite several rounds of chemotherapy, kept growing to stage 3 and stage 4. He was told there was no chance of survival, but his sister told him about the pioneering lung transplants at Northwestern.

In 2020, Bharat led a team that performed the first double lung transplant on a woman in her twenties whose lungs had been decimated by COVID. Khoury came under the care of oncologist Young Chae at Northwestern who wanted first to try other cancer-fighting treatments—but his health kept declining, leaving him in an intensive care unit with pneumonia and sepsis. It was determined that he was in fact a candidate for transplant since the cancer, despite being stage 4, had not spread to other organs, and he received his new lungs after a two-week wait. The team had to remove "trillions" of cancer cells all over his lungs within a six hour time frame, all the while taking care not to spill material into his chest cavity or blood stream.—AFP



CHICAGO: In this handout image courtesy of Northwestern Medicine, Albert Khoury (right), 54, speaks about his new lungs with a nurse at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago. — AFP



WUZHOU: This screen grab from video by state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) via AFP TV shows rescue teams with a piece of the fuselage as they continue their search at the site of where a China Eastern passenger jet crashed onto a mountainside near Wuzhou City in China's southern Guangxi region. — AFP

Drones, thermal scanners scour China Eastern crash site

WUZHOU, China: Recovery teams deployed drones and thermal imaging equipment Thursday across a mountainous area where a China Eastern plane inexplicably crashed with 132 people on board. Four days after flight MU5735 ploughed into rugged terrain near Wuzhou in southern China, officials are still yet to declare all of the 123 passengers and nine crew dead. More human remains have been found, officials confirmed on Thursday, but the velocity of a crash which punched a crater into the muddy ground and scattered plane parts and passenger belongings across a wide area, has complicated recovery work.

"Most of the aircraft wreckage is concentrated in a core area within a radius of about 30 meters from the main impact point," Zhu Tao of China's aviation authority told reporters. "The depth extends down from the surface to about 20 meters." Monday's crash is almost certainly China's worst air disaster in three decades and President Xi Jinping was swift to order a full investigation into what happened. Wiping tears from her eyes, her arms supported by two men, a distraught relative arrived at the entrance point to the crash area on Thursday morning, according to an AFP reporter.

Under pouring rain, she joined scores of firefighters, paramilitary police and reporters to trudge across the rough terrain to where eviscerated chunks of jet have been found—the result of the plane's as-yet-unexplained nosedive to the ground. Hundreds of relatives of victims have arrived in the southern Chinese city, awaiting confirmation of their worst fears.

Despite the odds, searchers on Thursday were yet to rule out finding people trapped on the densely forested, mud-slicked slopes. The "mission is mainly focused on searching for victims and saving lives", Huang Shangwu, of Guangxi Fire and Rescue Force, told reporters, citing instructions "from headquarters". "We are using thermal imagers and life detectors to

search the surface... we also use manual searches and aerial drones." At the same time, teams are scouring the landscape for the remaining black box—after a damaged voice recorder was recovered on Wednesday and sent to Beijing for analysis.

Experts hope it will yield clues to the cause of the crash, which saw the Boeing plane—flying between Kunming and Guangzhou—drop tens of thousands of feet in just minutes. State broadcaster CCTV showed rescuers lifting what appeared to be a chunk of the aeroplane's wing as they expanded the search area. Pieces of engine are also among the wreckage recovered, according to state news agency Xinhua. Tracking website FlightRadar24 showed the plane rapidly dropped from an altitude of 29,100 to 7,850 feet (about 8,900 to 2,400 meters) in just over a minute. The stricken jet was equipped with two recorders: the cockpit voice recorder and the other one in the rear passenger cabin tracking flight data.

Safety probe

Aviation authorities have vowed an extensive two-week check-up of China's vast passenger fleet. China Eastern also confirmed at a Thursday press conference that it had grounded all 223 of its Boeing 737-800 aeroplanes for safety checks, as the airline launches a safety overhaul following the crash. The safety message has rippled out across sectors. A notice from the State Council and Ministry of Emergency Management on Wednesday called for industries across the board to "rectify potential safety hazards".

US officials—Boeing is an American company—were also waiting for clearance to enter China, according to the US National Transportation Safety Board. "We are working with the Department of State to address those issues with the Chinese government before any travel will be determined," it told AFP Thursday. In an apparent effort to address speculation over how a jet only relatively recently brought into service could have suddenly dropped from the sky, aviation authorities have revealed a few details on the crew.

On Wednesday they said the captain of the ill-fated jet had more than 6,700 hours of flight experience and the first co-pilot had more than 31,000 hours of flight time. There was a second co-pilot on board, with more than 550 hours of flight time and all three were in good health with no known personal problems.—AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2022

Zain hosts virtual discussion series on latest tech concepts, Metaverse

Discussion in collaboration with NEST, featuring local and world experts

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, hosted a virtual discussion series titled "A New Digital Generation" in collaboration with NEST, the national company for educational services and training and a subsidiary of the National Technology Enterprises Company (NTEC), and EON XR, a multinational virtual and augmented reality software developer. The talks featured exciting discussions on some of the latest and most disruptive tech concepts, including the Metaverse, future of digital education, and digital assets.

Zain hosted a number of local and international experts at its Zain Innovation Center (ZINC), located at the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The speakers took part in three panel discussions that centered around the Metaverse and the disruptions it is expected to have on industries and markets, and how such disruptions would change the digital future. Nearly 700 participants signed up to attend the three discussions virtually.

The first talk discussed the Metaverse, a fusion between the real and virtual worlds. It is characterized as a virtual-reality space in which people can connect through various technologies including augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and extended reality (XR) experiences such as 3D avatars, digital assets, businesses, games, virtual economy, and much more. The discussion featured Rikard Stieber, a visionary Silicon Valley tech leader who founded many tech ventures and held many leadership roles at some of the world's biggest tech companies, including HTC and Google.

The second talk discussed Non-Fungible Tokens

(NFTs), which are unique digital assets that are stored on the blockchain. Often associated with digital files such as art, music, games, and videos, these assets are used to create and build upon new forms of ownership. This new digital phenomenon has gained a lot of attention recently, raising many questions about what NFTs are, how they work, and their potential to disrupt various industries. The discussion featured William Selviz, a multidisciplinary designer who specializes in immersive media technologies such as 3D animation, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), 360 video, and more.

Zain's third talk discussed the future of digital education and the effects of COVID on learning. The pandemic forced most schools to shut down and teach classes online. Today, research is proving that students who learn through AR/VR experiences are at least three times more likely to retain and understand information than traditional methods of teaching. The talk discussed the innovative ways in which education is being delivered to the future generation of learners. The discussion featured Mikael Jacobsson, co-founder of EON Reality, a multinational virtual and augmented reality software developer, who shared his 20+ years of

experience in this industry.

Zain is one of the leading organizations that actively adopt young entrepreneurs, as it believes in the capabilities and potential of the youth, and in the ideas and innovations they have to offer.

Because Zain relies - as part of its strategy - on addressing the youth's issues by investing in the future, the company has launched the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC), a leading incubator for entrepreneurs and innovations in Kuwait. The center aims at supporting and empowering the youth and their capabilities, as well as opening new horizons for tech startups.

ZINC represents an incubator for the youth's innovations, and currently encourages exceptional minds to think in an interactive environment, offers a modern and innovative workplace, presents a proper work environment for those who have aspiring ideas and visions, as well as develops and progresses ideas into real projects that can be executed and implemented.

For Zain, ZINC represents the prominent face of the digital transformation stage. Ideas are always affected by the care they receive, and if global markets look for smart ideas, then private sector organ-



izations in Kuwait are insistently heading towards these areas as well. For this, Zain believes that launching incubators will help discover new ideas and raise new innovations.

The training programs, interactive talks, and panel discussions offered by Zain in the fields of technology, along with the various training grant programs, e-learning portals, and other initiatives, all embody this strategic direction of the company's plans to enhance its areas of innovation and sustainability.

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KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ali Al-Mousa inaugurates the tenth edition of the Kuwait Motor Show 2022 at the 360 Mall on Wednesday.

Tenth edition of Kuwait Motor Show 2022 opens

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ali Al-Mousa inaugurated the tenth edition of the Kuwait Motor Show 2022 at the 360 Mall on Wednesday in the presence of represen-

tatives from reputed international automobile companies, ambassadors of various countries and car enthusiasts in Kuwait. The show is organized by Osama Bastaki's International Group for General Trading and Contracting. The Motor Show will last until March 31, 2022.

Al-Mousa toured the booths of the exhibition and was acquainted with the latest models of cars for the year 2022 and their distinctive features and characteristics. He also listened to briefings from the officials of the brands on display and the most salient features of cars and latest trends in the world of automobile.



Al-Mousa inside the Polestar car.



Al-Mousa in discussion with the officials at the Zain pavilion.



Volvo cars on display at the 360 Mall.

Business

Moscow stock market partially reopens after month-long closure

Foreigners not allowed to sell shares to stem flight of foreign capital

MOSCOW: The Moscow Stock Exchange resumed trading of some shares Thursday, the second stage in a phased re-opening after being suspended for a month due to Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

Trading renewed for only 33 of the largest companies that make up the ruble-denominated MOEX Russia Index, which saw gains of 10 percent at opening but closed at 4.4 percent. The RTS Index, which is calculated in US dollars, was down 9.0 percent as markets closed.

The companies trading on Thursday include Russian energy giants Gazprom and Rosneft, and the country's largest banks Sberbank and VTB, which are under US sanctions. Other companies trading on the market included metals giants Normickel and Rusal, several private companies and Russia's flag-carrier airline Aeroflot. The Moscow exchange suspended trading hours after President Vladimir Putin sent thousands of troops into pro-Western Ukraine on February 24.

It started a phased re-opening on Monday with trading in federal government bonds, after the longest hiatus since the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia's central bank said Wednesday that trading would be limited to just over four hours and short selling would be banned in an effort to prevent speculative deals.

Foreigners are not allowed to sell their shares, as part of measures taken by Russia to stem the flight of foreign currency and capital. Timothy Ash, an emerging markets strategist at BlueBay Asset Management, said Russian authorities have made a "concerted effort" to stabilize the domestic market and "ease the feeling of panic which came with the market collapse" after the initial sanctions.

But he said this "deeply managed" reopening is "really only window dressing" as the sanctions are "proving really painful". While the "Russian financial markets might stabilize in the short term," few foreigners will

want to invest there, he said, since "Putin has made Russia like toxic waste". Russia has been hit by Western sanctions that have pummeled the ruble and threatened to cause the government to default on its foreign debt.

US sees 'charade'

For analyst Mikhail Ganelin of investment company Aton, the gradual re-opening of the markets is an opportunity for Russians to protect their savings and hedge them against galloping inflation. "Using the market as a long-term investment is the right thing to do," Ganelin told AFP, adding that "markets will recover sooner or later, sooner or later there will be some kind of political stabilization." "There are not many savings opportunities now. The stock market is one good tool for saving investments." To aid recovery, the Russian government has pledged the equivalent of \$10 billion to buy up shares of Russian companies and Putin said Wednesday Moscow will now only accept ruble payments from Europe for deliveries of Russian gas. "What we're seeing is a charade: a Potemkin market opening," US Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh said in a statement Thursday. He said Russia will "only allow 15 percent of listed shares to trade".

"Russia has made it clear they are going to pour government resources into artificially propping up the shares of companies that are trading," he added. In a bid to stabilize the ruble, the central bank last month more than doubled its key interest rate to 20 percent. The sanctions also sparked an exodus of foreign companies from Russia, including H&M, McDonald's and IKEA.

Officials in Moscow have sought to downplay the gravity of the Western penalties, promising that Russia will adapt. Putin has said that the country will emerge stronger from the crisis. — AFP



RENTON: In this file photo, an employee works on Boeing 737 MAX airplanes at the Boeing Renton Factory Washington State. — AFP

US durable goods ended streak of gains in February

WASHINGTON: Orders for big-ticket manufactured goods fell for the first time in five months in February amid a slump in business for civilian aircraft manufacturers, US government data said Thursday. The Commerce Department said durable goods orders fell 2.2 percent last month, more than expected and a sharp turnaround from the 1.6 percent increase seen in January. The decline was driven by a shortfall in transportation equipment, which dropped 5.6 percent, and much of that was caused by a 30.4 percent decline in nondefense aircraft and parts, such as Boeing's jets, the data said. Orders for motor vehicles and parts, whose manufacturers have struggled to obtain scarce semiconductors, fell 0.5 percent.

"One month doesn't make a trend, but surprisingly broad-based weakness across the other categories

suggests US businesses proceeded more cautiously," Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics said. However, growth was seen in orders for defense aircraft and parts, which shot up 60.1 percent, as well as computers and related products, which gained 4.4 percent.

The overall losses would have been worse at 2.7 percent without the defense sector. With the transportation sector excluded, orders fell just 0.6 percent last month. After months of high prices and scarcity, the supply of new US homes on the market increased in February, though sales fell once again amid rising lending rates, according to government data released Wednesday. Sales of new homes fell two percent last month to an annual rate of 772,000, seasonally adjusted, and January sales were revised down sharply, the Commerce Department said. The result was substantially worse than analysts expected.

The US real estate market boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to the Federal Reserve's easy money policies and the disruptions to daily life caused by the coronavirus. However, the boom started to fade as available properties grew scarce and prices surged, and now is being hit by the Fed's interest rate hikes aimed at lowering inflation that have tightened borrowing conditions. — AFP



MOSCOW: A view of the Moscow Exchange office in Moscow on March 24, 2022. — AFP



شركة الصفاء للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 24 MARCH 2022

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

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,120	1,150	1,150	1,119	31	30,573,225	30	2.68%	15.35%	1,135	1,152	24.9	2.40	2.6%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	314	323	325	312	13	21,778,490	9	2.87%	15.77%	316	324	26.0	1.51	2.1%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	238	249	247	237	10	23,271,258	9	3.80%	14.22%	240	246	NM	1.07	1.6%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	288	294	301	285	16	24,691,056	8	2.80%	17.13%	291	298	22.3	1.34	1.7%	1.04
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	994	1,026	1,027	988	39	34	34	3.43%	23.32%	1,010	1,027	40.2	4.49	1.2%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	921	955	957	921	36	5,040,703	10	1.06%	20.89%	950	971	70.5	5.51	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	362	385	395	358	37	30,235,927	30	8.45%	75.80%	377	393	12.2	1.63	2.6%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	212	199	212	197	15	79,428,134	-10	-4.78%	40.14%	195	200	45.3	2.46	1.9%	0.61
252	Al Intiaz Investment	Financial Services	136	135	137	134	3	19,588,074	0	0.00%	14.41%	134	137	NM	0.82	6.3%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	160	160	163	157	6	20,772,762	0	0.00%	-10.61%	160	166	24.7	1.16	1.7%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	907	928	928	896	32	3,643,741	23	2.54%	17.02%	910	928	20.5	2.11	1.5%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	292	285	292	268	24	11,901,882	-7	-2.40%	0.71%	284	292	5.6	1.03	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,365	1,400	1,415	1,326	89	1,351,949	74	5.58%	60.73%	1,390	1,450	49.4	1.42	3.6%	0.95
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	968	999	1,000	960	40	1,946,524	27	2.78%	17.25%	995	1,010	28.4	2.35	5.4%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	386	384	389	380	9	10,550,916	-6	-1.54%	10.66%	382	388	NM	1.04	3.9%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,029	1,084	1,092	1,025	67	19,260,896	55	5.34%	14.71%	1,075	1,090	2.4	1.17	0.8%	1.47
605	Zain	Telecommunications	626	630	633	620	13	14,420,581	3	0.48%	5.88%	626	634	14.4	2.29	3.7%	1.33
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,665	3,629	3,674	3,570	104	1,531,687	-51	-1.39%	12.56%	3,585	3,704	7.9	3.96	11.0%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	215	216	217	215	2	1,766,168	1	0.47%	-0.92%	212	217	NM	0.69	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,641	1,690	1,700	1,640	60	1,528,647	9	0.54%	31.01%	1,680	1,700	NM	16.11	1.9%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	302	313	313	291	22	201,851,669	15	5.03%	12.59%	308	314	21.5	2.42	3.8%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	282	281	285	279	6	14,206,017	-1	-0.35%	2.55%	278	286	21.4	2.78	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	589	585	592	580	12	3,328,976	-4	-0.68%	-0.68%	581	590	18.2	1.65	2.7%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	395	396	404	391	13	1,896,928	4	1.02%	2.30%	391	400	NM	1.66	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	226	226	226	224	2	4,246,730	0	0.00%	-0.88%	224	227	19.2	4.01	4.0%	0.60
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,620	2,762	2,795	2,620	175	599,576	31	1.14%	36.73%	2,680	2,787	35.4	9.82	2.4%	0.71

* As of end of week closing

Business

Al-Shall Economic Report

Kuwait banking sector: A success model

KUWAIT: In an interview, the Central Bank of Kuwait's Governor Dr Mohammed Al-Hashel reiterated his deserved commendation for the banking sector's status. This was an occasion to thank the governor and his deputy both of whom are unfortunately about to leave their posts. It is a great loss for the country. In a review of the figures, the governor recalls that the banking sector's budget reached a historic figure of KD 91 billion and net bank profits reached KD 961 million for 2021 (KD 1.02 billion in 2019), a similar level to pre-COVID-19 era.

The Central Bank's 2020 pandemic hedges reduced irregular loans from 2 percent that year to a record low of 1.4 percent in 2021 with a coverage rate by 310 percent, an indication of asset quality and abundance of allocations, some of which contributed to the write-off of some.

According to the Governor, that performance was not coupled with taking high risks, ie a higher return with higher risk according to the financial concept. But it came with continued hedging and maintaining the integrity and durability of the sector. The capital adequacy rate was 19.2 percent, i.e. well above its minimum global requirement of 10.5 percent it is too high and perhaps an indicator of the narrow domestic borrowing and investment market. Liquidity coverage standard scored 183 percent and the net stable financing scored 111 percent, both of which are above their minimum requirements of 100 percent.

To hedge for the future, the Central Bank subjected the sector to pressure tests for its own and macroeconomics for the three years 2022-2024, concluding that even with the most difficult circumstances and with the adoption of stringent scenarios, the banking sector would maintain a capital adequacy level of 12.6 percent.

In summary, it is a past in which strict proactive policies were adopted in a time of crisis; then it is present in which the sector benefited from the recovery of the tightening provisions that contributed to the write-off of its defaulting loans and supported its profitability level, then a calculated future and following the most severe pressure scenarios, and those are the elements of prudent management from a professional central bank and an understanding banking sector.

We have three remarks that we have already mentioned and it is okay to repeat. The first is that the Central Bank's next new management will receive and supervise a sector in a healthy condition despite difficult general circumstances. We believe that the

The following tables summarize last week's performance of Boursa Kuwait

Description	Week 12	Week 11	Difference %
	24/03/2022	17/03/2022	
Working days	5	5	
Al-Shall index (30 Companies)	722.7	700.8	3.1%
Boursa All Share Market Index	8,042.6	7,869.7	2.2%
Value Trade (KD)	328,809,281	339,754,877	
Daily average (KD)	65,761,856	67,950,975	-3.2%
Volume Trade (Shares)	1,197,086,539	1,197,581,484	
Daily average (Shares)	239,417,308	239,516,297	-0.04%
Transactions	59,383	57,388	
Daily average (Transactions)	11,877	11,478	3.5%

- Banking sector's budget reached a historic KD 91 billion in 2021
- Net bank profits touched KD 961 million for 2021

order to cancel the deposits' guarantee has become a priority. Second, bank credit growth is high at 8 percent and about KD 4.1 billion, which is quantitatively encouraging but in content or credit quality, about half of it is consumer loans and premiums and which grow at about twice that in a country that does not produce goods and services, which does not benefit development and is possibly harmful and dangerous. The third is the inability of any pressure scenario to predict the state of macroeconomic stability. The country's economic and financial public administration is destructive, and no one can understand how it can behave and what it adopts while what it adopted earlier and what it adopts present is contrary to the sustainability of public finance and the economy.

To summarize, we reiterate our thanks to the current management of the Central Bank of Kuwait who's a huge loss, hoping that the new administration will succeed in performing at the same level, and regret the loss of professionalism and national sense at the level of the general administration of the country, and because of this, the country may lose all its professional institutions. The public environment is repellent to competencies.

Social security grant

In principle, neither the executive authority nor the legislative authority has the right to distribute funds that they have no authority over, as it is an absolute right for the participants in those funds,

retired or those who are at the head of their work, and the insurance funds are the funds of the participants in its system and they are the general assembly of those funds. Presently, only a quarter of them are retirees and three-quarters of them are active servants who pay their contributions so that their fund balances will remain financially balanced to ensure receipt of their pensions in the future, and it is necessary to coordinate a poll with their fund manager.

Also in principle, securities' profits are not calculated at the level of one year's profits or even a few years. The return on their investments is calculated at a rate of at least 10 years and a required rate of not less than 6 percent for the 10 years. We believe that what the Social Securities has achieved over a decade does not exceed half that rate. The third matter is that Kuwait's Social Security system was designed at a time of fiscal surpluses and because more than 80 percent are public sector employees, the employer pays about 75 percent of the current contributions for retirement ages the lowest in the world. As a result of the above, the estimates of the size of the actuarial deficit have increased, i.e. the inability to achieve the financial balance that ensures the payment of pensions to those currently in their jobs or those coming to the labor market in the future. Its estimates are KD 24 billion or about 11 percent of the Future Generations Reserves, and increasing over time with wrong decisions.

KFH GO smart branches offering latest services

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House "KFH" is unique in providing the KFHGO smart branches at the market level, this contributes to meet the growing needs of customers and keeping pace with the latest modern technologies and the highest quality standards, which confirms the bank's leadership in digital transformation and adoption of innovation in offering digital banking and financial solutions. Additionally, it contributes to adding value to the experience of customers who are looking for quick and easy banking services.

KFH is keen to enhance the spread of its smart branches which are 10 branches spread across Kuwait. The Branches are Avenues, Ishbiliyah co-op, Jabriya co-op, Al-Mangaf co-op, Shuwaikh KFH Auto Showroom, Sabah Al-Ahmad, Al-Salam co-op, Abu Fatirah co-op, and Dahiya Abdullah Al-Salem and Airport branch. KFH seeks to increase the number of these smart branches to meet the needs of customers in most areas of Kuwait because of their continuous success and ease of use for the various KFH services.

KFH continues its efforts to enhance service delivery channels, whether through KFHGo, orKFHonline mobile application, social media channels, robot technologies, artificial intelligence, and many other channels alternative to traditional banking channels. The smart branches, which operate fully automatically around the clock, reflect the remarkable development witnessed by the retail banking sector, at a time when customers are increasingly turning to using technology to obtain fast and highly efficient banking services.

Renault suspends work at Moscow factory: Company

PARIS: French car giant Renault announced Wednesday it was immediately suspending operations at its Moscow factory after Kyiv called for a boycott of the company for remaining in Russia.

Renault is also considering "the possible options" for its Russian affiliate AvtoVAZ, the company said in a statement, adding that it had downgraded its 2022 financial outlook.

"Renault Group has to revise its 2022 financial outlook with a Group operating margin of around 3 percent versus at least 4 percent previously," it said. Ukraine's foreign minister on Wednesday called for a global boycott of Renault over its earlier refusal to leave the Russian market in the aftermath of the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine.

"Renault refuses to pull out of Russia," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Twitter ahead of Renault's announcement. "I call on

customers and businesses around the globe to boycott Group Renault." Renault, in its statement issued later Wednesday, said the group's "activities in its manufacturing plant in Moscow are suspended as of today".

Following the announcement, Kuleba tweeted that he welcomed Renault's "statement on cessation of industrial activities in Russia".

"Responsible move against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing barbaric aggression against Ukraine," he wrote. Partly state-owned Renault had suspended its production at its plants near Moscow last month after Russia's invasion but subsequently resumed production according to reports.

Russia's top automaker, AvtoVAZ is part of the Renault-Nissan group with the French company owning a 69 percent stake. Western carmakers have ventured into Russia to assemble cars over the past two decades as the country's economy expanded.

Renault is particularly exposed as it invested in AvtoVAZ alongside Rostec, a state-owned defence conglomerate run by a sanctioned close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. —AFP

KFH Go branches enable customers to benefit from the diversified banking services package including request commercial transactions "Murabaha", request credit and prepaid cards, update information and mobile No., activate banking cards, open deposits and accounts, instant cheque book printing, instant credit card printing without pre-request, receipt of gold biscuits (10g), open (gold, saving, winner, automated service) account, buy/ sell gold, cash withdrawals without a bank card via the mobile through the QR code or through the civil ID or phone number, and many other finance and banking services.

Digital services

KFH provides several distinguished digital services as the swift transfer of funds to KFH Turkey using RippleNet, "Digital Wallet" service via smart mobiles and watches which provide the latest smart digital payment methods in collaboration with Samsung, Fitbit, Garmin and many other e-banking services.

KFH reinforces its approach in the policy of integrating innovative solutions and banking technology operations, launching digital transformation initiatives and rearranging products and services in line with the needs and nature of the main operational sectors, with an emphasis on moving forward to become the best digital bank in the Middle East, both in terms of systems interactive software, robot technologies, and artificial intelligence that it uses or the services it provides to customers, which contributes to adding a distinct value to the experience of customers who are looking for fast and easy banking services. KFH was the first bank in Kuwait to launch the individual finance service using e-signature. The service provides electronic processing of all paperwork related to finance transactions. The service enables KFH customers to sign any document remotely "electronic" at any time and any place i.e., the finance request is fully completed auto-

As the public treasury is the main financier of the Social Security contributions and because public expenditures increase continuously due to the population increase on one hand, because of high inflation rates on the other, and because of expected low oil prices and lower production rates are falling, policymakers simply undermine the future of those currently in active service and young people who have not entered its market. That proven fiscal deficit will be reflected in the inability of pension funds to meet their future commitments. On the other hand, the wrong fiscal policies will result in a lack of sufficient investment funds to create jobs for those coming to their market and will affect providing enough to spend on their education, health and housing, and all other necessities of life for them.

State's financial administration Accounts

In its monthly follow-up report to the State's financial administration, as published on its website, the Ministry of Finance mentions that total collected revenues until the end of the 11th-month of the current fiscal year 2021/2022 reached KD 15.979 billion, or 46.2 percent higher than total estimated revenues of KD 10.929 billion for the entire current fiscal year.

In details, actual oil revenues until 28/02/2022 reached KD 14.267 billion, 56.3 percent higher than estimated oil revenues of KD 9.127 billion for the entire year and 89.3 percent out of total collected revenues. Kuwaiti oil price averaged \$76.8 per barrel for the first 11 months of the current fiscal year 2021/2022. In addition, an amount of KD 1.712 billion has been collected from non-oil revenues, a monthly average of KD 155.633 million. The budget estimate of non-oil revenues for the entire fiscal year is KD 1.802 billion which means that what has been received, if it continues at this rate will be more by KD 65.512 million than the estimated amount for the entire current fiscal year.

Weekly performance of Boursa Kuwait

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was mixed where the traded value and number of transactions decreased, while the traded volume and the general index (Al-Shall Index) increased. Al-Shall Index (value weighted) closed at 722.7 points as of last Thursday, showing a rise by 21.9 points or by 3.1 percent compared with its level last week. While it remained higher by 99.9 points or by 16.0 percent compared with the end of 2021.

matically according to terms and conditions.

Additionally, KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch the instant ATM issuance service without pre-request through more than 100 ATMs in all KFH branches (ladies and gents) and several malls. It is the largest network in the country regarding the number of available ATM machines. The self-service provided to KFH customers enables them to print ATM card instantly within 3 minutes without the need to visit the branch or speak to the bank employees through phone service or make a pre-request.

KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch smart watches and mobiles service to execute banking transactions on ATMs at KFH branches and KFH GO branches. The customer can benefit from the diversified package of banking services through ATM machines without the need to use the card. Transactions are executed through available digital portfolios: Samsung Pay, Garmin Pay, Fitbit Pay and KFH Wallet.

KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch a new unique digital service "Live FX Pricing". The service gives customers the advantage of Live FX Pricing for local and global money transfers and inter-account transfer transactions. The service is available 24/7 in global markets and provides competitive profit margins, dynamic prices, and efficiency in execution. The service is available on KFHonline through mobile or KFH website and provides a basket of currencies including US\$, Canadian Dollar, Euro, GBP, Yen and TL.

KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to launch the mobile cheque deposit service. The service enables KFH customers to deposit cheques in their accounts electronically in a fast, easy and secured manner by registering access to kfhonline application, enter the cheque amount to be deposited and take a photo of both sides of the cheque using the smart phone camera. Thereafter, the amount is deposited in the customer account according to service terms and conditions.

Germany eyes keeping coal plants open longer as backup

FRANKFURT: Germany is looking at keeping coal plants open longer in order to ensure energy security, the government said Thursday, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sparked fears over power deliveries.

Berlin said it will bring down gas usage in power generation by "possibly keeping coal-fired power plants as a security standby for longer". Decommissioning the coal plants "can be suspended until further notice", they added, noting that "ideally" they would still stick to the goal of phasing out coal usage by 2030.

Germany's coalition of Social Democrats, ecologist Greens and liberal FDP had eyed winding down coal usage in the coming years as it sought to make the country climate-neutral by 2045.

But the energy transition had

been dependent on temporarily bumping up gas imports while infrastructure for renewables was being ramped up. The Ukraine war has however drastically changed its best-laid plans. With 55 percent of Germany's gas imports stemming from Russia, reliance on Russian energy has been exposed as an Achilles' heel as Western allies scramble to penalize Vladimir Putin for his war on Ukraine.

Germany's economy minister of the Green party has even been forced to look around the world to purchase coal to bulk up the nation's energy reserves. The pressure has been increasing as calls grow louder for the West to impose a complete embargo on Russian energy imports but Germany has so far been reluctant, citing the potential impact on Europe's top economy.

Putin on Wednesday upped the ante by demanding payments for gas in rubles, something that Germany has said is a breach of contracts. With US President Joe Biden joining a series of summits in Brussels on Thursday, the subject of energy security is expected to be broached by allies. —AFP



Eurozone growth slows as war threatens recovery

FRANKFURT: Business activity in the eurozone slowed in March, according to a closely watched survey, as high prices and a gloomy outlook raised fears the Ukraine war could snuff out economic recovery. Thursday's data indicated that while Europe was still growing at a solid pace after the lows of the coronavirus pandemic, clouds loomed for the health of the economy moving forward.

The survey underscores the "immediate and material impact" of the war on the economy and "highlights the risk of the eurozone falling into decline in the second quarter", said S&P's chief business economist, Chris Williamson.

Had it not been for the easing of coronavirus measures, "business activity would have weakened far more sharply in March", Williamson added.

The purchase managers' index (PMI) from S&P (formerly IHS Markit), slipped 1.0 points to 54.5, a statement said. A figure above 50 indicates growth. Among eurozone countries, France best resisted the negative effects of the war, as its service industry boomed and consumer demand offset slumping exports.

Growth slowed more steeply in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, but manufacturing was still above the levels seen late last year, when the country's crucial export sector suffered deeply due to the pandemic. Analysts and officials warn that the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have made economic forecasting highly uncertain but most agree that predictions of major growth will have to be significantly lowered.

The continent was already suffering a period of record inflation before troops from Russia, the EU's biggest source of natural gas, moved into Ukraine on February 24. The conflict has seen Europe and the US inflict a wave of sanctions against President Vladimir Putin and his regime that will certainly have counter-effects on the European economy especially. With war raging, businesses are living in fear that economic growth could be "collapsing" in the coming months, Williamson warned. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

HOLLYWOOD GRAPPLES WITH UKRAINE AHEAD OF OSCARS

With the Oscars set for Sunday, Hollywood is weighing how or whether to address Russia's bloody assault on Ukraine, trying to thread the needle between showing support for Kyiv and being seen as too preachy. As Leonardo DiCaprio's climate crisis warning and Joaquin Phoenix's outrage over artificially inseminated cows have recently shown, A-listers are rarely shy about making political statements at the Academy Awards—despite accusations of hypocrisy.

But after Oscars host Amy Schumer raised the idea of inviting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to speak at the ceremony via video, some have wondered if less might be more, in terms of acknowledging the crisis. "It's all about the manner in which it's addressed," said Scott Feinberg, awards columnist for The Hollywood Reporter. "If it looks like it's just pandering or lecturing, that's not going to go over well. "But if it's heartfelt and meaningful, then I think it will have a different result."

One example of Hollywood stars using their platform effectively is a GoFundMe site launched by Mila Kunis—who was born in Ukraine—and her husband Ashton Kutcher. It has raised over \$35 million toward relief supplies and free short-term housing for Ukrainian refugees in neighboring countries, and drew praise from Zelensky himself. Kutcher and "Mila Kunis were among the

first to respond to our grief," wrote Zelensky, a former actor himself.

"Grateful for their support. Impressed by their determination. They inspire the world. #StandWithUkraine," he added. Sean Penn, who was in the Ukrainian capital to shoot a documentary when the Russian invasion began, has signed an agreement for his foundation to provide education and shelter for refugees in Poland.

"Ukraine is the tip of the spear for the democratic embrace of dreams. If we allow it to fight alone, our soul as America is lost," he said in a statement to AFP. "Terminator" star Arnold Schwarzenegger appealed to Russian leader Vladimir Putin to end the "senseless" war in Ukraine, in a video message that went viral.

And many less well-known filmmakers have been chronicling Ukraine's conflict since 2014, when Putin annexed Crimea and backed separatist rebels in the Donbas region. For instance, documentary "A House Made of Splinters" and drama "Klondike" both premiered at January's Sundance festival, examining the impact of the long-running conflict in eastern Ukraine on ordinary families and children.

'Tone deaf'

On Hollywood's awards season circuit, references to the Ukraine crisis have been a constant theme since the invasion



In this file photo Kristen Stewart speaks onstage during the 2022 Film Independent Spirit Awards in Santa Monica, California. — AFP photos



In this file photo actress Mila Kunis arrives at the Premiere of Universal Pictures' "Ted" sponsored in part by AXE Hair at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California.



In this file photo Megan Mullally attends the 2020 Vanity Fair Oscar Party hosted by Radhika Jones at Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills, California.

began, from expressions of solidarity with the nation's people to expletive-laden tirades against Vladimir Putin. "We stand with the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing war, both Ukrainians and other ethnicities and nationalities who are being denied safe harbor," Oscar nominee Kristen Stewart said at the Film Independent Spirit Awards. Host Megan Mullally adopted a saltier tone.

"I think we speak for everyone here when we say we are hoping for a quick and peaceful resolution—specifically, f** off and go home, Putin," she said. Schumer, who is unlikely to get away with similar

language on network TV, recently said she had pitched the idea of inviting Zelensky to "satellite in, or make a tape or something, just because there are so many eyes on the Oscars."

While the Academy has not commented, the idea appears to have been nixed, and Schumer conceded that "there is definitely pressure in one way to be like, 'This is a vacation, let people forget—we just want to have this night.'" For Feinberg, "it seems like they realize that that's tone deaf." "I mean, he's dealing with life and death matters here. And yes, he's a former actor, but it just seems that

could have really blown up in their faces," he told AFP. Organizers are "thinking hard at the show about how to address it without making their show highly political or divisive," he added.

While the Oscar producers may not end up addressing the issue at all, the night's winners are likely to do so anyway. "If I were a betting man, I'd say almost every speech will mention Ukraine and the atrocities that are going on there," said Variety film awards editor Clayton Davis. — AFP



In this file photo (From left) New Zealand's director Jane Campion, British actor Benedict Cumberbatch and US actress Kirsten Dunst arrive for the screening of the film "The Power of the Dog" presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival, at Venice Lido.



In this file photo (From left) Mexican actor Eugenio Derbez, US actress Marlee Matlin, US actor Daniel Durant, US actor Troy Kotsur and English actress Emilia Jones accept the award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture for 'CODA' onstage during the 28th Annual Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards at the Barker Hangar in Santa Monica, California.

The 10 contenders for the best picture Oscar

From a bumper 2021 in which sprawling blockbusters finally hit reopened movie theaters, and streaming platforms released more prestige flicks than ever, 10 films remain in contention for the Academy Award for best picture. Oscars voters had to choose from a diverse shortlist that includes a homoerotic Western, a Japanese meditation on grief and a sprawling sci-fi epic featuring giant sandworms. Here is a look at the movies vying for the top prize at Sunday's Oscars:



In this file photo Director Steven Spielberg arrives for the premiere of Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" at the El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles.

'Belfast'

Kenneth Branagh's semi-autobiographical "Belfast"—the shortest, most personal film on the list—has long been viewed as a serious Oscars contender. It depicts the outbreak of violence in his native Northern Ireland in the late 1960s from the perspective of a nine-year-old boy. Buddy struggles to comprehend the dark events brewing on his street, but is sure he does not want to flee the only home he has ever known. "Belfast" has won a respectable number of precursor awards, but may have lost some of its early momentum.

'CODA'

Another intimate family drama, "CODA" centers on high school teen Ruby, the only hearing member of a deaf household in a

small US fishing community. The movie, which cast deaf actors in lead roles and features copious dialogue in sign language, has been celebrated as a landmark in disability representation. But it also packs serious emotional heft, as the family struggles to support Ruby's ambition to leave for music school when it relies so heavily on her help to communicate with the outside world. "CODA" exploded into serious contention with a key win for best cast at the Screen Actors Guild last month, and could have the best chance of unseating "The Power of the Dog."

'Don't Look Up'

Satirical comedy "Don't Look Up" has the starriest cast of any nominated film this year. Oscar winners Leonardo DiCaprio, Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lawrence and Cate Blanchett are just a few of the A-listers facing extinction from a massive comet hurtling toward Earth—an allegory for the climate crisis. "Don't Look Up" is one of Netflix's most-watched movies ever, but its sledgehammer politics have split audiences and critics.

'Drive My Car'

Clocking in at a minute under three hours, Japanese drama "Drive My Car" is the longest nominated film—a subtle and slow meditation on grief and loss, adapted from Haruki Murakami's short story. "Drive My Car" was adored by cinephiles, winning dozens of critics' prizes, and the success of South Korea's "Parasite" two years ago proved subtitles are not the obstacle they once were to Oscars glory. Seemingly a shoo-in for best international film, "Drive My Car" would still be a shock winner for best picture.

'Dune'

Denis Villeneuve's sci-fi epic "Dune" earned \$400 million at the global box office—the other nine nominated movies

took \$220 million combined. Adapting the first part of Frank Herbert's seminal novel about feuding noble houses on a planet plagued by giant sandworms, the movie has also been popular with critics, and a sequel is already confirmed. But its awards success has mainly been limited to technical categories such as visual effects, sound and cinematography—meaning it could lose best picture but still end Oscars night with the most wins overall.

'King Richard'

Combining the remarkable real-life story of Venus and Serena Williams with the A-list stardust of Will Smith, "King Richard" is an uplifting crowd-pleaser with strong reviews to match. Smith delivers a subtle performance as the ambitious father of two future tennis greats, keeping the focus on the Williams' unorthodox family dynamics and eschewing many of the clichés of sports movies and biopics. The best actor Oscar appears to be Smith's to lose, but a best picture win would be an upset.

'Licorice Pizza'

Paul Thomas Anderson's writer-director behind "There Will Be Blood" and "Boogie Nights"—is a darling of Hollywood with a cult following. His latest offbeat offering returns to his native Los Angeles, where a directionless twentysomething woman and a cocky high school boy strike up an unlikely relationship. Playing out across a series of retro 1970s vignettes, "Licorice Pizza" is a dreamy, idiosyncratic and nostalgic drama, but even fans would likely admit it is not the finest film in the "PTA" canon.

'Nightmare Alley'

Macabre carnival fable "Nightmare Alley"—another entry from an established auteur filmmaker—is undeniably stylish and immersive. But Guillermo del Toro's pitch-black noir about a traveling "mind reader" who defrauds rich clients with sham

seances is unlikely to match the best picture Oscar of his previous film, "The Shape of Water."

'The Power of the Dog'

Since its glitzy world premiere at the Venice film festival in September, Jane Campion's moody Western "The Power of the Dog" has been the film to beat. Adapted from Thomas Savage's novel about toxic masculinity in 1920s Montana, it earned the most Oscar nominations with 12, and racked up the most pre-Oscar award wins from Hollywood guilds and critics' groups. Combining Campion's distinctive vision, a stellar cast led by Benedict Cumberbatch, an eerie psychological plot and gorgeous images shot in New Zealand, the film ticks many traditional best picture boxes. But its slow pace and ambiguous meaning have left some voters cold—and with best picture decided by a preferential ballot which favors universally enjoyed movies, a dark horse could still unseat "The Power of the Dog."

'West Side Story'

Steven Spielberg's decision to remake the most-awarded musical film of all time sparked debate the moment it was announced. And while its release was met with glowing reviews, "West Side Story" still has critics who wonder why it was even made. Spielberg retained the 1950s New York setting of the original tale of ill-fated lovers connected to rival gangs, but tackled representation issues head-on, including authentic Afro-Latino casting and lengthy Spanish dialogue with no subtitles. Ariana DeBose's performance as Anita is expected to win her an Oscar after numerous precursor awards, and Spielberg is so revered in Hollywood that further gongs cannot be ruled out, but the movie's odds for best picture remain long. — AFP

Vietnamese man tries to row from Thailand to India to see wife

A Vietnamese man who tried to row 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles) from Thailand to India to see his wife was in custody Thursday after being rescued off the Thai coast, a senior navy official told AFP. Ho Hoang Hung set off from the Thai holiday island of Phuket in an inflatable rubber dinghy, equipped with water and instant noodles but no navigation system, planning to cross the Bay of Bengal near the start of cyclone season.

A fishing boat found the 37-year-old on Wednesday near the Similan Islands, about 80 kilometers off the Thai mainland, and contacted the navy's maritime security unit, which came and rescued him. Ho told officials he was trying to reach his wife, who works in Mumbai, after spending two years apart because of COVID travel restrictions, Captain Pichet Songtan from the Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Centre told AFP.



Pichet said the man was found with no map, compass, GPS or change of clothes, and only a limited amount of water. He had initially flown to Bangkok but found that without a visa he could not travel on to India, and so took a bus to Phuket, where he acquired the dinghy. After setting off around March 5, Ho was apparently held up by headwinds, making limited progress in the two weeks before he was found. Thai officials said Ho will be returned to Phuket for further questioning. "We have contacted the Vietnamese embassy as well as Indian embassy but not had a reply yet," Pichet said. — AFP



In this file photo Irish actress Caitriona Balfe (left) and actor Jamie Dornan attend the premiere of Focus Features' "Belfast" at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles. — AFP photos



In this file photo American actor and producer Will Smith poses on the red carpet on arrival for a special screening of the film "King Richard" at Curzon Mayfair in central London.



In this file photo US actress Zendaya Coleman, aka Zendaya (left) and French-American actor Timothee Chalamet pose during a photocall ahead of the avant-premiere of the science-fiction movie "Dune" at the Grand Rex cinema hall in Paris.



Paubha artist Ujay Bajracharya works on his rendition of the Green Tara, a goddess of compassion revered by Buddhists and Hindus in the country, in Lalitpur on the outskirts of Kathmandu. — AFP photos

Nepal artist breathes life into sacred painting tradition

With a shaved head and an empty stomach, artist Ujay Bajracharya dips his brush to line the eyes of the deity Tara as a soothing Buddhist hymn warbles in the background. The 40-year-old is applying the final strokes to his paubha painting, a devotional art form known for its minute detail, intense colours and the strict purification rituals traditionally required of its practitioners. It took three months for Bajracharya to complete his rendition of the Green Tara, a goddess of compassion revered by Buddhists and Hindus in Nepal.

Before work began, he shaved off his hair and clipped his nails, while a Buddhist priest blessed his canvas and selected a day auspicious enough for the artist to commence his labors. Bajracharya woke up early each morning and did not eat until his day's work was

over, adopting a strict vegetarian diet that also excluded garlic, tomatoes and onion when he broke his fast.

"My body felt light and I felt more focused and motivated to paint," he told AFP. "Changing my lifestyle was a bit difficult at first but I had the support of my family and friends, so that helped me stay disciplined." Paubha remains a common painting method in Nepal but the austere religious observances once followed by its artists have fallen out of practice. Bajracharya's adoption of these rituals began last year, when he approached a museum in the capital Kathmandu about painting another Buddhist deity while adhering to the forgotten traditions.

Rajan Shakya, founder of the Museum of Nepali Art, said that they immediately agreed to the idea of reviving the practice. "It is part of what makes paubha art

unique and valuable. The more people learn about it, the more demand there will be for Nepali artists. And then we know our art will survive, our culture will survive," Shakya said. Bajracharya has committed to observing these rules for future paintings, beginning with his exacting work on the Green Tara, which he crafted for worship in a private prayer room at his home.

"I felt that we should preserve this method and the next generation should also be aware-people should know about the spiritual aspect of these paintings," he said. Paubha artworks use cotton or silk canvases, and colours were traditionally made by grinding minerals and plants into fine powder. Some works even used pure gold and silver. The oldest preserved paubha painting dates to the 13th century, but scholars believe the tradition

is much older, with earlier examples likely disappearing because of the fragile materials used. Its artists are believed to have inspired trends in thangka, a similar type of devotional painting in neighboring Tibet that has been recognized in UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.

'A form of meditation'

Priest Dipak Bajracharya—a member of Ujay's caste but of no relation to the painter—said that in earlier times paubha artists would stay "pure" to ensure the sanctity of the images they produced. "The process itself is considered a form of meditation," he said. While the traditional religious value remains, paubha paintings are now commonly seen as decorative hangings in museums or the homes of collectors.

A growing international appreciation

for the craft has proven lucrative for artists, with interested buyers in China, Japan and Western countries. "Paubha paintings have now become a business, but their aim is not commercial—they are actually objects of respect and worship," said the priest. Dipak returned to Ujay's home once the latter's hair had grown back for a final religious ceremony, culminating in a ritual to "breathe life" into the finished painting.

The ceremonial practice invites the Green Tara to reside in the work as a vessel for worship. "This is not art alone, the faith of Buddhists and Hindus is tied to it," said Ujay Bajracharya. "If we don't preserve this art form, the faith will also slowly fade away." — AFP

Art Basel promises French focus for new Paris fair

Art Basel said Thursday that its new Paris fair would have a French team and be called "Paris + by Art Basel" as it seeks to ease tensions over replacing France's own fair. The Parisian art world was shocked in January when it was announced that Art Basel, the world's biggest fair organizer, would replace the long-running FIAC (Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain) this autumn. The Swiss giant, part-owned by billionaire investor James Murdoch, already has fairs in Basel, Miami and Hong Kong under its own brand.

Its takeover reflects a recent boom in the French capital's standing as a centre for the arts thanks to the opening of major new museums, as well as dealers shifting away from Brexit-impacted London.

But local French galleries feared they would lose the guaranteed slots they had at FIAC. Apparently keen to reassure locals, Art Basel said the new fair would have French management, led by Clement Delepine, who ran the Paris Internationale contemporary art fair, alongside a former head of Christie's France and a former deputy director of FIAC.

Its selection committee will include 10 galleries-four French and four international. "I'm very confident. Many galleries who are the power behind fairs and were no longer coming to Paris, are once again interested in the city which has become a lot more dynamic," Art Basel global director Marc Spiegler told AFP. Like FIAC, Paris + by Art Basel will be held at the Grand Palais near the Champs-Élysées in October. — AFP



US actor and director Sean Penn looks on during a press conference in Krakow, Poland. — AFP

Sean Penn signs deal to help Ukraine refugees

American actor and director Sean Penn on Wednesday signed an agreement for his CORE Foundation to provide help to Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Under the deal between CORE, which he co-founded, and the municipality of Krakow, the foundation will open an office in the historic southern Polish city and provide educational activities and also convert unoccupied premises to accommodate around 50 refugees, the Polish agency PAP said in a report.

Penn was in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv in late February when the Russian invasion began, to shoot a documentary, the Ukrainian president's office said at the time. The double Oscar-winner was photographed attending a government news conference in Kyiv, and could be seen meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky in a video posted to the Ukrainian president's official Instagram account.

The 61-year-old actor with two Oscars for "Harvey Milk" and "Mystic River"—is shooting a documentary for Vice Studios, according to NBC News. Penn has previously attracted controversy as a result of his foray into politics and current affairs, especially after he and Mexican-American actress Kate del Castillo interviewed Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman while he was on the run. — AFP

Rather than paying annual or semi-annual interest to investors, the proceeds instead will go to the staff in the parks to invest in the battle against poachers, and to improve conditions for the animals. The funds will benefit the Addo Elephant National Park and the Great Fish River Nature Reserve, the World Bank said. Officials hope the bond, two years in the making, will offer a new model to leverage private funds to finance conservation efforts or other projects. The catch is they must have benchmarks that can be objectively measured.

"The Rhino bond is a groundbreaking approach to enabling private sector investment in global public goods—in this case biodiversity conservation, a key global development challenge," World Bank President David Malpass said in a statement. "The pay-for-success financial structure protects an endangered species and strengthens South Africa's conservation efforts." The five-year bond, which priced Wednesday, will be sold at 94.84 percent of face value, and will provide

Amapiano: South Africa's 'pumping' music gift from township to the globe

Manchester United's Paul Pogba, fresh from a haircut, rhythmically juts out his chin to the catchy sounds of amapiano—the South African music that has catapulted across the world. "Ameno", the song in Pogba's clip, has 10 billion views on TikTok alone, powered by dance challenges that Shaquille O'Neal, Janet Jackson and Shakira couldn't resist. Its catchy phrase "you want to bamba" in the recomposed version by Nigerian rapper Goya Menor, remixed by a Ghanaian producer based in the United States, uses sounds that first played in South African clubs. It is often heard blasting everywhere from houses, car speakers at traffic lights and at parties.

No one's sure exactly how amapiano—literally, "the pianos"—began. South Africans first heard it a decade ago, but over the last two years, it has exploded with international tours, music awards, festivals and countless playlists. "It has a unique style of beat. There is an instrument in amapiano called a log drum," said TikTok's Africa music operations manager, Yuvir Pillay, better known as Sketchy Bongo. "That's really the whole soul of amapiano music. It's a really pumping, hitting bass."

That log drum sound is what people are dancing to, he said. Amapiano star Kamo Mphela said the genre is "a whole culture movement". "I don't want to just say it's just a sound, because it gets influenced by so much other stuff that are just part of the hood lifestyle," she told AFP, wearing a furry black-and-white outfit reminiscent of Cruella de Vil.

'More local than anything'

Mphela rose to fame in 2018 as a dancer, but the 22-year-old then realized she could also make the music she wants to dance to. She's performed around Africa, and notably live at London's Boiler Room, a universal online broadcasting platform. "It's not about what you have. Amapiano is about what you're living,"



Customers dance in a nightclub during an amapiano party in Johannesburg. — AFP

said the Soweto-born entertainer. "You can be one kid in the back room creating a hit, and the next day you're a superstar." Tumelo "Force" Mabe and Tumelo "Maero" Nedondwe, known as MFR Souls, were amapiano pioneers. Their hit Amanikiniki has nearly 25 million views on YouTube.

"He was more into deep house, and I was more into soulful house, so we wanted something different," Maero told AFP at their home-studio outside Johannesburg. That's when we started mixing up the sounds to get something really unique — that's how amapiano started initially." That mix included kwaito, South African house music from the 1990s. And they replaced vocals with piano chords. "It's more local than anything," Maero said. "It's just raw because there are no rules in amapiano. We don't master amapiano songs. You just mix and balance the sound. It needs that rawness."

TikTok-made careers

They've also performed abroad and Force said he loves watching "people from outside South Africa, singing a song even though they have no idea what it means." "Nowadays there is a new song every week. TikTok and Instagram have played a huge role in amapiano—a career can be made out of TikTok," said Maero. TikTok spurs creators to engage once they notice a song is trending: this includes a slot on their curated playlists, encouragement to promote music and advice on how to earn royalties through the app.

"The more videos you have created with your song, the more royalties you earn," said TikTok's Pillay, adding that there is a direct correlation between what trends on TikTok and what makes number one on leading music streaming platforms. — AFP

'Rhino bond' charges onto markets to save S African animals

Critically endangered black rhinos in South Africa will get help from an unusual source: Wall Street, where institutional investors have expressed a willingness to buy a new type of bond being issued by the World Bank that will pay for successful efforts to save the animals. In this pilot project that will be judged on whether the population of horned animals in two parks in the country increases, the Washington-based development lender will issue a \$150 million bond March 31.



investors a guaranteed minimum return once it matures. But they also can receive a share of \$13.8 million from the Global Environment Facility if the number of rhinos increases.

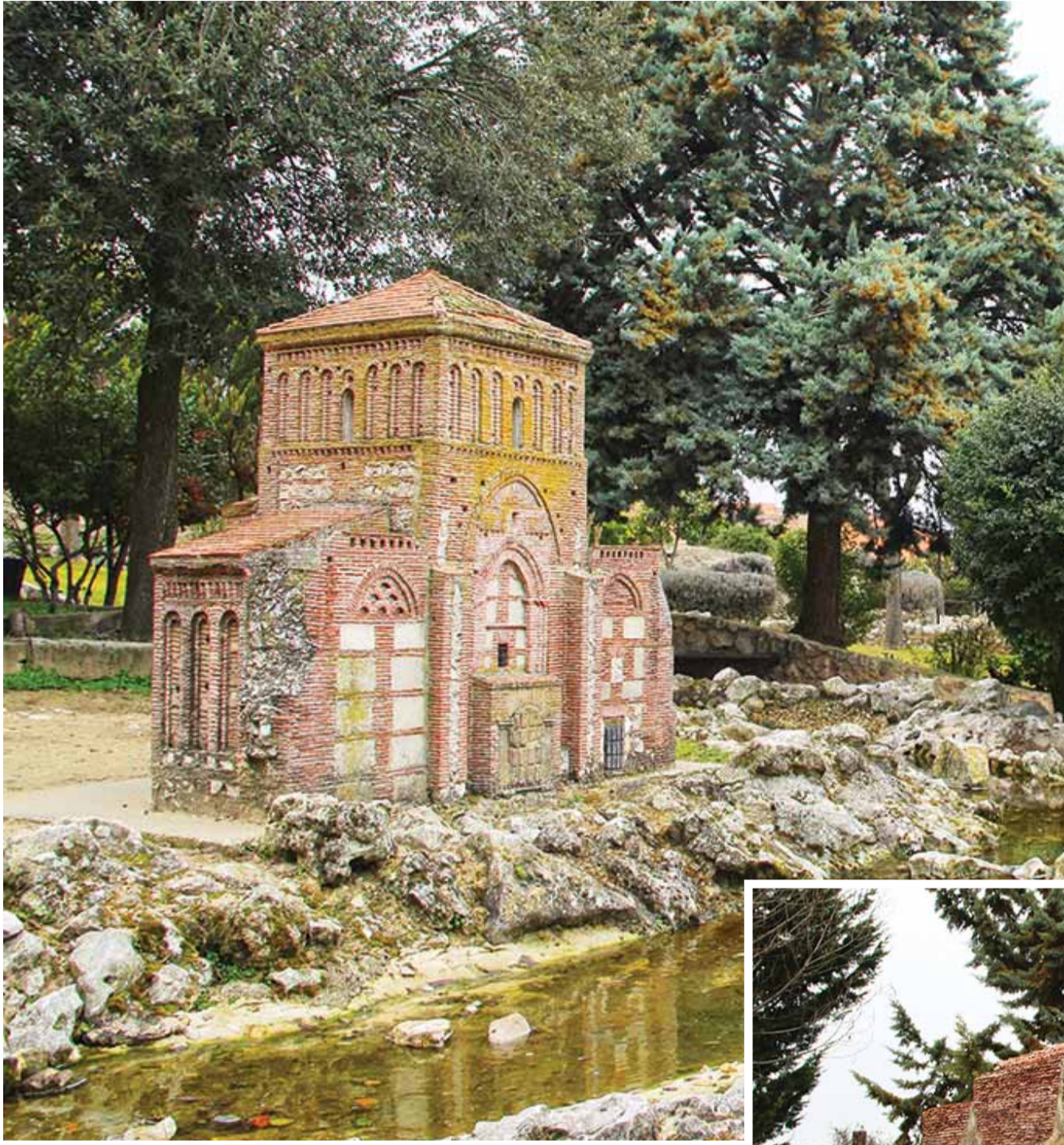
Spreading the risk

The return would be based on a sliding scale, and if growth reaches or exceeds

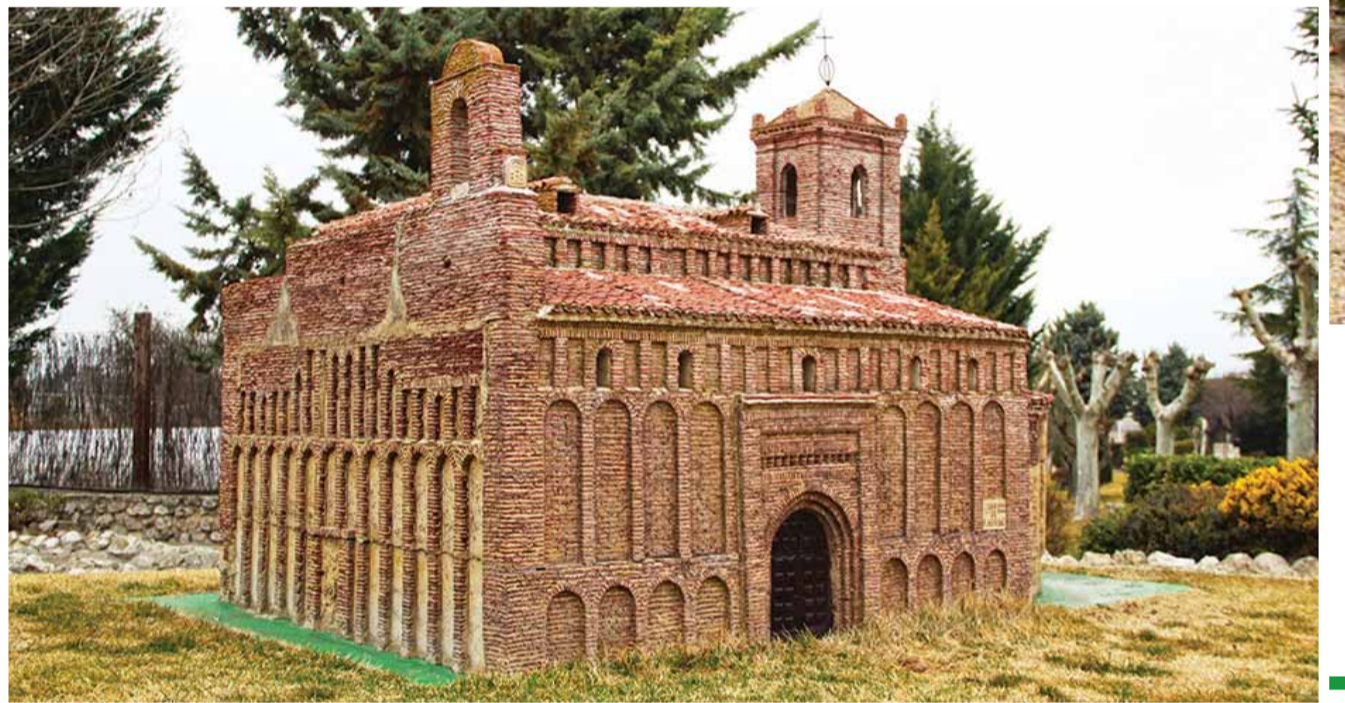
four percent, investors receive the entire "success payment." "What we're looking to do here is really change that risk allocation and say is there a way that we can pass some of that project performance... (and) risk to someone else other than governments and donors," said Michael Bennet, head of market solutions and structured finance at the bank.

The parks will receive about \$10 million total, with about half arriving in the first year. These funds, which usually go to bondholders, can be used for things like increasing drone and aircraft surveillance against poachers and creating water holes, Bennet told AFP. The rhino population growth rate will be independently calculated by Conservation Alpha and verified by the Zoological Society of London.

Black rhinos are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as critically endangered, though in the wild their population has doubled to more than 5,000 from a historic low three decades ago. The animals are slaughtered for their horns, which are smuggled into Asia, where they are mistakenly believed to have medicinal benefits. The South African government last month issued hunting permits that would allow 10 of the animals to be killed, along with 150 elephants. — AFP



Pasion Mudejar:
Spain's unique park
boasting **Islamic
architecture**



Located in Spain's northwestern Castilla y Leon area, Pasion Mudejar is a magnificently styled park that was built during the nearly-eight-century Islamic rule of Andalusia. The park, which is situated in Olmedo in Valladolid province, was opened in 1999. It abounds with 18 miniatures of both Muslim and Christian

architectures, combining a unique hybrid style. The attraction resembles a living museum where two lakes and a pond with fountains, 300 species of plants and visitors mirror an impressive and stunning scene.—KUNA

Local industries, artworks, attract visitors at Sudanese pavilion in Dubai Expo 2020



Leather artworks made by local citizens attracted visitors to the Sudanese pavilion at (Expo 2020 Dubai). Handcrafted leather goods, made from crocodiles and pythons skins were showcased at the pavilion, and popular among visitors. Other artworks were displayed

in the Sudanese pavilion including paintings and artistic drawings that reflected the Sudanese culture, and heritage, and the exquisite animal and agricultural production. — KUNA



Sports

Expanded IPL returns to India but crowds under COVID curbs

A galaxy of top names and two new franchises

NEW DELHI: The Indian Premier League returns for its biggest season on Saturday, with a galaxy of top names and two new franchises expanding the world's richest cricket competition to 10 teams for its 15th edition. But crowds in the cricket-mad nation will, initially at least, be limited to 25 percent capacity with group games restricted to four venues, one in Pune and three in Mumbai. The venues for the three playoff matches and the May 29 final are yet to be announced.

International T20 greats such as Australia's David Warner and England's Jos Buttler will be back for two months of high-octane cricket, but fellow Englishman Ben Stokes and West Indies veteran big-hitter Chris Gayle are big names who will be missing. The teams will be divided into two groups of five, based on their previous IPL records, for a 70-match regular season that promises to be the first completed entirely in India since 2019 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"This season is going to be with crowds and we

are hoping to have full capacity soon," Arun Dhumal, treasurer of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), told AFP. "The new teams bring a lot of excitement and after the player auction, in a way, all the teams are new. "There is a lot of new blood and we are hoping that it will be exciting for the players and the fans."

The 10 teams splurged \$75 million to buy 204 players in last month's auction with Mumbai Indians bringing back Ishan Kishan for a whopping \$2 million. England batter Liam Livingstone was the most expensive overseas player, costing the Punjab Kings \$1.52 million to bolster their bid for a first IPL title. The two new teams—set up at a combined cost of a staggering \$1.6 billion—are Gujarat Titans, owned by CVC Capital Partners, and Lucknow Super Giants, backed by Indian tycoon Sanjiv Goenka.

Kohli under pressure

The Rohit Sharma-led Mumbai Indians have been the most successful IPL team, winning a

record five titles in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020. Chennai Super Kings are the defending champions and will open the season against Kolkata Knight Riders, owned by Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan, at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium on Saturday.

Four-time IPL winners Chennai said Thursday that Mahendra Singh Dhoni has handed over the captaincy to Ravindra Jadeja after making the team one of the most successful since the league started in 2008. The two-month extravaganza will see 74 matches in all, with teams coached by some of cricket's greats including Australians Ricky Ponting and Tom Moody, Stephen Fleming of New Zealand and Mahela Jayawardene of Sri Lanka.

Debutants Gujarat Titans have snapped up highly rated spinner Rashid Khan of Afghanistan, but the explosive pace of England's Jofra Archer may not be on display for Mumbai Indians after he missed the Ashes in Australia with an elbow injury. Of the home superstars, Virat Kohli will be under pressure after stepping down as captain of India

and enduring, by his lofty standards, a lean spell with the bat having not scored an international century since November 2019.

Having tried and failed to win the IPL title for nine seasons as skipper of Royal Challengers Bangalore, "King Kohli" has also stepped aside with South Africa's Faf du Plessis taking charge. "(Kohli) doesn't look that confident but he also needs a bit of luck. I am sure you will enjoy the same Virat, batting very freely, very dominating," Vijay Lokapally, a veteran journalist and a Kohli biographer, told AFP.

"And it's good if we expect him to excel every time, it speaks for the respect he has in the cricket world." The tournament began in India in April last year but had to be suspended at the halfway point a month later as COVID infections surged across the country. It eventually resumed in September in the United Arab Emirates, with Chennai Super Kings beating Kolkata Knight Riders in the final on October 15 in Dubai. The pandemic also forced the IPL to be played in the United Arab Emirates in 2020. —AFP

After Barty: Young tennis players who could take top spot

SYDNEY: World number one Ashleigh Barty's sudden retirement has left a gaping hole in women's tennis, already preparing for life without ageing superstar Serena Williams and with Naomi Osaka sliding down the rankings. But there are plenty of reasons for long-term optimism. AFP Sport looks at the young generation jostling to become the next face of women's tennis:

Iga Swiatek

The increasingly confident Pole leads the pack. Aged just 20, Swiatek, whose father was an Olympic rower, is in line to become the new world number one when the updated rankings are released on Monday. She shot to prominence by winning the French Open in 2020 and has shown remarkable consistency, making the second week for a sixth consecutive Grand Slam during the Australian Open in January. After posting her first top-10 year-end finish in 2021, Swiatek made the semis at Melbourne Park, won Doha in February, then emphatically claimed the Indian Wells title last week. Born in Warsaw, she is the first player since Caroline Wozniacki in 2009 to win five or more titles before turning 21, showing a more aggressive style since recruiting Tomasz Wiktorowski as her coach.

Aryna Sabalenka

The powerful Belarusian has banked 10 singles titles with her explosive all-court ability. Still only 23, she won two crowns during the 2021 campaign and made the semi-finals at Wimbledon and the US Open to reach a career-high ranking of two. But she readily admits nerves can get the better of her and her abilities were questioned this year when she self-destructed at two season-opening tournaments in Australia, reduced to tears as her serve deserted her. Sabalenka's serving woes continued at the Australian Open and she has failed to make an impact at three tournaments since, leaving the Minsk-born right-hander needing to regroup.

Emma Raducanu

The 19-year-old Briton stunned the world of tennis as she won the US Open as a qualifier last year without dropping a set. But she has struggled to repeat those exploits. In seven tournaments since, her best run was into the quarter-finals of the Transylvania Open in October. Raducanu though has time on her side and she said in Miami this week that the early exits had not dented her confidence and she planned to stay in the game into her 30s. Ranked 13, she is on her first full season on the WTA Tour. With new coach Torben Beltz by her side she will be looking to show why tennis is so excited by her potential.

Coco Gauff

The 18-year-old American is another prodigious talent with the world at her feet. She won hearts as a 15-year-old in 2019 at Wimbledon when she arrived as a qualifier and reached the last 16, beating five-time champion Venus Williams along the way. Her exploits sparked 'Coco Mania' as she received messages of congratulations from far and wide and she went on to win her first WTA title that year. Her second title came in 2021, a year in which she also beat Barty in Rome and made her first Grand Slam quarter-final at the French Open. Currently ranked 17th, one place below her career best, Gauff models herself on the Williams sisters, pointing to their tenacity and fearlessness.

Leylah Fernandez

Fernandez's stunning exploits at the US Open last year, where she knocked out defending champion Osaka, world number two Sabalenka and fifth-ranked Elena Svitolina before losing to Raducanu in the final, earmarked her as a future star. Not since Serena Williams at Wimbledon in 2012 had a player beaten three top-five rivals in a Slam, putting her in esteemed company.

The 19-year-old Canadian couldn't repeat her exploits at the Australian Open this year, crashing to a wildcard in round one. But she took it in her stride, vowing to get straight back on the practice court and she retained her WTA Monterrey crown last month. Coached by her father, the trilingual teenager—who speaks fluent English, French and Spanish—said this week in Miami that Barty was a role model and she wanted to follow in her footsteps. —AFP

Kuwait GP attract 200 shooters

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Grand Prix ended on Friday as 200 shooters from 20 countries participated. Today, Skeet shooters will play the final rounds of 25 targets each as the top six scorers will compete for the medal rounds.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's Elie Bejjani won the Men's Singles Trap gold medal – followed by Kuwait's Ahmad Al-Daihani (second) and Khalid Al-Mudhaf (third). In the Women's Trap, Kazakhstan shooters took first and second place. Also, Raspikova won gold while Mariya Dmitriyenko won silver. Morocco's Yasmeen Almaghry grabbed the bronze medal.

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi said he was happy with Al-Daihani's and Al-Mudhaf's performance. He said a good number of promising youths participated in the tournament to gain experience. The trap competition was fierce due to the presence of outstanding shooters in the Grand Prix.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the American Embassy visited the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Shooting Complex on Wednesday and was received by Kuwait Shooting Sport Club Secretary General Obaid Al-Osaimi. The delegates toured the complex and expressed appreciation of its facilities. They also shot at targets at the shooting ranges.

Red Bull Paper Wings takes off in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Red Bull Paper Wings, the biggest paper plane competition in the world, takes off on Kuwait campuses this month. The event was created to celebrate students and their creativity. This year, 490 separate qualifiers will be spread over 62 participating countries. Red Bull Paper Wings 2022 will take place at two separate collegiate Kuwait locations on separate competition days, and combines the physical and mental skills of players, in the hopes of realizing Leonardo da Vinci's dream of flying. The event is open to all individuals over the age of 18 years. The first event was held on Wednesday, March 23, 2022, at Kuwait Technical College (KTech). Full event details can be found here.

Other qualifiers will be held throughout the coming weeks. Once at the in-person events at their campus of choice, participants will need to construct their winning paper plane on-premises, using the official Red Bull Paper Wings A4 paper. At home, practice flights should be on A4 paper with a weight of no more than 100 grams. Red Bull Paper Wings gives competitors the chance to compete in three distinct categories.



Duajit Otaibi pictured with the Men Trap winners



Obaid Al-Osaimi pose for a group photo with the American delegation.



These are: distance, airtime, and aerobatics.

The distance category is judged after two flight attempts are made, with only the best distance tallied to their final score. This category needs a strong throwing arm for the long runway built for the occasion. The airtime category will require participants to build planes that resist gravity. Paper planes that remain off the ground the longest will win here.

The aerobatics category sees the competition move entirely online. This will be the first year that aerobatics will be a completely online event. Submissions will be viewed on the social media platform TikTok. To submit, students must upload their recorded aerobatics performance to TikTok, @RedBull, and include the relevant hashtags #redbullpaperwings, and #kuwait. The aerobatics cate-



gory will be judged on the overall construction of the paper plane, but the main criteria for advancement to the World Final will be social engagement, performance creativity in the video, and flight performance.

The Kuwait winners will earn their tickets to compete at the World Finals, where all country winners will converge later this year. The Red Bull Paper Wings World Final takes place from May in Salzburg, Austria. It will be held at the famed Hangar-7 on May 13 and 14, 2022. For more information and FAQs, including the entire Red Bull Paper Wings ruleset, please note that they can be found on the Kuwait official website. To find out more about Red Bull Paper Wings and other major events of interest, follow @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook.

Kuwait's referees, women honored



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait Olympic Committee (KOC) Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad honored 10 Kuwaiti referees in addition to members of Women Sports Committee in the presence of Women Committee Chairwoman Fatima Hayat. The honoring of the female referees, coaches and sports leaders was in appreciation of their efforts in the develop-



ment of women sport in Kuwait and their contributions in various games. It is aimed at encouraging Kuwait girls and women.

The honorees included: Dr Moudhi Al-Hussainan (Volleyball); Munira Al-Hashash (Basketball); Khalida Al-Ali (Table Tennis); Shahad Behbehani (Weight Lifting); Iman Al-Kout (Taekwondo); Dr Abrar Karoon (Karate, referee and coach); FIBA recognized Basketball coach Farah Al-Ammar; Handball

continental referees Maali Al-Enezi and Dalal Al-Naseem and Tennis referee Aseel Shaheen.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser also honored members of Women Sports Committee members at KOC. They include: Sheikha Bibi Salem Al-Sabah; Rabeah Al-Hajiri; Aliya Al-Sanea and Dr Laila Al-Dhabt. Meanwhile, Fatima Hayat said one of the most important duties of the Olympic committee is not support players only but also for those in the sports field.

Sports

Salah vows revenge as Egypt, Senegal fight for WCup place

‘We meet them again and inshallah we will take revenge’

JOHANNESBURG: Egypt captain Mohamed Salah has vowed to avenge an Africa Cup of Nations final loss last month to Sadio Mane-inspired Senegal when they clash again on Friday in a 2022 World Cup play-off. Failure in the continental final was particularly bitter for prolific Liverpool scorer Salah as he was also part of the Egyptian team that lost the 2017 Cup of Nations final against Cameroon.

Liverpool teammate Mane played a pivotal role in the first Cup of Nations triumph of Senegal - atoning for a penalty miss in regular time by converting the spot-kick that won the shoot-out. Egypt host the first leg on Friday and Senegal have home advantage next Tuesday with the aggregate winners filling one of five places reserved for Africa at the 32-nation finals in Qatar. Here, AFP Sport looks ahead to the five first legs with Cameroon seeking a record-extending eighth appearance by an African nation at the World Cup and Mali hoping to reach the finals for the first time.

Egypt v Senegal

Senegal coach Aliou Cisse says the Cup of Nations triumph is history and all that matters is securing a second straight World Cup appearance. “Winning the Cup of Nations is not an end in itself because we share a common goal of playing at the World Cup again,” he told reporters. With a ‘spine’ comprising Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, Napoli centre-back Kalidou Koulibaly, PSG midfield-

er Idrissa Gueye and Mane, Senegal are well equipped to succeed. Egypt welcome back star goalkeeper Mohamed el Shenawy, who missed the Cup of Nations final through injury, but they were the second best side in the African title decider and start as underdogs. The Egyptian media reported Egypt captain Mohamed Salah telling his teammates after the penalty shoot-out defeat in Cameroon that “we meet them (Senegal) again next month and inshallah (God willing) we will take revenge”.

Ghana v Nigeria

Nigeria are favoured, but tradition suggests a close affair with each nation winning twice in previous World Cup qualifiers and four other meetings drawn. Both fared poorly at the Cup of Nations with Ghana shock first-round casualties after losing to minnows Comoros and Nigeria making a timid last-16 departure against Tunisia. Nigeria boast a stronger squad than they had in Cameroon with forwards Emmanuel Dennis, Odion Ighalo and Victor Osimhen now available, but injured midfielder Wilfred Ndidi misses out. Ghana fired Serb coach Milovan Rajevac after the Cup of Nations debacle and brought in Otto Addo with former Newcastle and Brighton boss Chris Hughton lending assistance.

Cameroon v Algeria

Hosts Cameroon fired Portuguese Toni Conceicao

after finishing third at the Cup of Nations and hired legend Rigobert Song on the orders of President Paul Biya. Song has chosen most of the team eliminated by Egypt in the semi-finals and there will be much interest in how he treats Bayern Munich forward Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting. Choupo-Moting was furious at the not making the starting line-up against the Pharaohs and teaming up with captain and leading Cup of Nations scorer Vincent Aboubakar and Karl Toko Ekambi. Algeria suffered a disastrous Cup of Nations title defence, going out after the first round, and coach Djamel Belmadi has dumped 11 of the squad he took to Cameroon in January.

DR Congo v Morocco

The Democratic Republic of Congo are alone among the 10 contenders in not having the benefit of match practice at the Cup of Nations — they came third in a qualifying group and missed out. It could be advantageous, though, as Morocco will not have recent footage of the Leopards, whose only previous World Cup appearance was in 1974 when the country was called Zaire. However, it is no secret that Dieumerci Mbokani is the man Morocco must shackle after the 36-year-old scored four goals in qualifiers having been recalled after several years in the wilderness. Cup of Nations quarter-finalists Morocco boast a star full-back in Ashraf Hakimi, but Chelsea winger Hakim Ziyech will be absent due to a fall-out with



Egypt captain Mohamed Salah

coach Vahid Halilhodzic.

Mali v Tunisia

Mali and Tunisia met at the Cup of Nations in Cameroon and a tale of two penalties ended with the Eagles from west Africa winning 1-0 after Ibrahima Kone scored and Wahbi Khazri missed. More close encounters are likely with Mali hoping to create history, and deny Tunisia a sixth World Cup appearance. A boost for Mali is the belated decision of France-born Everton midfielder Abdoulaye Doucoure to represent the country of his parents, Tunisia, who fell to Burkina Faso in the Cup of Nations quarter-finals, have recalled forward Taha Yassine Khenissi after he completed a six-month doping ban. —AFP

Juventus stun Lyon in Women’s Champions League, Arsenal draw

PARIS: Substitute Agnese Bonfantini fired Juventus to a 2-1 comeback victory over Lyon in the first leg of their Women’s Champions League quarter-final on Wednesday while Arsenal needed a last-gasp goal to secure a 1-1 home draw with Wolfsburg. Seven-time champions Lyon took an early lead in Turin through Brazilian forward Catarina Macario and were huge favorites as they dominated early proceedings. But the French powerhouses were reduced to 10 players just after the hour when Ellie Carpenter was sent off.

Launched just five years ago, the Italians had never been at this stage of the Champions League but had a lively crowd in the Juventus stadium willing them on. A storming finish ensued with a leveler when Cristiana Girelli pounced on a loose ball on 71 minutes before a brilliant shot from substitute Bonfantini on 81 minutes won the night. “Lyon are the best team in the world, both individually and collectively,” said Juve coach Joe Montemurro.

“The sending off gave us an advantage but I saw signs before that we were starting to exploit the space better.” At the Emirates in London, Tabea Wassmuth gave Wolfsburg the lead over Arsenal in the 19th minute, heading home a cross from the right from Maria-Joelle Wedemeyer. It was Wassmuth’s ninth goal in the competition and kept her on top of the goal-scoring charts. Two-time champions Wolfsburg also hit the woodwork twice.

However, Arsenal grabbed a deserved equalizer in the 89th minute against the Bundesliga leaders courtesy of Lotte Wubben-Moy who scored from inside the box after a free-kick from American star Tobin Heath. “It was a very good finish, a very special moment for her to come to this stadium and score a very important goal like this,” said Arsenal coach Jonas Eidevall on Wubben-Moy, a club youth product. “You work with a player every day and she gets to live a moment like this - it’s a



TURIN: Juventus’ French goalkeeper Pauline Peyraud-Magnin (left) and Lyon’s French defender Wendie Renard go for the ball during the UEFA Women’s Champions League quarter-finals, 1st leg football match between Juventus and Lyon (Olympique Lyonnais) on March 23, 2022. —AFP

special moment. In football, sometimes there are bad times and sometimes there are good times like that.”

Wassmuth, voted player of the match, admitted her team should have finished the tie as a contest. “We are disappointed as we had chances to make it 2-0. But there is the second leg to play back home

and we’ll be ready for it,” she said. On Tuesday, Barcelona came from behind to beat Real Madrid 3-1 away with a double from Alexia Putellas. Paris Saint-Germain striker Marie-Antoinette Katoto also scored twice as they won 2-1 away to Bayern Munich. The second legs take place on March 30 and 31. —AFP

Gambia edge Chad in 2023 qualifier

JOHANNESBURG: Gambia, the outsiders who took Africa by storm this year when reaching the Cup of Nations quarter-finals, edged Chad 1-0 on Wednesday in their first step toward reaching the 2023 finals. The Scorpions left it late in Yaounde with United Arab Emirates-based forward Steve Trawally scoring in the 89th minute to win the preliminary round first leg.

Gambia, a small west African country surrounded by Senegal, made a spectacular Cup of Nations debut two months ago, beating Mauritania, Tunisia and Guinea before losing a last-eight clash with hosts Cameroon. Before tackling Chad, Belgium-born Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet warned his players to avoid become “one-tournament wonders”.

“We want to qualify for the 2023 and 2025 Africa Cup of Nations and the 2026 World Cup,” said the coach who has guided national teams in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. He cited the example of Madagascar, newcomers who stunned Nigeria when reaching the 2019 Cup of Nations quarter-finals in Egypt only to miss out on the latest edition. Chad hosted Gambia in the Cameroon capital because the landlocked central African does not have a stadium that meets international standards.

Gambia are also affected by a Confederation of African Football (CAF) clampdown on venues with sub-standard pitches, dressing rooms or facilities and will stage the return match on Tuesday in Morocco. Mauritius are the only nation among the 10 in the preliminary round who have been permitted to play at home. The Indian Ocean country face another island nation, Sao Tome e Principe, on Thursday and will stage both legs in Saint-Pierre as their opponents have conceded home advantage. South Sudan scored four second-half goals to

defeat Djibouti 4-2 in ancient Egyptian Mediterranean city Alexandria.

Tito Okello gave the Sudanese a 54th-minute lead by converting a penalty having been fouled and after Djibouti leveled, Rashid Toha, Okello and William Gama netted for the winners. Djibouti completed the scoring in added time, but face a massive task in Uganda on Sunday if they hope to survive an early exit. Eswatini all but sealed a place in the 48-nation group stage, which kicks off during June, by punishing sloppy Somalia defending to triumph 3-0 in Dar es Salaam.

Bonginkosi Dlamini reacted quickest to a low cross for the only first-half goal and Fanelo Mamba chipped the ball over the onrushing goalkeeper to double the lead midway through the second half. Sandile Gamedze completed the rout three minutes from time, firing a low shot into the corner of the net in the Tanzanian commercial capital. Seychelles goalkeeper Alvin Michel saved a Lehlohonolo Fothoane penalty in a 0-0 draw against Lesotho in Saint-Pierre. —AFP

Chelsea allowed to sell tickets under new licence

LONDON: Chelsea fans will be able to attend Champions League and FA Cup matches for the rest of the season under the terms of a new licence granted to the club by the UK government. The European champions have been hit by a series of restrictions since owner Roman Abramovich was sanctioned by the British government over his alleged links to Russian president Vladimir Putin. Among those had been a ban on tickets not purchased prior to the sanctions being imposed on March 10.

Chelsea host Real Madrid for the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final on April 6 and face Crystal Palace in the FA Cup semi-finals on the weekend of April 16/17 at Wembley. The new licence allows tickets for those matches and any further Champions League, FA Cup or Women’s Super League matches to be sold with the proceeds going to the relevant competition organizer. Chelsea fans will also be able to buy tickets for away matches in the Premier League and to away fans for home league matches.

However, they are still not permitted to sell new tickets to home fans for league matches. “The Government has today made alterations to the licence to Chelsea Football club so that fans will be able to access tickets to away matches, cup games and women’s fixtures,” said British Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston. “Since Roman Abramovich was added to the UK’s sanctions list for his links to Vladimir Putin we have worked extensively to ensure the club can continue to play football while ensuring the sanctions regime continues to be enforced.”

Chelsea’s parent company Fordstam Limited has also been allowed to inject up to £30 million (\$39 million) into the club to allow it to meet its financial demands until the end of the season. Last season Chelsea had a £28 million a month wage bill and the club’s technical and performance advisor Petr Cech warned they may not have made it to the end of the season without an easing of the licence granted.

Abramovich’s investment fuelled an unprecedented era of success for the Blues as they won 19 trophies in the past 19 years, including five Premier League titles and two Champions Leagues. The Russian billionaire put the club up for sale prior to being sanctioned, but the process to find a new owner has continued with the deadline for final bids to be lodged with American merchant bank Raine passing on March 18. —AFP

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.

I, Karthika Akula, holder of Indian Passport No. N4816273 & Civil id No. 292071009229 has changed my name from Karthika Akula to (Given Name)Karthika (Surname); Muthyala hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Muthyala Karthika. (C 1434)

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MIAMI: Andrew Wiggins #22 of the Golden State Warriors shoots the ball during the game against the Miami Heat on March 23, 2022 at FTX Arena in Miami, Florida. —AFP

Warriors halt their losing streak

Poole too hot for Heat as Warriors bounce back

MIAMI: Jordan Poole scored 30 points as the short-handed Golden State Warriors halted their losing streak in emphatic fashion with a 118-104 defeat of the Eastern Conference-leading Miami Heat on Wednesday. The Warriors, missing injured star point guard Stephen Curry, had stumbled to three straight losses heading into Wednesday's road game in Florida, with a 94-90 reversal to Orlando on Tuesday the latest setback. Warriors coach Steve Kerr responded by opting to rest Draymond Green and Klay Thompson, and the gamble paid off as an unfamiliar-looking lineup delivered in style at Miami's FTX Arena.

Poole had nine assists alongside his 30-point performance, while Andrew Wiggins, Jonathan Kuminga and Damion Lee each finished with 22 points. After pulling ahead by 19 points in the third quarter, the Warriors looked to be wobbling after Miami clawed their way back into the contest to lead early in the fourth period. But Poole, Wiggins and Kuminga

combined for 23 points in a 37-point fourth quarter to see the Warriors home.

Golden State improved to 48-25 for third place in the Western Conference while Miami fell to 47-25 at the top of the East, just 1.5 games ahead of the Milwaukee Bucks. "Just our overall competitive fire and execution was better," Kerr said. "I thought our guys earned it. When you defend that well, the game gets a lot easier offensively." Kerr acknowledged the win was in sharp contrast to his team's struggles against lowly Orlando 24 hours earlier.

Roller coaster

"Sometimes the NBA doesn't make any sense," he said. "One thing I've learned is that these are the greatest players on earth." There's 30 teams—the bad teams have great players and the good teams have great players. Everybody's human. "You go through ups and downs and it's a full 82-game season. That's why it's important to just keep pushing ahead and

not succumb to the noise and the roller-coaster nature of it all."

The top of the East is becoming increasingly congested, with the red-hot Boston Celtics also closing in on the lead. The Celtics maintained their recent hot streak with a ruthless 125-97 pounding of the Utah Jazz in Boston. Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown both finished with 26 points as the Celtics extended their winning streak to five straight games.

The bruising defeat was a reality-check for Utah, who were dominated throughout after Boston roared to a 15-point lead at the end of the first quarter and piled on the pressure. Donovan Mitchell led Utah with 37 points. The Celtics are also within striking distance of first place in the Eastern Conference, improving to 46-28. A thrilling duel in Memphis saw a Grizzlies lineup missing star Ja Morant clinch a 132-120 victory over the Brooklyn Nets.

Kyrie Irving delivered another dazzling performance for Brooklyn with 43 points while Kevin Durant

added 35 points, but the Nets were confounded by a resilient Memphis team. Desmond Bane and De'Anthony Melton led the Grizzlies scoring with 23 points each while Dillon Brooks had 21. Four other Memphis players finished in double figures. Memphis had swept into a 76-62 halftime lead but were blitzed by a 42-point Brooklyn third quarter, with Durant and Irving contributing 25 points between them to give the Nets a slender lead.

But Memphis roared back to outscore the Nets 29-16 in the fourth to clinch victory. "This is the most together team that I've ever been a part of," Bane said. "We weathered the storm, stayed with it and got the win." In Los Angeles, Joel Embiid scored 30 points as the Philadelphia 76ers opened a three-game road trip with a 126-121 win over the Lakers. The Lakers were without LeBron James due to a sore knee. Embiid was backed with 24 points from James Harden and Tyrese Maxey, who finished with 21 points. Tobias Harris added 20 points. —AFP

Frustrated Verstappen bullish about recovery

JEDDAH: World champion Max Verstappen hopes to put his season-opening disappointment behind him and show the true potential of his new Red Bull car at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. Just days after an enforced retirement, while running second behind Charles Leclerc of Ferrari in the Bahrain Grand Prix, the 24-year-old Dutchman said he wants to return stronger and faster at the high-speed Jeddah Street Circuit.

"Last weekend was a tough one for all of us to take," said Verstappen, who gave vent to his frustrations during the race in a radio exchange with his team before fuel supply problems halted him with four laps remaining.

"It was disappointing. You always say to yourself, and to the team as well, that we have to score points. It doesn't matter if it is first or second in the first race weekend. "You could see that. In turn one, I didn't risk too much in the fight with Charles. It was all clean and I was like 'I'm happy with second here', but to lose so many points was very disappointing. "You know in a championship where sometimes it can be very tight, at the end, these are very important points."

Leclerc won ahead of Ferrari team-mate Carlos Sainz in a resounding one-two for the Italian team with Lewis Hamilton taking third place for Mercedes as Verstappen was followed into retirement by Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez. It was Ferrari's first win since 2019 and installed them as leaders of the embryonic championship. "The Jeddah track is still very new for us. Last year, the humidity was challenging," said Verstappen.

"It's a really quick track with high-speed straights and this year's cars are slightly heavier so it's going to be interesting to see how they perform." Last season's inaugural Saudi event, in December, was the penultimate race of the championship and delivered high drama with two red flag stoppages and fiery competition between Verstappen and Hamilton before the Briton won to set up a furious and controversial



SAKHIR: Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc (foreground) and Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (background) compete during the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in the city of Sakhir. —AFP

finale in Abu Dhabi.

Red Bull team chief Christian Horner said he hoped his team can avoid more reliability issues, but conceded Ferrari showed in Bahrain they were fast. "We may have made some strategic miscalculations, but Ferrari had the pace," Horner said. "It was encouraging for us that we took the fight to them. Max was obviously very disappointed, but he's pragmatic too and it's a long year. He knows we've got a good car. We've just got to get on top of understanding this issue."

'A lot of everything'

Mercedes admitted they have work to do, even though they were third and fourth in Bahrain. Trackside engineering boss Andrew Shovlin told the F1 Nation podcast that their new car was beset by many problems but hoped to upgrade for Jeddah. "There is a lot of everything," said Shovlin. "There's bouncing. The balance is poor. There is a lack of low-speed grip. We're struggling on traction. The drivability could be better. The tyre warm-up is not good enough ... and the car is a bit on the heavy side." The opening race delivered a shake-up to the hierarchy and plenty of wheel-to-wheel racing. The outfits that stepped up included Ferrari's customer team Alfa Romeo where China's first F1 driver Zhou Guanyu made a point-scoring debut. —AFP

Japan beat Australia to reach World Cup, Saudis also qualify

SYDNEY: Substitute Kaoru Mitoma scored twice in the dying minutes as Japan beat Australia 2-0 on Thursday to book their place at a seventh straight World Cup and in doing so also helped Saudi Arabia qualify. It was a crushing blow for an under-strength Socceroos who now face a perilous play-off to keep alive their hopes of making Qatar. The game in a wet Sydney looked destined for a draw before Mitoma converted from close range on 89 minutes, and then again after a mazy run in injury time to spark joyous celebrations from the visitors. Victory pushed Japan to the top of Asian Group B qualifying on 21 points, six clear of Australia with only one more game to play.

The Saudis, on 19 points, face China in Sharjah later Thursday but are assured of their place in Qatar courtesy of Japan's win. Australia now cannot finish higher than third, forcing a play-off against

the third-placed team in Asian Group A. The winner will then meet a team from South America for the right to play in Qatar later this year. Japan started their qualifying campaign with two losses from their first three games, but have now won six in a row.

They headed into the high-stakes clash in front of nearly 42,000 fans at Stadium Australia with a clear edge. Australia's last win over them was in 2009 and Hajime Moriyasu's men claimed a crucial 2-1 victory when the two teams met in October. Australia were also missing a string of players due to coronavirus impacts or injury, including influential duo Aaron Mooy and Tom Rogic. But in a boost, coach Graham Arnold returned to the sidelines after seven days in self-isolation after testing positive for coronavirus last week.

He was left frustrated as an energetic Japan started strongly with Liverpool star Takumi Minamino testing Socceroos keeper Mat Ryan inside the first minute. Conditions were difficult in the rain and it took Australia 11 minutes to work their first shot, with a new-look midfield struggling to click and create chances. While Japan controlled the tempo, Australia got the ball in the net on 25 minutes, ricocheting off Minamino from a Martin Boyle corner, but it was ruled out for an infringement. —AFP



SYDNEY: Japan's Kaoru Mitoma (right) celebrates after scoring during the Qatar World Cup 2022 Asian zone Group B qualification football match between Australia and Japan at Stadium Australia on March 24, 2022. —AFP