

5 Thousands flee homes after Philippine volcano erupts



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Saudi foils oil tanker attack after Houthis disrupt F1

Riyadh vows max security for race • Yemen rebels propose truce, peace talks

News in brief



AQABA: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, Jordan's King Abdullah II, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi meet. — AFP

Jordan king hosts Arab leaders

AMMAN: Jordan's King Abdullah II hosted Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi in the Red Sea port city of Aqaba on Friday for "consultative" talks. Others in attendance included Saudi Minister of State Prince Turki bin Mohammad. — AFP

Iran objects to Durra gas deal

TEHRAN: Iran on Saturday branded "illegal" a deal reached between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to develop the Durra gas field in the Gulf, insisting on its right to also exploit it. Iran's foreign ministry said the deal was "contrary to current procedures and previously held negotiations". Iran and Kuwait have held unsuccessful talks for many years over their disputed maritime border area. — AFP

Five Palestinian children killed

RAMALLAH: Five children were killed in a house fire in a town near the West Bank city of Hebron early Saturday. Mayor of Taffuh Mahmoud Erzekat said that the five, aged between five and 14, had died after the fire broke out in their home. Another 15 people were injured, including the children's parents, whose condition was critical. — AFP

Iraq fails to elect new president

BAGHDAD: Iraqi lawmakers failed again on Saturday to elect a new president due to the lack of a quorum in parliament, keeping the country mired in political paralysis. Parliament had issued a final list of 40 candidates for the post, a largely ceremonial role that by convention is reserved for a member of Iraq's Kurdish minority. — AFP

'The Rock' makes Dubai debut

DUBAI: A giant diamond nicknamed "The Rock" went on display for the first time in Dubai on Friday ahead of an auction where it is expected to fetch over \$30 million. The 228.31-carat pear-shaped gem, which was mined and polished in South Africa more than 20 years ago, is the largest white diamond ever to come to auction, said Christie's. — AFP



JEDDAH: Saudi forces destroyed explosives-laden boats and launched air strikes in Yemen on Saturday after Houthi rebel drones and missiles hit targets around the country, setting off an inferno at an oil plant within sight of Jeddah's Formula One race.

Three people were killed in the operation against the booby-trapped boats, according to the Saudi-led coalition, which also carried out air raids on the Yemeni cities of Sanaa and Hodeida overnight. It marked a violent seventh anniversary of the coalition's military intervention in Saudi Arabia's impoverished neighbor Yemen, after the Iran-backed Houthis had seized the capital Sanaa in 2014.

Thousands of people marched in Sanaa on Saturday to denounce a conflict that has killed hundreds of thou-

sands directly or indirectly, according to the UN, and left millions on the brink of famine. However, there were signs of diplomacy as a senior Saudi official told AFP the rebels had offered a ceasefire and peace talks in exchange for opening up Sanaa's airport and the lifeline port of Hodeida. "The Houthis put forward an initiative through mediators that includes a truce, opening the airport (Sanaa) and the port (Hodeida) and Yemeni-Yemeni discussions," said the official, on condition of anonymity.

Houthi political leader Mahdi Al-Mashat announced the "suspension of missile and drone strikes and all military actions for a period of three days". "And we are ready to turn this declaration into a final and permanent commitment," he added, dangling the prospect of

Continued on Page 6



JEDDAH: Smoke and flames rise from a Saudi Aramco oil facility in this Red Sea coastal city on March 25, 2022, following an attack by Houthi rebels. — AFP

Kuwait main donor for building 'Desert Storm' memorial

WASHINGTON: Kuwait's Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah announced Saturday that Kuwait will be the lead financial donor for the construction of the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial in the heart of the US capital. "As we commemorate the 31st anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait, we are here today to celebrate the launch of the long-awaited and very special project for all of us, the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial," Sheikh Salem said at the launch of the project.

"Kuwait is very proud to be the major donor to the construction of this memorial," he added. "Our contribution stems from our strong desire to recognize and honor the men and women who stood firmly and justly on the right side of history and paid the ultimate price to free Kuwait from the aggression of Saddam Hussein," the Kuwaiti ambassador said. He affirmed that "these men and women from Kuwait, the US and other coalition countries deserve to have a place to be honored and remembered by generations to come. Their story needs to be told over and over again and this is precisely what this memorial is for," he remarked.

Furthermore, Sheikh Salem told KUNA that "this very important memorial will forever stand as a testament to America's values in upholding liberty and freedom and also as a testament to the true friendship and alliance that exist between Kuwait and the US, an alliance that was forged by blood, sweat and tears." Continued on Page 6



WASHINGTON: Kuwait's Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with CEO and President of the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial Scott Stump. — KUNA

All 132 on crashed China Eastern jet confirmed dead

BEIJING: All 132 people aboard the plane that crashed into a mountainside in southern China this week have been confirmed dead, the country's civil aviation authority said Saturday. Dozens of victims' relatives have been waiting for days as rescue teams combed heavily forested slopes for plane debris and signs of survivors from Monday's disaster near the city of Wuzhou, Guangxi province.

While no cause has yet been determined, online tracking data showed the plane rapidly dropped

from an altitude of 29,100 to 7,850 feet (about 8,900 to 2,400 m) in just over a minute. "All 123 passengers and nine crew members of flight MU5735 of China Eastern airlines have been killed on board on March 21," Hu Zhenjiang, deputy director-general of the Civil Aviation Administration of China, told a press conference. "The identity of 120 victims has been determined by DNA identification."

After the announcement, Hu and the assembled journalists stood to observe a minute's silence for the victims of the tragedy. Aviation officials previously confirmed they had found a black box they believed to be the cockpit voice recorder, which should provide important clues to the cause of the crash. The stricken jet, a Boeing 737-800, was equipped with two recorders: one in the rear passenger cabin tracking flight data, and the other a cockpit voice recorder. Rescuers are still looking

for the other recorder. The cause has mystified aviation authorities, who have scoured the site's rugged terrain for clues as to what sparked China's deadliest plane crash in nearly 30 years. China Eastern had earlier said the crashed plane, which was nearly seven years old, had met all airworthiness requirements pre-flight. Following the incident, the company launched a safety overhaul, grounding all 223 of its Boeing 737-800 aeroplanes for checks. The disaster provoked an unusually swift public response from President Xi Jinping, who ordered a probe into its cause as aviation authorities vowed an extensive two-week check-up of China's vast passenger fleet. 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". — AFP

Biden doubts Russia dialing down war aims

WARSAW: US President Joe Biden cast doubt on Russia's signal that it may scale down its war aims to concentrate on eastern Ukraine, as two Russian missile strikes slammed into the west of the country on Saturday, wounding five. After failing to break Kyiv's ferocious resistance in a month of fighting and deadly attacks on civilians, the Russian army in a surprise announcement said it would

focus on "the main goal - the liberation of Donbas".

But Biden said he was "not sure" that Moscow has indeed changed strategy, as he branded Russian President Vladimir Putin a "butcher" while meeting Ukrainian refugees in Poland. The US leader assessment came as two missiles struck a fuel depot in western Ukraine's Lviv, a rare attack on a city just 70 km from the Polish border that has escaped serious fighting since Russian troops invaded last month. At least five people were wounded, regional governor Maksym Kozzytsky said, as AFP journalists in the city center saw plumes of thick black smoke.

Continued on Page 6



WARSAW: US President Joe Biden kisses a child while meeting refugees of Russia's war with Ukraine at PGE Narodowy Stadium on March 26, 2022. — AFP

Local

EU High Representative praises Kuwait as close, reliable partner

EU, Kuwait enjoy dynamic relationship

BRUSSELS: European Union High Representative Josep Borrell has praised Kuwait as a close and reliable partner and a voice of moderation in the Gulf region. In a wide-ranging exclusive interview with Kuwait News Agency, KUNA, on Saturday, the EU foreign policy chief spoke on the expanding EU-Kuwait relations, Kuwait's role for stability in the Gulf region, cooperation to find solutions to end the war in Ukraine, energy cooperation, Iran's nuclear deal, among other issues.

Borrell has said he is looking forward to the first visit in his capacity as the EU High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy/Vice President of the European Commission to Kuwait. He noted that he had met Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on a number of occasions in the past and was looking forward to see him again.

"This will be already my third meeting with foreign minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah since the beginning of the year, and our contacts so far and this visit are a confirmation of a very dynamic relationship between the EU and Kuwait," Borrell said. Kuwait is a close and reliable partner for the EU. Borrell affirmed in the special interview with the Kuwaiti news agency.

"It was the first Gulf country with which we have signed our Cooperation Arrangement in 2016. Since then, our sectoral cooperation has deepened and expanded to a large variety of fields, from trade and investments to research, education, development and humanitarian aid, security and counter-terrorism," he said. Borrell pointed out that his visit to Kuwait, along with his mission to Qatar due later today, is taking place "at a crucial time."

War in Ukraine

"The war in Ukraine represents a defining moment for the whole world and the future of our rules-based international order. The current situation in Ukraine and aggression by Russia makes our partnership with the Gulf even more relevant," he said. "My visit will offer the opportunity to discuss with Kuwaiti partners on how we can further enhance our engagement, not only on Ukraine and on looking for solutions to stop the war, but also on other pressing regional crises and issues of mutual interest, such as Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq or on Iran/JCPOA, where we are mindful of our Gulf

partners' concerns and opinions," said the EU's foreign policy chief.

Borrell has added that he intends to discuss with his Kuwaiti partners "how we can further enhance our bilateral relations and the region-to-region partnership, and to jointly work to tackle global challenges of today, notably climate change and green energy transition." Earlier this month, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sponsored ceremonial completion of state refiner, Kuwait National Petroleum Company's (KNPC) multi-billion dollar clean fuels project.

Voice of moderation

Elaborating, Borrell praised Kuwait as a voice of moderation in the region, adding that the Gulf state has already been doing a lot for peace and mediation in the Gulf region and beyond. "We highly value the good offices of the late Amir (Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah), played in the (Gulf) region, especially for the resolution of the GCC rift, which was essential for the success of the Al-Ula Summit. It also paved the ground to relaunch EU-GCC cooperation," Borrell said.

He was alluding to the 2021 GCC summit, held in the Saudi resort town of Al-Ula, where the GCC leaders made headways in solidifying inter-GCC ranks. He underlined that "our commitment to the UN Charter resonates hardly stronger with any other Arab country than with Kuwait and your country's principled stance on Russia's illegal invasion to Ukraine truly set the tone among partners."

This Russian aggression is not only about Ukraine. It violates the rules of international politics and the UN Charter. It is an attack on every independent and sovereign country in the world, making the whole world a more dangerous place and also creating further instability, also in the Middle East," he warned. Borrell highlighted that the war and its consequences also give the geopolitical ambition of the EU a new impetus and "forces us to think about accelerating energy

diversification and transition to renewables, to reduce our energy dependency on Russia."

Well-intentioned partners

"This also opens up a new space for EU-Kuwait cooperation. Here, we encourage Kuwait to play an active role in stabilizing the international oil markets, by increasing production and encourage OPEC members to play their part," said Borrell a former foreign minister of Spain. Borrell said the 27-member also wants to further cooperate with well-intentioned partners, including Kuwait, on initiatives that contribute to de-escalation and dialogue in the region.

"The EU is a peace project and we have experience in this field, especially confidence building measures in areas as maritime and nuclear safety, and disaster preparedness and response," he stated. Regarding ongoing negotiations on the nuclear deal (JCPOA) with Iran, the EU remains firmly convinced that a nuclear agreement would greatly contribute to a strengthening of the overall stability and security in the region and a more positive dynamic, he said.

"When the moment has come and all parties once again comply fully with their obligations, the deal can be the stepping stone to discuss other important

issues and the EU is ready and willing to further engage and support in this regard," he said. On humanitarian aid, the EU's top-most diplomat said "the EU is the biggest humanitarian and development assistance donor and we are interested to work closely with Kuwait to address humanitarian catastrophes in our regions, the dramatic situation unfolding in Ukraine, but also in other conflicts, notably Yemen, Syria and Palestine."

Borrell announced, he will be hosting the 6th international donor conference on Syria in Brussels, "and very much on Kuwait's continued generosity." "We also encourage our friends from Kuwait to support our efforts to ensure sustainable funding to Yemen, which finds itself already in the seventh year of a devastating war, resulting in very dire humanitarian situation."



European Union High Representative Josep Borrell

And also to UNRWA, which will be complementary to our endeavor to reactivate the long overdue Middle East Peace Process," said Borrell who also served as President of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2007. On trade relations, Borrell said "we are Kuwait's first import partner and the second biggest trading partner. But we can still do more together as our visions for the future complement each other. We both need to diversify our economies, albeit in a different way."

"We are eager to jointly work with Kuwait to tackle global challenges, notably climate change. On this, we have seen bold initiatives on green transition in the Gulf recently and hope that Kuwait will follow suit," said Borrell, an aeronautical engineer and economist by training. "We are ready to engage with your country ahead of COP27, but also to strengthen our cooperation on topics of mutual interest such as clean energy transition, hydrogen and renewable energy."

On ties with the Gulf countries he said "we intend to enhance our engagement with the Gulf in areas of mutual interest, like for instance, climate change and energy sustainability, peace and stability, and humanitarian assistance." "Our offer of a stronger and more strategic partnership (with the GCC) will be on the table soon, in the form of a communication that sets out a number of concrete proposals for the EU and GCC to strengthen our cooperation. We intend to publish this strategy for stronger cooperation with the GCC shortly after Ramadan (in May)," Borrell concluded. —KUNA

Opening up a new space for cooperation



Bangladesh celebrates National Day

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated Bangladesh on its national day in a letter addressed to its President Abdul Hamid on Saturday. His Highness the Amir wished the president well, and his country progress and prosperity. Their Highnesses the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah addressed similar messages to President Abdul Hamid. Meanwhile, on the occasion of the 51st Anniversary of the Independence and National Day of Bangladesh, His Excellency Major General MD Ashikuzzaman, NDC, AFWC, PSC, G, Ambassador of Bangladesh and Nahid Niaz Shilu held a reception on Thursday, 24 March, 2022 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The event attracted a lot of dignitaries and top officials.



German ambassador: Role of media very important in age of social media misinfo

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Stefan Mobs organized a luncheon meeting with the local press on Thursday and expressed gratitude for their cooperation and coverage during his three-year stay in Kuwait. He applauded the role of the professional media, especially for 'explaining' many issues amidst misinformation circulated in the age of social media.

"I have a personal attachment to your profession because I wanted to become a journalist years back. I know how it works to be more balanced in everything. I am happy that this country (Kuwait) enjoys a free press. This is very important in a free country. We have a very unique situation now compared to years ago: We have unprecedented misinformation and we have facts that are not being circulated. As journalists, you all have a very important role to play to bring out the truth. You can help analyze and sort out facts and present them to the public," Mobs said.

According to the ambassador, when he came to Kuwait, he was new to the Gulf but not the region, since he was briefly assigned to Damascus. "After I came in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic began. Because of the pandemic, there wasn't much work since few people were travelling, and parts of the two years we were locked down. But we kept our embassy open to facilitate medical travels of Kuwaitis," Mobs said. "We maintained our presence to keep in touch with the government here. Last year, we had official visits of our foreign ministers," he said.

Mobs said he enjoys a very good personal friendship with the Kuwaiti ambassador to Germany and always coordinates with him when it comes to medical



KUWAIT: Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Stefan Mobs organized a luncheon meeting with the local press on Thursday.

travels by Kuwaitis to Germany. "Although Kuwait recently closed their physical office in Frankfurt, I know things will be okay soon," he said. According to him, Kuwait has a lot of business in Germany and his country has a strong presence in the Kuwaiti market also.

Mobs also mentioned upcoming super-projects that are about to be delivered in Kuwait soon, like the new wastewater treatment plant in Um Al-Haiman in southern Kuwait. "When completed, the water will be very clean. You could even drink it, as there will be no residue," he said. The ambassador was asked about energy troubles around the world as the war between Russia and Ukraine rages. "Congratulations to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for signing the Durra field deal. This is a wonderful development. We are interested in developing renewable energy with Kuwait, such as hydrogen, solar, thermal and wind energy," he said.



MADRID: A delegation representing Kuwait Municipal Council explores the successful endeavors and work mechanisms of the city's Municipal.



Head of Kuwait delegation with Chief of Marbella's Municipality Maria Angeles —KUNA photos

Kuwait delegation explores Marbella

MADRID: A delegation representing Kuwait Municipal Council visited Marbella, Spain, to explore the successful endeavors and work mechanisms of the city's Municipal. Head of delegation, Engr Abdulsalam Al-Randi, stated to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that they discussed bilateral ties with Chief of Marbella's municipality Maria Angeles and a number of officials.

Eng. Al-Randi added that this visit comes as part of efforts to bolster relations between Kuwait and Spain's municipalities, and aims to promote cooperation between the two. Al-Randi added that Angeles welcomed Kuwaiti tourists, saying that they are provided with the comfort and ease they desire, as a considerable number of

them own houses within the area.

He commented that the Kuwaiti delegation was given opportunity to examine Andalusian municipal plans and survey their relation to other government bodies to better preserve architectural identity and historical value. Al-Randi added that they were also able to look into eservices and study how it facilitates the process. He illustrated that in order for the municipality to better experience of sea-goers and prevent sea pollution, they established a multi-storey boat parking, where different services are provided in exchange of a fee.

Eng. Al-Randi further expanded on the municipality's investment in the environmental sector saying they planted trees all over the city, either horizontally or vertically, to compensate for loss in green areas. The Kuwaiti delegation, which also includes Municipal Council members Mishal Al-Hamdhan and Ahmad Al-Enezi, began their visit in capital city of Madrid on prior official invitation that was postponed due to Covid-19 pandemic. —KUNA

Local

Kuwait's FM attends forum 'Transforming for New Era'

Amir of Qatar inaugurates 20th Doha Forum

KUWAIT: Representing His Highness the Prime Minister, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah participated in the 20th edition of the Doha Forum, held on Saturday under the title: "Transforming for a New Era". The forum was held under the auspices and in the presence of Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, and with the attendance of a number of leaders, foreign ministers, UN and EU officials and senior tourist, economic and security officials.

The event highlighted international efforts to promote joint cooperation and coordination in addressing rising global challenges and necessary reforms for developing relevant policies and approaches. The discussions also include the latest regional and international developments, mediation, preventive diplomacy, international affairs, peace and prevention of conflicts, climate change, fuel energy and COVID-19 impacts, and others.

Inaugurating the 20th Doha Forum, Amir of Qatar said that the world has reached a critical stage at the political, economic, environmental, and social levels. The Qatari Amir added in a speech he gave during the opening ceremony of the event that the current time requires "radical reviews before the entire globe reaches a stage of unbalance." Environmentally unfriendly and irresponsible forms of industrial production are extremely increasing, leading to catastrophic consequences affecting humanity, and would even continue to harm the future generations, Sheikh Tamim added.

Meanwhile, the shocking increase in poverty levels, and difficulty in reaching the basic life needs led to famine, he said. "We believe that social justice is the real safety measure for societies, which requires fair tax policies, as most societies cannot dispense state services," Sheikh Tamim said. Islamophobia needs firm efforts to encounter it, similar to efforts exerted in facing

anti-Semitic and racial discrimination, he noted. Anti-Semitic accusation is commonly used now in a wrong manner to those criticizing Zionist policies, which negatively affects the real fight against racial discrimination, he affirmed. At the political and security levels, he indicated that the Ukrainian war came after extended increase in armament over the last four decades. The Qatari Amir underscored on his country's firm position on rejecting violence, terrorizing civilians and assaulting the sovereignty of countries, and any other forms of violating humanitarian values and state laws.

"We are in solidarity with the millions of innocent people and refugees who are victims of this unjust war," he said, alluding to the war in Ukraine. "I would like to remind the world of millions of Palestinians who suffer from the Zionist occupation .. as well as (hardships of) the Syrian and Afghan peoples, whom the international community failed to support," he said.

Qatar has taken a path of rational dialogue based on balancing common values and interests, and "we have chosen the path of mediation to resolve disputes by peaceful and fair means," he said. The new era that "we dream about and I personally work for is the era of peace, security and coexistence for all. It is the era of social justice, where all peoples can reach their basic needs of education, health, food resources, a world in which they live in dignity and practice their lifestyle and cultures," Sheikh Tamim said.

The two-day Doha Forum aims to launch dialogue and debate on the critical challenges encountering "our world, and promote exchange of ideas, policy-making and provide feasible recommendations." The forum's new edition of the forum, the first held since outbreak of the coronavirus, tackles various political issues, international relations, global financial topics, economic development, defense, cyber security, food security, in addition to sustainability and climate change,



'Social justice is the real safety measure for societies'



DOHA: Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani inaugurates the 20th Doha Forum. —KUNA photos



US, Kuwait celebrate 60 years of friendship



KUWAIT: American Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider and other top officials attended a mural unveiling ceremony held in partnership with the LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) at the Museum of Modern Art on Thursday.



KUWAIT: American Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider attended a mural unveiling ceremony held in partnership with the LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) at the Museum of Modern Art on Thursday. The embassy-commissioned mural, titled "America & Kuwait: 60 Years of Friendship", celebrates six decades of US-Kuwait diplomatic ties.

"Designed in the form of a collage, the mural showcases the shared history of America and Kuwait through the decades," Charge d'Affaires Holtsnider said. "Additionally, as part of a broader effort to mark Women's History month in March, the mural highlights the important contributions of women to the development of both countries. The women featured include prominent rights activists, martyrs of the first Gulf War, and other significant figures."

American and Kuwaiti talents collaborated on the project, including acclaimed Kuwaiti artist and LAPA Board Member Amira Behbehani, LAPA Fine Arts Department Manager Zena Dabbous, and Associate Professor of Studio Art and Graphic Design at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) William J. Andersen.

"Our deepest thanks to Amira Behbehani, Zena Dabbous, and William Andersen - your hard work paid off. Because of your creativity and talent, we now have a remarkable mural that will speak to generations to come about the special bond between our two countries," Holtsnider added. Various government officials and members of the local art community attended the ceremony, including the NCCAL's Acting Secretary General Dr Eissa Al-Ansari. The mural will feature as part of NCCAL's Al-Qurain Cultural Festival from March 21-30.

On the occasion of the



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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comKuwaiti aid concentrates
on war-stricken Yemen

Arab League condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi oil facilities

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti aid has continued to flow abroad particularly for the impoverished in war-stricken Yemen where the assistance covered in particular the badly affected health sector. Kuwait Al-Zakat House, on Friday, inaugurated construction of a clinic in the Yemeni Shabwa province, with potentials to provide treatment and medications for 24,000 people.

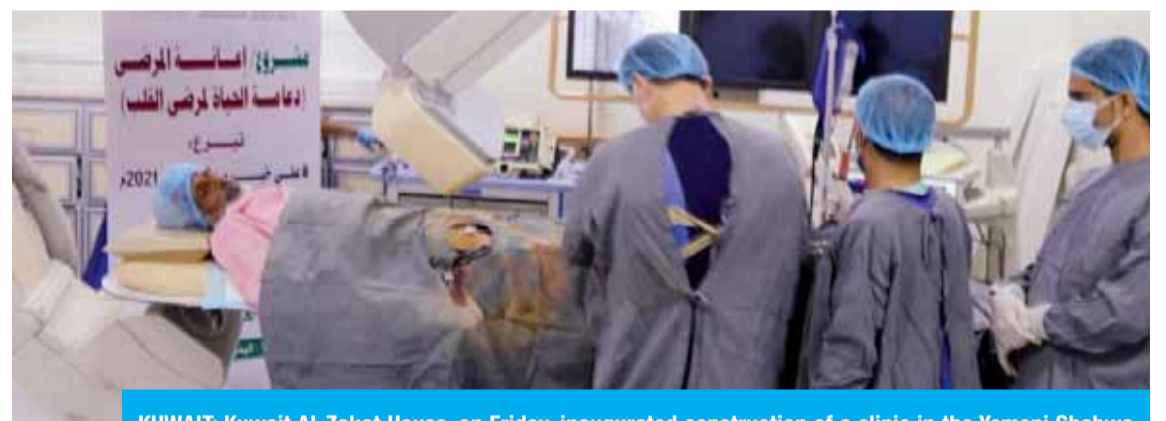
The Kuwaiti "Al-Tawasol foundation for humanitarian aid," the party executing the venture, said in a statement that Shabwa Governor Abed Raboo Hashla laid the corner stone of the complex, designed to house six clinics, an emergency ward, a pharmacy, a laboratory and other related facilities. On the 16th of this month, another Kuwaiti charity, Abdullah Al-Nouri Society, inaugurated construction of a maternity and child hospital in Maarib province with a million dollars allotted fund.

Both projects are being executed as part of the ongoing humanitarian campaign, "Kuwait on your side," designed to sooth hardships of ordinary Yemenis who have taken much of the brunt of the seven-year war. Meanwhile, Badr Al-Sumait, Director General of the International Islamic Charity Organization, declared at a news conference allocating aid for the vulnerable segments of the peoples in Pakistan, in addition to the Afghan refugees.

The organization is training 1,000 students in Afghanistan on various handicrafts and qualifying them to get jobs. With the approach of the fasting month of Ramadan, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor set terms for collecting donations during the month, barring cash donations and affirming that allotted money must be paid according to the previously set conditions.

The ministry public relations director, Ahmad Al-Enezi, declared in a statement barring collection of donations at unlicensed places such as shopping malls and public parks. For his part, the undersecretary, Abdulaziz Al-Shuaib, said number of charities in Kuwait reached more than 200, a testament to the Kuwaiti people's advocacy of relief and humanitarian acts, aiding the needy anywhere possible.

In another development, Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit has strongly denounced the Houthi militias Friday's series of assaults on Saudi oil facilities and infrastructure. The continued Houthi terrorist attacks on Saudi Arabia threaten the security of the whole region and energy supplies to the world at a delicate time. Abul-Gheit also stressed that the international community had to take a firm action towards the Houthi hostilities which violate the international law and the international humanitarian law. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Al-Zakat House, on Friday, inaugurated construction of a clinic in the Yemeni Shabwa province, with potentials to provide treatment and medications for 24,000 people. —KUNA photos

Algerian PM
lauds Kuwait

KUWAIT: Algerian Premier Ayman bin Abdelrahman has lauded the enlightening role of Kuwait that extended to all Arabs through its efforts in education and spreading of culture. He said the Kuwaiti impression reached over Algerian and every Arab, and lauded the participation of Suad Al-Sabah Publishing and Distribution Dar in the 25th International Book Exhibition in Algeria.

The Premier spoke to Sheikha Fadheila Mohamad Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah during a tour of the exhibition. He said that Dr Suad Al-Sabah is a distinguished part in the Arab culture as being creative and supporter of cultural activities in the Arab world. The premier bin Abdelrahman who opened the International Book Exhibition toured the exhibition accompanied by minister of Culture and Arts, cabinet members and diplomats. Meanwhile the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) honored Poet Dr Suad Al-Sabah during its eighth Arab poetry day as well as the late Algerian poet Mohammad Al-Saehi.

Kuwait, Morocco legal
panels meet in Rabat

RABAT: A joint symposium between Kuwait National Committee for International Humanitarian Law and its Moroccan counterpart kicked off Friday at the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Rabat, on civilian protection in armed conflicts and challenges of implementation at the national level. The two committees' chairmen Adel Al-Essa of Kuwait and Farida Khamlichi of Morocco co-chaired the joint symposium. The program of the symposium, in which members of

the two committees participate, includes three sessions, the first of which is devoted to discussing the topic of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The second session will discuss the subject of national efforts to support the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, with the participation of Justice at the Kuwaiti Court of Appeal Ahmad Al-Muqlad and the Judge of the Court of First Instance Hamad Al-Salahi. As for the third session, it is chaired by Al-Essa, focuses on preparing for the Kuwait regional meeting of the Arab national committees. The symposium will be attended by, in addition to the delegations of the two countries, experts in IHL from Egypt and the International Committee of the Red Cross. —KUNA



RABAT: Kuwait's Adel Al-Essa and Morocco's Farida Khamlichi co-chaired a joint symposium. —KUNA

International
Women's Group
holds symposium

KUWAIT: On the occasion of International Women's Day, the International Women's Group held a symposium in collaboration with the Al Jarallah German Specialized Center entitled "TOGETHER WE CAN END CERVICAL CANCER". According to the World Health Organization, cervical cancer ranks second among the most common cancers that infect and cause deaths among women around the world. It became incumbent upon all concerned to create awareness of how to prevent this type of cancer. The group's president, Italian ambassador's spouse, Christiana Balducci, opened the meeting with the importance of raising awareness of women's health.

This was followed by a speech in which Dr Ali Zadeh, CEO of the Center, explained the leading role of the Center in creating awareness among different segments of society. Dr Maamoun Al-Qaseer, a Consultant Clinical Virologist, explained the risks of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection. And the importance of early detection to avoid cervical cancer. He confirmed that the HPV vaccine has proven to be highly effective in preventing infection. Tests aimed at early detection of the disease also help to enhance treatment and prevention opportunities to increase full recovery and survival.

The Board member of Jarallah German, Mehrdad Zadeh concluded with a speech thanking the International Women's Group for giving the center the chance to raise awareness in the community, highlighting that the cervical cancer awareness campaign has been going on since January, and the importance of the center's vaccination and early detection programs. He confirmed that the center is equipped with laboratory services for the detection of cervical cancer and gynecologists to enhance women's awareness in the State of Kuwait. In the end, the International Women's Group offered a shield of thanks to Jarallah German for their contribution to this effective symposium.

Netflix to show
VO Kuwait's
'Weird Tales'

KUWAIT: Netflix, the global entertainment streaming platform, signed an agreement with VO, the first Kuwait-based integrated youth platform for incubating young talents, to show VO's newly produced Arabic anthology series "Weird Tales" (Hikayat Ghareeba), which was filmed at its high-tech and well-established creative studios after five years of preparations for the project.

VO announced today that the series is considered to be the first "supernatural horror-like" series featuring a group of eight separate episodes written by different prominent writers and directed from a unique creative angle that is inspired by American and European series such as The Twilight Zone and Black Mirror.

In an official statement, the CEO of VO Kuwait, Riham Al-Ayyar, announced the agreement and stated: "VO aims to trigger a cinema wave from Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf region that would deliver an elevated cinematic language, paving the way for a powerful regional film movement that could echo internationally. We are therefore looking forward to cultivating our relationship with Netflix and collaborating in many future projects that would illustrate a real image of our region and support Kuwaiti and Gulf talents."

Al-Ayyar reaffirmed VO's commitment and dedication towards positioning Kuwait on the global map and diversifying the country's economy through its local talents. She then added: "Our main objective is to position Kuwait globally through exceptional Kuwaiti talents and internationally recognized professionals." Among new actors and actresses, many celebrated Kuwaiti talents are participating in the series, such as Rahaf Al Anazi, Ahmed Al Anon, Faisal Al Amiri, Hoda Al Khatib, Abdullah Al Tarawa, Muhammad Safar and Hassan Ibrahim.

Founded in July 2020, VO nurtures and supports Kuwaiti talents and inspiring initiatives in various fields including entrepreneurship. The platform launched its all-inclusive creative hub and official mobile-application in 2021, and is currently establishing an academic program for Kuwaiti youth to nurture their talents while promoting their creative productions on a seamless, high-tech and efficient digital platform.



Riham Al-Ayyar



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LAUREL, Philippines: Residents living near Taal volcano ride a vehicle as they evacuate to a public school in Laurel, Batangas, on March 26, 2022, after an eruption earlier in the morning sent ash and steam hundreds of metres into the sky. —AFP

Philippine volcano erupts, thousands flee

Further eruptions could trigger dangerous volcanic flows of ash and debris

LAUREL, Philippines: Thousands of people fled their homes near a Philippine volcano Saturday after an eruption sent ash and steam hundreds of metres into the sky. Taal volcano, which sits in a picturesque lake south of Manila, exploded with a “short-lived” burst at 7:22 am (2322 GMT), the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said in a statement.

It warned further eruptions were possible, which it said could trigger dangerous, fast-moving volcanic flows of gas, ash and debris, as well as a tsunami. Residents in five fishing and farming settlements around the lake were ordered to leave their homes, in the third mass evacuation in as many years around one of the country’s most active volcanoes.

“It rained mud,” said Cornelia Pesigan, 25, who sought shelter at a school outside the seven-kilometre (4.3-mile) “danger zone”. “It smelled really

bad and I had difficulty breathing,” the mother-of-two added.

The initial eruption was followed by “nearly

continuous phreatomagmatic activity” that sent plumes stretching 1,500 metres (4,900 feet) into the air, the seismological agency said, raising the alert level from two to three on a scale of zero to five.

A phreatomagmatic eruption happens when molten rock comes into contact with underground or surface water, said Princess Cosalan, a scientist at the agency, likening it to pouring “water on a hot pan”.

Cosalan told AFP that ash and steam emissions had quietened in the hours after the initial burst, but said the institute’s on-site sensors continued to detect volcanic earthquakes and another eruption was “possible”.

The agency’s chief, Renato Solidum, said the activity was weaker than in January 2020, when Taal shot ash 15 kilometres high and spewed red-hot lava, crushing scores of homes, killing livestock and sending tens of thousands into shelters. “There is no threat beyond the... five villages,” Solidum said.

More than 12,000 people live in the most vulnerable communities, according to the latest available official data. Police have been deployed to stop people entering the high-risk zones, while aviation authorities warned airlines and pilots of potential hazards from volcanic ash in the atmosphere.

The Philippines is hit periodically by eruptions and earthquakes due to its location on the Pacific “Ring of Fire”—a zone of intense seismic activity. Access to the volcano island, which was once home to a community of thousands, has been prohibited since the 2020 eruption.

Last July, the seismological agency raised the alert level to three after Taal burst to life again. It belched sulphur dioxide for several days, creating a thick haze over the capital and surrounding provinces. The alert level was lowered back to two before Saturday’s eruption. —AFP



“It rained mud”

US cancels Taliban talks after girls school closure

WASHINGTON: The United States said Friday that it has cancelled planned talks in Doha with the Taliban after the hardline Islamist rulers of Afghanistan shut girls’ secondary schools. “We have cancelled some of our engagements, including planned meetings in Doha around the Doha Forum, and have made clear that we see this decision as a potential turning point in our engagement,” State Department deputy spokeswoman Jalina Porter said.

The Taliban, which seized power in August and is eager for international recognition, shut down girls’ secondary schools this week just hours after reopening them. “This decision by the Taliban, if it is not swiftly reversed, will profoundly harm the Afghan people, the country’s prospects for economic growth, and the Taliban’s ambition to improve their relations with the international community,” Porter told reporters.

“For the sake of Afghanistan’s future

and the Taliban’s relations with the international community we urge the Taliban to live up to their commitments and to their people,” she said. “We also stand with Afghan girls and their families, who see education as a path to realizing the full potential of Afghanistan’s society and economy,” she added.

The Taliban’s decision to keep schools shuttered for girls came after a meeting late Tuesday by senior officials in the southern city of Kandahar, the movement’s de facto power center and conservative spiritual heartland. It followed months of work by the international community to address the issue of supporting teacher stipends, and came just as Afghan girls were eagerly heading back to school for the first time in seven months.

“Major setback”
When the Taliban returned to power, they promised a softer rule com-

pared with their first regime from 1996 to 2001, which became notorious for human rights abuses. They claimed to respect women’s rights, in line with their interpretation of Islamic sharia law, and said girls would be allowed to study through to university.

But the Taliban have imposed a slew of restrictions on women, effectively banning them from many government jobs, policing what they wear and preventing them from travelling outside of their cities alone. In a joint statement Thursday the foreign ministers of Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Norway and the United States, plus the high representative of the European Union, said the Taliban’s decision will harm the group’s prospects for legitimacy. — AFP

picturesque antique shop and a sign warning drivers to watch out for ducks crossing the road. “It’s beautiful here, and it’s quite rural, but it can also be quite lonely,” said Gaze.
Within 24 hours of starting her



KABUL: Afghan women and girls take part in a protest in front of the Ministry of Education in Kabul on March 26, 2022, demanding that high schools be reopened for girls. — AFP

EU envoy to visit Iran seeking to close gaps in nuclear talks

TEHRAN: The European Union’s coordinator for talks to restore the Iran nuclear deal, Enrique Mora, said he was hoping to close gaps in the negotiations ahead of his expected arrival Saturday in Tehran. Iran has been engaged in negotiations to revive the accord with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly since April 2021.

The EU diplomat, who coordinates talks between Iran and the US, is due to arrive in Tehran on Saturday night, state news agency IRNA reported. He is scheduled to meet Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri on Sunday. “Working on closing the remaining gaps in the #ViennaTalks on the #JCPOA,” Mora tweeted ahead of his trip. “We must conclude this negotiation. Much is at stake.”

Concerned parties have signalled for weeks that the negotiations are close to an agreement, but that “political decisions” are required from Tehran and Washington. Western parties have been pushing for the talks to be concluded “urgently” given the accelerated pace of Iran’s nuclear programme.

Following the United States’ unilateral withdrawal from the deal in 2018 and the re-imposition of crippling economic sanctions, Iran began rolling back on most of its commitments under the accord from 2019. The negotiations have been paused since March 11, after Russia demanded guarantees that Western sanctions imposed on it following its invasion of Ukraine would not damage its trade with Iran.

Days later, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said during a joint news conference with his visiting Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian that Moscow had received the guarantees. Consultations between Amir-Abdollahian and his counterparts had continued since delegations returned to their capitals, IRNA said. — AFP

English town sends message to Putin

DISS, United Kingdom: A peaceful market town in the east of England is uniting for Ukraine, sending aid trucks, prepping beds for refugees and even raising funds with an expletive-laden pub cocktail. Like many communities around Europe, the people of Diss, population 8,000, want to do their bit to help Ukraine, identifying with the immediacy and proximity of the conflict in a different way to wars in Syria, Afghanistan or further afield.

“It’s been very graphic, hasn’t it? On the television, we’ve seen pictures of people like us, and you think

‘blimey, what if that happened to me?’,” said Debbie Gaze, who started a Facebook group to bring locals together to host those fleeing the Russian invasion.

“It could be my grandma. It could be my daughter.... I’d like someone to help take care of them if the roles were reversed,” she told AFP. Over 3.7 million Ukrainians have fled the country during Russia’s month-long invasion, the United Nations says, including 1.5 million children.

Many prefer to stay in neighbouring eastern European countries, in the hope that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s devastating invasion might soon end. But others are fleeing further afield, including to Diss, around 80 miles (130 kilometres) northeast of London.
Diss is a typical pretty English market town, complete with tea rooms, a



DISS: Account manager of Colemans Removals, Jordan Coleman prepares aid packages destined for the Polish border with Ukraine, in Diss, eastern England, on March 22, 2022. — AFP

online group, she had over 200 people in the tiny community saying “count me in, what can I do?”. Residents have been contacting fleeing Ukrainians via social media and helping with their visa applications. — AFP

International

Palestinians vote in second phase of municipal elections

Islamists poised to sweep the parliamentary election

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: Polls opened Saturday in towns and cities in the Zionist-occupied West Bank in a rare democratic exercise following a decade and a half of delays to Palestinian elections. It is the second phase of municipal elections after a first round of voting in December in 154 West Bank villages. Saturday's vote is being held in 50 towns and cities, with many elections uncontested, or without any candidates in some cases. No legislative or presidential elections have been held in the Palestinian territories for 15 years, following repeated delays.

The last municipal elections, held in 2017, were boycotted by Hamas, the Islamist rulers of Gaza. The militant group, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, is also boycotting this vote in protest at president Mahmud Abbas's indefinite postponement of parliamentary and presidential elections that had been scheduled for last year.

The Islamists had been poised to sweep the parliamentary election, which was widely seen as the real reason for Abbas's 11th-hour postponement of the poll, citing Israel's refusal to allow voting in annexed east Jerusalem. Abbas's presidential term

was supposed to end in 2009.

No elections are being held in the Gaza Strip or Zionist-annexed East Jerusalem. In the Jordan Valley city of Jericho, independents dominate the candidate lists, with established parties officially staying away, a dynamic mirrored across the West Bank. "Usually there are just one or two lists running—and they belong to the parties. This time there are five lists, many of them independents," said Emad Barahmeh, a local businessman who heads one of the independent lists running in Jericho.

Yet experts say that Hamas and Fateh, the secular party led by Abbas, are still involved, running candidates under the table as independents. "It is also noticeable that the various Palestinian factions are clearly absent from running for these elections, but their candidates have entered under the name of independents," Talab

Awad, an expert on Palestinian elections, told AFP. "There are candidates from the Hamas movement in these elections, but they are doing so personally," Awad said, adding participation would likely be "high". Hamas is officially boycotting the elections. "People were disappointed when they delayed the



Vote is being held in 50 towns, cities



BEIT FURIK, Palestinian Territories: An elderly Palestinian man casts his ballot as he votes in the local elections in Beit Furik, east of the West Bank city of Nablus, on March 26, 2022. —AFP

legislative elections, now they opened this, it's like a small piece of freedom for them," said Barahmeh. Hamas and Fatah have been at loggerheads since 2007 when the Islamists seized Gaza after a week of deadly clashes. Today, the Fatah-dominated

Palestinian Authority has control over parts of the occupied West Bank, where 2.8 million Palestinians live, while the Gaza Strip, an enclave of 2.3 million inhabitants under Israeli blockade, remains under Hamas control. — AFP

Historic German 'rail bridge' aids war-ravaged Ukraine

BERLIN: The convoy rolls slowly out of the heart of Berlin, its eight cars tethered to a bright red locomotive. Destination: Ukraine, thanks to a historic "rail bridge" delivering humanitarian aid to the besieged country. Four days' journey, more than 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) travelled and at the end of the line, tonnes of food and other essentials delivered to people in need.

The operation of the Deutsche Bahn (DB), the German rail company, echoes the famous Allied airlift—known as the "air bridge" in German—during the Cold War to help the city of Berlin during a Soviet blockade. "It only took four days" to set up this cooperation with the Polish and Ukrainian railways which now allows this "rail bridge" to operate regularly, explains Sigrid Nikutta, head of DB Cargo, the freight service of the public company.

Every other evening, a convoy leaves the German capital after having collected donations from companies and individuals throughout the country, at dedicated points or directly from manufacturers and supermarket chains. Pallets of baby food, boxes of sanitary pads and tampons, small electrical appliances, medical equipment, floor mattresses, blankets... the outpouring of generosity is so overwhelming that the containers fill up rapidly.

"Each container is a message to Ukrainians: 'We aren't leaving you on your own!'," Nikutta says. Among the DB staff, morale is high. Employees take convoys to Poland where they then hand off to local drivers.

The containers must later be unloaded and transferred because the width of the rails in Ukraine is different. When the train arrives in Ukraine, the national railway takes over.

'Respect'

The unflinching commitment of the employees of the Ukrainian national company to transport food and refugees from one end of the country to the



BERLIN, Germany: An engine bringing aid supplies to the Ukraine departs from the BEHALA container terminal in Berlin on March 24, 2022. Inscription reads: "Rail bridge for the Ukraine". — AFP

other has earned the admiration of their colleagues to the west. "They have my respect but also my concern because we all know that this is dangerous," Nikutta says.

However the risks for the "rail bridge" are limited, says DB Cargo spokesman Michael Schmidt. "We do not transport weapons, no oil", he stresses, noting that since the start of the Russian offensive, attacks on the Ukrainian rail network have been rare because "the Russians need to keep this infrastructure in good condition".

All the convoys, sent to various Ukrainian cities and towns, have so far arrived safely, Nikutta says with pride. She even received a photograph of the arrival of the containers in Kyiv sent by the mayor of the capital, the charismatic ex-boxer Vitali Klitschko.

"Many Ukrainians feel today, after four long weeks of war, what the Berliners felt at the time of the blockade by the Soviets" in 1948-1949, says the Ukrainian ambassador to Germany, Andriy Melnyk, who attended the departure of a convoy this week.

"Without the enormous effort of the Allies at the time, what would this beautiful city have become?" he asks. "We now need other solid bridges, including political ones, and the most important would be a prospect of EU membership for Ukraine", says the ambassador, giving the starting signal to the locomotive stamped with the slogan "We stand with Ukraine". — AFP

Zimbabwe votes in by-elections

HARARE, Zimbabwe: Zimbabweans voted Saturday in key parliamentary and municipal by-elections seen as a test for President Emmerson Mnangagwa's ruling party in next year's general polls.

The polls had generated so much interest in the run-up that Mnangagwa led various campaign rallies to shore up support for his ZANU-PF candidates. But only short queues were seen in the hours after polling stations opened at 7 am. The southern African country has for years been grappling with economic hardships, joblessness and accusations the government was stifling dissent.

"We need change," Jasen Maeka, a 42-year-old unemployed man said after voting at a polling station in central Harare.

"We should give the opposition a chance. This government has proved to be a failure," Maeka said. Opposition leader Nelson Chamisa, who is seen as the most formidable challenger to Mnangagwa, formed a new party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), three months before the by-elections.

He sees the election as a "crucial... a dry run of the 2023 election".

The new party drew massive crowds to its campaign rallies. Chamisa's party complained of growing repression by the authorities as several of its rallies were banned by the police during the two-month long campaign.

Unrest at an opposition rally last month left one person dead and 22 injured. During the campaign, the country's vice president Constantino Chiwenga likened the opposition to lice which should be "crushed" and Mnangagwa vowed at a Thursday rally that ZANU-PF would rule "forever".

ZANU-PF, which has led the country since independence from Britain in 1980, also attracted huge campaign crowds.

'Another disputed election'

Critics accuse Mnangagwa, who took power in 2017 after Robert Mugabe ruled for 37 years, of muzzling critics and the opposition has voiced concern that election will not be credible. Chamisa accused the electoral commission of bias and said he had alerted regional blocs such as SADC.

"We can't have yet another disputed election,"

said Chamisa after casting his ballot in Harare's Kuwadzana township.

"We want a proper referee, a proper umpire not this one who throws the whistle away to join the other team," he said, referring to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

"ZEC is literally mobilising apathy, making sure that people are frustrated, making sure that the vote is suppressed". Voters are casting ballots in 28 parliamentary constituencies including 20 where opposition lawmakers were recalled in a battle over the control of the country's largest opposition party.

The rest of the seats fell vacant following the deaths or reassignment of the incumbents.

By-elections were also being held in 122 local



HARARE: Zimbabwe main opposition party leader Nelson Chamisa of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) is identified before voting at Kuwadzana Primary School in Harare during by-elections held in the country, March 26 2022. —AFP

government municipalities.

The by-elections were supposed to be held within 90 days of the seats falling vacant but Mnangagwa delayed the polls in 2020 citing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sixteen parties were taking part in the elections. On the eve of the polls, Chamisa's party alleged that the election was rigged before voting had taken place, citing errors in the voters register.

The ZANU-PF director for information and publicity, Tafadzwa Mugwadi, told AFP the voting process has been going "pretty well."

He said: "So far so good." —AFP

Saudi foils oil tanker attack after...

Continued from Page 1

a "permanent" ceasefire if the Saudi-led coalition ends its operations against the country. A Riyadh-based diplomat told AFP that Hans Grundberg, the UN's special envoy to Yemen, had led recent efforts to reach a truce during the month of Ramadan, which begins in early April. Four boats laden with explosives were destroyed at Salif, a Red Sea port north of Jeddah, a day after the Yemeni attacks on a televised F1 practice day spooked drivers and threw the race into doubt. "We targeted four booby-trapped boats in Salif port, which is under prepara-

tion, and thwarted an imminent attack on oil tankers," the coalition said, according to state television.

Drivers returned to the track for the final practice session after hours of talks with F1 and team officials late on Friday and safety assurances from the Saudi government. "Drivers are not 100 percent happy (or) fully relaxed," said Ferrari team principal Mattia Binotto. "They are still concerned but they have listened to the reassurance and they understand it's important to stay here and try to race."

After hours of talks with the pilots, team principals and Saudi officials on Friday, Formula One and governing body the FIA said it had received "assurances" that the race in Jeddah can be held safely. "Saudi government authorities and security agencies... have given full and detailed assurances that the event is secure," a joint statement said. — AFP

Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the State of Kuwait leadership as well as Ambassador Al-Sabah for their steadfast support of this memorial and for remembering the events, people and enduring legacy for which this memorial will commemorate," Stump added.

In Dec 2014, former US President Barack Obama signed the memorial's enabling legislation. In March 2017, former President Donald Trump signed the law authorizing the memorial to be built near the National Mall, which is home to iconic monuments in Washington DC. The Memorial's design will commemorate the historical significance of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm while honoring the service and sacrifice of US and Coalition military personnel who liberated Kuwait from Iraq. — KUNA

Biden doubts Russia dialing...

Continued from Page 1

Putin sent troops into Ukraine on Feb 24, vowing to destroy the country's military and topple pro-Western President Volodymyr Zelensky. But his army has made little progress on capturing key cities, and its attacks that have hit hospitals, residential buildings and schools have become more deadly.

Biden, who has been leading efforts among Western allies to press Putin to end his invasion of Ukraine, has blasted Putin as a "war criminal" over the assaults on civilians. The Kremlin hit back at Biden's description of Putin as a "butcher", saying "a state leader must remain sober-minded". "Such personal insults are narrowing down the window of opportunity for our bilateral relations under the current (US) administration. One should be aware of this," said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, in remarks carried by state news agency TASS.

Biden, who is on a two-day visit to Poland after holding a series of summits in Brussels with Western allies, earlier met Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov in Warsaw in an emphatic show of support for Kyiv. Both ministers had made a rare trip out of Ukraine for the face-to-face talks, in a possible sign of growing confidence in their fightback against Russian forces.

The talks discussed Washington's "unwavering commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters. Biden, who later met Polish President

Andrzej Duda, also stressed the "sacred commitment" to NATO's collective defense, in a clear reassurance to Ukraine's neighbors rattled by the conflict. "You can count on that... for your freedom and ours," he told Duda.

Speaking after visiting Ukrainian refugees later Saturday, Biden said he had been asked by children to pray for their male relatives fighting in Ukraine. "I remember what it's like when you have someone in a war zone and every morning you get up and you wonder... you are praying you don't get that phone call," said Biden, whose son Beau served in Iraq before dying of a brain tumor.

On the frontlines, Russia's far-bigger military continued to combat determined Ukrainian defenders who are using Western-supplied weapons - from near the capital Kyiv to Kharkiv, the Donbas region and the devastated southern port city of Mariupol. A humanitarian convoy leaving Mariupol, including ambulances carrying wounded children, was being held up at Russian checkpoints, a Ukrainian official said. A buildup of several kilometers had formed close to Vassylivka, in the region of Zaporizhzhia where the convoy was headed, said Lyudmyla Denisova, in charge of human rights in Ukraine. "The ambulances carrying wounded children are also queuing. The people have been deprived of water and food for two days," she wrote on Telegram, blasting Russian troops for "creating obstacles".

Authorities have said they fear some 300 civilians in Mariupol may have died in a Russian air strike on a theatre being used as a bomb shelter last week. Russian forces hammering Mariupol's out-gunned resistance consider the city a lynchpin in their attempt to create a land corridor between the Crimea region, which Moscow seized in 2014, and the Donbas. —AFP

Kuwait main donor for building ...

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He indicated that the memorial is expected to be completed in 2023, where it will "take its rightful place among all the other magnificent memorials" in the nation's capital. CEO and President of the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial Scott Stump said "this kind and extremely generous pledge ensures that the historical significance of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm will be forever and prominently etched into world history". "I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His

International

US calls for tougher UN Security Council sanctions against N Korea

Pyongyang test-fired its largest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile

UNITED NATIONS: The United States called Friday for tougher international sanctions against North Korea at the UN Security Council, accusing Pyongyang of "increasingly dangerous provocations" after it test-fired its largest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile.

"The United States calls on all member states to fully implement the existing Security Council resolutions," US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said during the meeting convened to discuss North Korea.



Council to take further action

"Because of DPRK's increasingly dangerous provocations, the United States will be introducing a... Security Council resolution to update and strengthen the sanctions regime" that was adopted in December 2017, she said, using the official acronym for North Korea.

At the time "the council decided we would take further action in the event of a DPRK ICBM launch," Thomas-Greenfield said. "This is precisely what happened. So now is the time to take that action." The unanimously adopted text was voted on a month after Pyongyang fired its last previous intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Hwasong-15, which was deemed powerful enough to reach the continental United States.

Following Friday's meeting, a group of 15 nations including permanent Security Council members Britain, France and the US—but minus China and Russia—released a joint statement condemning Pyongyang's latest launch "in the strongest terms" and warning it "poses a threat" to the entire international community.

"The DPRK is demonstrating its determination to continue advancing its weapons program as it esca-



PYONGYANG, North Korea: Students of the Pyongyang Jang Chol Gu University of Commerce sit in front of the Rodong Sinmun newspaper while reacting as they watch footage of the previous day's launch of the Hwasong-17 missile — Pyongyang's first ICBM test since 2017. — AFP

lates its provocative behavior—and yet the Council has remained silent," said the countries, which include non-permanent Security Council members Brazil, Ireland and Norway, as well as Germany, Japan and South Korea.

The statement urged UN states, especially Security Council members, "to join us in condemning this behavior and in urging the DPRK to abandon its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs and engage in diplomacy toward denuclearization."

China addressed the Security Council meeting and urged "prudence and reason" regarding North Korea. "All is not quiet on the international front. No parties should take any action that would lead to greater tensions," China's UN ambassador Zhang Jun said.

Russia, for its part, warned against following Washington's lead on tightening sanctions. Deputy

Russian envoy to the UN Anna Evstigneeva said Moscow believes that doing so would "go beyond the framework of cutting off financing" for the DPRK missile and nuclear programs and would "threaten North Korean citizens with unacceptable socio-economic and humanitarian problems." In 2018, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un formalized a moratorium on nuclear testing and long-range ballistic missile launches, stating that his goals had been met and proclaiming his country a fully nuclear state.

He nonetheless personally supervised Thursday's launch, which state media outlet KCNA reported was meant to ensure the country is ready for "long-standing confrontation" with the United States. The Group of Seven nations and the EU on Friday condemned what they said was North Korea's "blatant violation" of its obligations under Security Council resolutions. — AFP

Malta PM heads for re-election

VALLETTA, Malta: Voters in Malta voted Saturday in general elections expected to secure another term for the government, despite concerns about corruption in a nation still rocked by the assassination of a journalist. Opinion polls point to a decisive win for Labour Prime Minister Robert Abela, who has campaigned on his handling of the coronavirus pandemic and his party's economic record during nine years in power.

But Labour is still tainted by the high-level corruption exposed by journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was killed by a car bomb in October 2017 — a murder that shocked the world. A public inquiry last year found the state under then Labour prime minister Joseph Muscat created a "culture of impunity" in which her enemies felt they could silence her. Muscat had already stepped down in January 2020, after public protests at his perceived attempts to shield allies from the probe into her death. He was replaced in a Labour party vote by Abela, who has since moved to strengthen good governance and press freedom, although Caruana Galizia's family say he has not gone far enough.

At a final rally Thursday, Abela urged flag-waving supporters to "trust me with my first mandate so I can continue changing things". The opposition Nationalist Party has sought to press the issue of corruption, with leader Bernard Grech warning "our democracy is at stake", but has been hamstrung by its own internal divisions. Politics is important in Malta where most voters are highly partisan and turnout tops 90 percent. But a lacklustre campaign, coronavirus restrictions and the shadow of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have all led to warnings of a lower turnout this year.

"It was quite a quiet campaign, the two leaders agree in many things. They all work for the same aim, but then who delivers?" said Rossana Cutajar, a 42-year-old sales assistant, after voting in Valletta. Polls, which opened at 7 am, close at 10:00 pm (2100 GMT), with provisional results expected by early afternoon Sunday.

Located off the coast of Sicily, Catholic-majority Malta is the smallest and most densely populated country in the European Union, with around 516,000 people living in 316 square kilometres (122 square miles). Its location in the middle of the Mediterranean made it a repeated target for invaders down the centuries, resulting in a rich culture, with the 16th-century walled capital designated a UNESCO world heritage site. — AFP



VALLETTA, Malta: Leader of the opposition centre-right Nationalist Party, Bernard Grech (L) accompanied by his wife Anne-Marie, waves to supporters on March 24, 2022 during a meeting in St George's Square. — AFP



ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia: People take photos in front of a sign making reference to the "No More" movement, against foreign intervention, in Meskel square, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on March 25, 2022. Tigrayan rebels agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" on March 25, 2022, a new turning point in the nearly 17-month war in northern Ethiopia following the government's announcement of an indefinite humanitarian truce a day earlier. — AFP

Does Ethiopia truce make peace any more likely?

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia: Ethiopia has declared a conditional truce, and their rebel opponents in Tigray have agreed to cease hostilities if certain terms are met. Does this bring Ethiopia any closer to peace?

Why now?

There has been sustained diplomatic pressure to end the conflict between the federal government and rebels aligned to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that has raged since November 2020. Diplomats have been shuttling back and forth between the two sides for months. The new US special envoy to the region, David Satterfield, was in Ethiopia earlier this week. "I think international pressure has played a part in this decision," Awet Weldemichael, a Horn of Africa security expert at Queen's University in Canada, told AFP. "Ethiopia is facing economic challenges due to the war, meanwhile negotiations have been going on behind the scenes."

The US has not imposed sanctions so far but legislation making it possible has been advanced. Limits on financial assistance from international lenders and US development agencies has also been considered.

It comes as Ethiopia faces "one of its worst food crises in decades" with nearly 30 percent of its 110 million people in dire need of assistance, said Rene Lefort, an independent researcher on the Horn of Africa. "Yet, Ethiopia cannot face a food crisis without international aid," Lefort said. The TPLF has also been forced to reconsider its position. Their stronghold of Tigray reels from what the UN says is a de facto blockade on the region where famine looms. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, meanwhile, has abandoned his quest to recapture Tigray to the displeasure of allies in the Amhara region, while confronting a simmering rebellion from an insurgent group in Oromia, Lefort said. "In recent months, there has been a change in priority for Abiy Ahmed."

Will it work?

The government said it hoped the truce would hasten aid delivery to Tigray, where food, fuel and medicine are desperately needed. But at present, road convoys would need to pass through the Afar region,

where the TPLF is present and local authorities have refused aid passage to Tigray until the rebels withdraw. "It is not certain that convoys would be able to resume quickly" just because a truce was declared, a humanitarian source told AFP. Ethiopia made the truce conditional on the TPLF withdrawing from Amhara and Afar.

The TPLF, in turn, agreed to cease hostilities only if food aid reached Tigray. The TPLF may be willing to make concessions on Afar but would not likely withdraw from Amhara, analysts say. But the impasse in Afar posed a particular challenge on its own, Lefort said. "The Afar government has little control over Afar territory. It will be difficult to prevent the population, which is also hungry, from blocking convoys," he said. Observers said it was also unlikely the TPLF's opponents in Amhara would open their region to allow aid convoys to travel onward to Tigray.

Is peace near?

The Eurasia Group said both sides continued to see military pressure as a means to extracting concessions ahead of any talks, even if outright victory was no longer the objective. "The 'truce' effectively acts as a trust-building exercise between the TPLF and federal government, yet a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire remains unlikely in the short-term given both sides' hardline stances on outstanding issues," the think tank said.

The quick restoration of basic services denied to Tigray for months—electricity, communications and banking chief among them—would be a test of the government's goodwill, observers said. The truce "could be a turning point, but it will depend on whether it's genuinely intended," said Awet. "I hope this is a starting point for peace talks but it's not very promising".

What hurdles remain?

Even if a lasting ceasefire was brokered with the TPLF, the rebels are not the only armed actor in northern Ethiopia. Abiy faces increasing pressure from hardliners in the Amhara elite unhappy the TPLF is not being pursued in Tigray.

The Amhara have territorial disputes with the TPLF in western Tigray, where they have militias that do not fall under federal control. "For some within the Amhara, you have to go all the way to Mekele to crush the TPLF," said Lefort, referring to the capital of the Tigray region. "But authorising humanitarian convoys to Tigray means giving up this military conquest, and leaving the TPLF in place." — AFP

Australia voices concern for journalist

SYDNEY: Canberra voiced concern for Australian journalist Cheng Lei's well-being Saturday, as it confirmed she would face trial in China next week after almost two years in detention. Cheng, previously an anchor on state broadcaster CGTN, disappeared in August 2020 and was formally arrested for "illegally supplying state secrets overseas" in February last year.

"The Australian government has regularly raised serious concerns about Ms Cheng's welfare and conditions of detention," foreign minister Marise Payne said in a statement, also confirming staff had met with Cheng on Monday.

"We expect basic standards of justice, procedural fairness and humane treatment to be met, in accordance with international norms." The mother of two was a familiar face on the state broadcaster's English-language channel, conducting interviews with noted CEOs from around the world.

Further details of the charges against her are not known. "We have asked also that Australian officials be permitted to attend Ms Cheng's hearing on 31 March, in line with China's obligations under the Australia-China bilateral consular agreement," Payne said. Born in Hunan province, Cheng is now an Australian national who emigrated to the country as a child, before returning to China and joining the state broadcaster in 2012.

China does not allow citizens to hold dual nationality. She could face severe punishment if found to have broken China's national security laws, which can carry a sentence of up to life in prison for cases deemed most serious.

Cheng's detention came as relations between Australia and China cratered. The timing and lack of information about charges raised speculation that her detention was politically motivated, or tit-for-tat retaliation.

Beijing has reacted angrily to Australia's liberal use of foreign interference laws to block Chinese investment in sensitive sectors and to investigate Chinese influence on the country's public life, as well as Canberra's calls for an independent probe into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic.

Cheng's detention also came weeks after Australian authorities raided the homes of Chinese state media journalists. Her detention sent shockwaves through China's foreign journalist community and two Australian journalists, Bill Birtles and Michael Smith, fled China shortly after being interrogated about Cheng. Months after Cheng's detention, Chinese authorities also detained a Bloomberg News employee, Haze Fan, also on allegations of endangering national security. — AFP

Nigeria's ruling party seeks unity before 2023 polls

ABUJA, Nigeria: Nigeria's ruling party held its national convention on Saturday to choose a new chairman and overcome infighting before picking a candidate to replace President Muhammadu Buhari in the 2023 election. The meeting in Abuja will look to end internal bickering that Buhari warned could harm party unity and its success in the vote.

Political manoeuvring is heating up to replace Buhari as leader of Africa's most populous nation but the race remains open with several heavyweights in the running. All Progressives Congress (APC) party leaders and delegates meet to select a new chairman and other posts in a final stage before primaries later this year for a presidential candidate.

Buhari, a former army commander who steps down after two terms, spent weeks talking to the party's state governors and senior members to try to reach a consensus on leadership before Saturday's assembly.

"Ensure that we go into this election united so we can win this election. I think this has been the message as far as the president is concerned," Abdullahi Sule, a state governor and senior APC member told local Channels TV. Formed in an alliance of several parties in 2013, the APC managed to win in 2015 over the long-ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), which at the time was struggling with its own internal splits.

Buhari, who came to power promising to bring security and fight corruption, steps down touting successes in infrastructure and transport projects across the country. But Nigeria is still battling jihadists in its northeast and its northwest region has been hit hard by criminal gangs behind a spate of attacks and mass kidnappings. Africa's largest economy and top petroleum producer is recovering from the coronavirus pandemic, but recent fuel and electricity shortages have underlined cost-of-living woes for Nigerians.

How the APC manages unity in its convention will determine whether it will struggle with further splits and high-profile defections before primaries and 2023, analysts said. "The outcome of the convention will either make or mar the party. We are aware of the bickerings, intrigues and horse tradings going on among the different groups," said Dr. Dapo Thomas, a political science lecturer at Lagos University. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2022

Boursa Kuwait's E-Annual General Assembly approves cash dividend of over KD 13m for 2021

Board of Directors recommends to distribute cash dividends of 65 fils per share

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait Securities Company (KPSC) held its E-Annual General Assembly (AGM) meeting for the year ended Dec 31, 2021 on Thursday, March 24, 2022, which saw the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 65 fils per share approved, with a total value of KD 13,050,424.

The cash dividends will be distributed to the company's registered shareholders by the end of day of the record date, which is scheduled to be 6 April 2022, and distributed among the shareholders by 10 April 2022, which is the scheduled payment date, as approved during a Board of Directors meeting following the AGM.

The Board of Directors' report, the Auditor's report and the consolidated audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended on December 31, 2021, were all approved, as were the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee reports and the Nominations and Remunerations Report for Board members and Executive Management.

The AGM was chaired by Vice Chairman Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari, who read the reports issued by the Kuwait Clearing Company's electronic system regarding the quorum of attendance, the results of participation and voting included in the agenda, as well as a report of the shareholders' notes. Shareholders also agreed to grant the Board of Directors authorization to buy or sell the company's shares, provided they do not exceed 10 percent, in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 7 of 2010 and its executive regulations and amendments, as well as discussing and approving the Related Parties' Transaction Report for 2021 and the related parties' transactions. The reappointment of Badr Adel Salem Al-Abduljader from Ernst & Young (Al-Aiban, Al-Osaimi & Partners) as the auditor for the fiscal year ending on Dec 31, 2022, was also approved.

During the meeting, shareholders elected the members of the Board of Directors for the upcoming three years, announcing the appointment of Hamad

Mishari Al-Humaidi, Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Talal Jassim Al-Bahar, Khaled Waleed Al-Falah, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, Faleh Abdullah Al-Rogobah, and Yousef Faisal Al-Mannai, while Bader Abdulmohsen Al-Jeaan, Jassem Hassan Zainal and Dalal Jaffar Behbehani were elected as alternates.

Moreover, during a Board of Directors meeting held after the AGM, Hamad Mishari Al-Humaidhi was appointed Chairman while Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari was voted Vice Chairman for the following three years.

Boursa Kuwait Vice Chairman Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari commented on the results, stating: "Boursa Kuwait delivered an exceptional financial performance for this year, with an increase in operating profit by 26.3% over the previous year, from KD 12.6 million to KD 15.9 million. The company continued to implement its operational strategy to reinforce its efficient contribution to fulfilling the "New Kuwait 2035" vision, making great strides in its path to be a leading stock exchange in the Middle East, and a market ranked by the most prominent global indicators."

Al-Kandari also highlighted the company's phenomenal performance this year, and the Board of Directors' commitment to supporting the company's strategy, showcasing the series of achievements and milestones that contributed to the development of the company and the Kuwaiti capital market.

"Boursa Kuwait continued to deliver on its promise to grow, elevating Kuwait's capital market apparatus through a commitment to its progressive strategy that keeps up with the best-in-class international standards and practices. The company also made great strides towards the sustainability of its operations as well as encouraging all market participants to adopt the best sustainable practices," Al-Kandari added.

Reaffirming its commitment to contributing to the "New Kuwait 2035" vision and the National Development Plan as well as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Boursa



Boursa Kuwait Vice Chairman
Bader Abdullah Al-Kandari



Boursa Kuwait Chief Executive Officer
Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi

Kuwait developed an ESG Reporting Guide that aims to support listed companies to report on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues, and to meet the growing needs of various stakeholders, including investors, customers, suppliers, and regulators for transparent and regular information. This is in addition to launching guided programs and initiatives in the major fields relevant to Corporate Sustainability and collaborating with its shareholders in leading national and international organizations.

Al-Kandari also extended his sincerest gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on behalf of Boursa Kuwait and its Board of Directors, for their continued support to the stability of Kuwait's economy and development.

Al-Kandari concluded by thanking the shareholders for their continuous trust in Boursa Kuwait, and the Capital Markets Authority, Kuwait Clearing Company, and all participants in the Kuwaiti capital market for their efforts in promoting Kuwait's position as a leading regional market and the State of Kuwait as a prominent destination for international investment.

Boursa Kuwait's Vice Chairman also thanked his fellow Board members and Executive Management for their diligence

and dedication in contributing to the realization of the company's strategy and goals, resulted in the notable improvement and progress of the Kuwaiti financial market by means of their wise counsel. He also thanked all company employees for their active contribution to these achievements.

Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer also commented on the company's results for 2021, saying, "Boursa Kuwait witnessed a marked increase in trading value and volume, with trading volume increasing by more than 57.9 percent from 53.6 billion to around 84.6 billion transactions, while traded value saw an increase of 26.6 percent, from around 10.7 billion Kuwaiti dinars to about KD 13.6 billion. The Kuwaiti capital market's market capitalization in 2021 was around KD 41.4 billion, an increase of around 28.4 percent from 2020."

Al-Osaimi drew attention to the company's key performance indicators, saying: "Boursa Kuwait's total assets stand at 110.4 million, a 6 percent increase from KD 104.2 million from 2020. Meanwhile, Boursa Kuwait's shareholder equity also increased by 14.8 percent, to KD 60.6 million from 52.8 million and the total operating revenue came in at 31 KD million, an increase of 39.7 percent compared to 2020's total of KD 22.2 million."

Al-Osaimi praised Boursa Kuwait's efforts to promote the Kuwaiti capital market globally, shedding light on the unique investment opportunities it offers. In 2021, the company held several virtual corporate days and roadshows, which attracted over 20 listed Kuwaiti companies, to provide insights and access to the international investment community through facilitated sessions and one-to-one meetings with institutional investors.

Al-Osaimi concluded his statement by thanking the Board of Directors for their unwavering support of the company's strategy and operations, as well as Executive Team members and every company employee, who have played significant roles to advance the development of the market. He also thanked the Capital Markets Authority, Kuwait Clearing Company, and brokerage firms whose expertise, knowledge and professionalism are reflected in every aspect of the successful development of Kuwait's capital market.

Al-Osaimi reiterated the company's commitment to modernize the Kuwaiti capital market by expanding its offerings and improving market efficiency, enhancing access and reinforcing transparency and governance as well as increasing liquidity and transparency, while fortifying investor confidence as part of the company's efforts to enhance and modernize the market and increase its asset classes.

Since its inception, the company has strived to develop a strong financial market with high liquidity and credibility through the implementation of a range of structural and technical developments and initiatives that will enhance the position of the exchange, regionally and globally. Boursa Kuwait continues to implement many steps in accordance with international practices and standards to transform Kuwait into a regional and global investment destination, by focusing on creating an attractive issuer base and broadening its investor base, increasing the depth and breadth of its products, as well as upgrading its infrastructure and business environment to international standards.

Zain 'Best Telecom Company' and 'Best Digital Transformation Company' in Kuwait during 2021

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, was named 'Best Telecom Company' and 'Best Digital Transformation Telecom Company' in Kuwait for the year 2021 during the annual excellence awards hosted by leading business magazine International Finance at Jumeirah Emirates Hotel, Dubai. International Finance Magazine presented the two awards to Zain - for the third time in its history - in recognition of the company's outstanding success, innovation, and relentless pursuit of excellence to serve its customer base, the biggest in Kuwait. Recently, Zain has achieved a number of milestones related to empowering digital transformation across Kuwait's private and public sectors.

Zain is proud of this recognition from International Finance Magazine, which also reflects the achievements of Kuwait's private sector organizations in contributing to national economy. The 2021 awards honored leading companies and institutions that have delivered success, innovation and excellence, as well as those that have made a vital contribution to the vibrancy of business within Kuwait and the region.

This recognition further strengthens Zain's role as a leader in the Kuwaiti private sector and reinforces the company's commitment in maintaining the values of its brand. Zain will continue its pledge to provide exclusive services to meet the needs of its customers and facilitate their personal and professional needs. As one of the most recognizable brands in Kuwait, Zain was recently ranked first in the 'Best Mobile Operator' category for the tenth time and the 'Best Internet Service Provider' category for the sixth time in Kuwait for the year 2021 by Service Hero, the Arab World's only 100 percent consumer powered customer satisfaction index.

In 2021, Zain received the Gulf Breakthrough Award from Dell Technologies, the global leader in technology solutions. The award recognized Zain's Strategic Partnership with Dell in driving digital transformation within the telecom and IT sector in the region, as well as its offering of advanced solutions across its B2B and B2C platforms as per world-class standards.

The award was a testament from one of the world's biggest technology leaders in Zain's capabilities



Event patron Kuwait's Consul General in Dubai and UAE's Northern Emirates Theyab Al-Rashidi presents Zain's awards to Waleed Al-Khashtli.

and contributions to empowering digital transformation. The award reflected the company's leadership in adopting the highest international standards to offer advanced solutions with fantastic service quality to its subscribers and corporate customers, whom it considers an essential part of the Zain family,

the biggest family of subscribers in Kuwait.

Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all services it offers to its customers. The company affirms its continuous efforts in meeting customers' needs and aspirations to deliver its promise and offer the best services and latest technologies.

Houngbo first African to head UN labor agency

GENEVA: Gilbert Houngbo, the former prime minister of Togo, was on Friday elected the next head of the International Labour Organization, and will become the first African to lead the UN agency. After two rounds of voting, the ILO's governing body elected the 61-year-old to succeed British trade unionist Guy Ryder, who steps down at the end of September, after 10 years in the job.

"You have made history," Houngbo told the governing body after the election. "I am deeply and absolutely honoured to be the first representative of the African region to be selected to lead the ILO after 103 years." Houngbo was chosen from among five candidates and had been seen in a strong position after the African Union threw its weight behind him.

Currently head of the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), he also enjoyed strong backing on the labor side. His opponents in the race were former French labour minister Muriel Penicaud, South Korea's ex-foreign minister Kang Kyung-wha, South African entrepreneur Mthunzi Mdwaba, and ILO deputy Greg Vines of Australia.

Houngbo's win marks a dramatic shift for the ILO, which since its founding in 1919 has been led only by men from Europe or the Americas. The oldest specialized UN agency has 187 member states, which are, uniquely in the UN system, represented by governments, employers and workers. The organization's governing body counts 56 members, with half of them representing governments, and a quarter each representing employers and workers. — AFP



Gilbert Houngbo

Business

German farmers in Ukraine press ahead in defiance of war

Corn, wheat and sunflower oil prices have soared in recent weeks

DEHRZIV, Ukraine: Every year in early spring, German farmers Torben Reelfs and Tim Nandelstaedt turn the soil and plant the first sugar beets of the season on their plot of land in western Ukraine. But this year, the ritual has taken on a new meaning. "It's very symbolic. When the machine turns over the land, it's a different feeling than in previous years," said Reelfs, 41, speaking to AFP by phone from the farm about 60 km from Lviv.

When Russian troops invaded Ukraine on February 24, Reelfs and Nandelstaedt immediately fled to Germany to "get away from the missiles, to be on the territory of the EU, of NATO", according to Nandelstaedt, 43. "At first I thought that Russia would get to the Polish border very quickly," he said. But three weeks later, both of them were back in Derzhiv, their adopted home for the last 10 years. "What we are seeing here, the solidarity on a military and a humanitarian level, is inspiring and gives you hope," said Reelfs.

'Poker game'

With the west of Ukraine so far largely spared from the deadly fighting raging in the south and east, the two men decided to go ahead and start sowing their crops. The pair had already managed to secure the fuel, fertilizer and seeds they needed. They began by sowing the sugar beets, which will be followed by corn in around two weeks' time and soybeans in around two months.

It's too early to tell whether the crops will ever be harvested, but for now, Reelfs is sure it was "the right

decision". He also feels "a certain responsibility" to "reduce the risk of catastrophic famines" around the world as a result of the war. Before the Russian invasion, Ukraine was the world's fourth largest exporter of corn and was on its way to becoming the third largest exporter of wheat behind Russia and the United States.

Corn, wheat and sunflower oil prices have already soared in recent weeks and the situation looks set to worsen if the "breadbasket of Europe" is unable to keep up with the usual supplies. The two German farmers know that going ahead with the harvest is a huge risk — a "poker game", according to Reelfs. "What will happen in six months, when we harvest, I honestly have no idea," said Nandelstaedt. "Some farms have already been hit by missiles or attacked by ground troops. Fields are burning. If that happens here, it will be over."

'Adventure'

Reelfs and Nandelstaedt have spent the last decade building up their farm in Ukraine, which covers 1,900 hectares of land and employs 25 people. The business partners, who have been friends for over a decade, were among a wave of farmers who took up leases on land in Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union, attracted by the cheap prices and fertile soil. They liked the idea of an "adventure" and the chance to build everything from scratch, according to Reelfs.

Between 2008 and 2009, "we visited almost 50 vil-



DEHRZIV, Ukraine: German farmers Tim Nandelstaedt (left) and Torben Reelfs pose on the field of their farm in western Ukraine on March 23, 2022. — AFP

lages and there was still available land everywhere", he said. "When we started out, you could rent a hectare of land for 17 euros (\$18.70) and could even pay in kind, with wheat or sugar. Today, we pay well over 100 euros here and it is more than 200 euros in many regions." It's a sign of how much Ukraine has changed over the years, he said: "Corruption has greatly decreased... and the standard of living has got better and better."

Reelfs believes it has been a surprise to the Russian

forces to see that "people are not at all unhappy with their government, they want to support the army and defend their country". During their stay in Germany, Reelfs and Nandelstaedt collected 130,000 euros in donations for Ukraine and helped to arrange accommodation for around about 170 people in villages around Berlin. "Even though they all feel welcome there, they want to return to Ukraine as soon as possible," said Reelfs. — AFP



LUBUMBASHI: (Left) Francoise Yumba, director of the Kibalamite primary school since 1975 and who is awaiting retirement for more than 30 years, poses for in her office on Feb 14, 2022. (Right) Bayard Kumwimba Dyuba, 84, a teacher since 1968 and who is awaiting retirement, teaches in his 5th year primary classroom at the Kiwele II primary application school on Feb 14, 2022. — AFP



DRC civil servants work until the end of their lives

KINSHASA: They are past 70 and sometimes even 100 years old. Many civil servants in the Democratic Republic of Congo work until their last days, hoping for a pension and recognition that never comes. "I would like the state to close my career with honor," says Bayard Kumwimba Dyuba, 84, a primary school teacher in Lubumbashi, the main town in the southeast of the vast central African country. Dyuba is a short, jovial man with a sharp mind, plagued by a bent back and "difficult hearing". "I started teaching in 1968, on September 9. It's the job I chose... I don't want to give it up," he says after the question has been repeated. He teaches a class of 35 pupils aged 11 or 12. "But I am at the end of my strength."

Then why doesn't he retire? "I want to leave," Dyuba says. "But not like that, with nothing! I would like to be given what I deserve." He estimates that \$30,000 (27,320 euros) would be the fair "final tally" on his departure, followed by a regular pension. But for years, many teachers and administrative workers have been forgotten, despite a 2016 law stipulating that those who have reached the age of 65 or have accumulated 35 years of career are eligible for retirement.

'Almost abandoned'

"We are neglected, almost abandoned," declares Dyuba, who says he earns a monthly salary of 370,000 Congolese francs (\$185). In another primary school close to his, the headmistress is 78 years old. Francoise Yumba Mitwele entered the profession in 1962. "It was my vocation, I love to teach," she says, upright and dapper in her colorful African wrap.

Like Dyuba, she is tired but continues to work, because she is also waiting for "a sum to leave". She evaluates this departure payment at \$25,000, which would suffice to buy a house for her children.

Sunak's rising star loses some of its shine

LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak is being accused of being out of touch with ordinary voters, in a sudden fall from grace just months after he was tipped as the next prime minister. The star of the 41-year-old Chancellor of the Exchequer had been in ascendancy for his handling of public finances as the coronavirus pandemic devastated jobs and businesses. But it has lost some of its lustre following a mini-budget on Wednesday which he said was designed to tackle cost-of-living pressures that are soaring.

At the same time, he is facing awkward questions about his billionaire wife and her father, whose company has had to play down its business ties in Russia. Sunak - who has billed himself as a low-tax Conservative - was branded a "fiscal illusionist" by a think-tank for claiming to cut taxes but allowing the overall tax burden to rise. What he hailed as "the largest single personal tax cut in a decade" in fact set taxes on course to rise to their highest level as a frac-

Last September, Minister of the Public Service Jean-Pierre Lihau estimated the number of civil service agents eligible for retirement at 350,000. "14,000 are over 90 years old, 256 are centenarians. The oldest is 110 years old," he said, affirming that he wanted to work for a "gradual departure of those concerned to a retirement that is dignified compared to the past".

"It's been heard before, every minister says the same thing and then nothing happens," protests lawyer Hubert Tshiswaka, director of the Human Rights Research Institute in Lubumbashi, which defends the cases of former public service employees eligible for retirement. "The pensions do not come and the old dads and old mothers die in misery!" Tshiswaka criticizes the "embezzlement" of public money and the "impunity" that goes with it.

Mitwele is also skeptical, because since the government minister's declarations, nothing has changed. "I would like to leave with my head held high," insists the headmistress, who also asks that her work over the years be recognized. "We don't even have a medal, which we could leave to our grandchildren," she says, her sadness shot through with anger.

'We are waiting'

On the far side of the country, in the capital Kinshasa, "Petit Pierre" clings to the banister as he climbs a rickety staircase up to his office, on the first floor of a blue house in the Singa Mopepe district of which he is the chief. At 80, Yantula Bobina Pierre Elengeza, his real name, is pleased to work "for a great service of the state".

As head of the district in Lingwala commune, he receives the inhabitants, settles their neighborhood or housing grievances, and takes censuses. In 1960, he was a percussionist in the African Jazz rumba orchestra of Joseph Kabasele, alias Le Grand Kalle, author of the cult title "Independence Cha Cha". Petit Pierre gave up music after a serious car accident in 1963 when his leg was amputated. "I have a prosthesis, I'm used to it," he says. Every day except Sunday, he wakes up at 3:00 a.m. to avoid traffic jams en route to his office. When asked if his work is tiring, he does not mention his age but regrets not having a computer. — AFP

tion of national income since just after World War II.

Paul Johnson, head of the Institute for Fiscal Studies think-tank, said Sunak had done nothing to protect the poorest by increasing welfare payments in line with inflation. "He continues, despite his rhetoric, to be a chancellor presiding over a very big increase in the tax burden," he told reporters on Thursday. "What he did was not enough even to stop the expected tax burden rising yet further."

Sunak's headline policy was a cut in fuel duty by five pence (\$0.07) for a year. But that reduction was immediately swallowed up by rising fuel costs attributed to market instability blamed on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The chancellor - nicknamed "Dishy Rishi" because of his slick Instagram-ready profile - was then photographed filling up a car at a supermarket petrol station. But the car in question, a humble Kia Rio, did not belong to the wealthy former Goldman Sachs analyst, but had been borrowed from a supermarket employee. He then appeared confused as to how to pay for the fuel and a can of soft drink at the check-out.

Russia questions

The fall-out from Wednesday has dogged Sunak, with unfavorable headlines even from normally supportive newspapers. He has also had to fend off questions about his wider family. On Thursday, he was

Zimbabweans get groceries from abroad

HARARE: Zimbabwean Clever Murape has his groceries delivered, like people around the world - only his don't come from a local shop. His rice, oil and washing powder make a 600-km trip from neighboring South Africa to his small brick home in a dusty township of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. The groceries are brought by runners known as "malayitsha" - literally "people who carry things" - and they're just one sign of how much of Zimbabwe's economy now takes place beyond its borders.

"My older sister sends groceries through malayitsha every month which is enough for the family," Murape, 35, told AFP. His sister lives in South Africa and has used online deliveries to help out since Murape lost his job as a scrap metal dealer during the pandemic. "It has really helped me. There are 10 of us here, including some of her children and our sick mother. We just must ration this food so that we don't go hungry."

In Zimbabwe's turbulent economy, two liters of cooking oil costs \$4.50 (just over four euros) if he buys it locally. But if he buys it from across the border in South Africa, it's \$3.50 - including delivery. Once synonymous with hyperinflation, Zimbabwe is seeing prices soar once again. Inflation ran at 66 percent in February.

Early this month, the government raised fuel prices twice within a week, driven mainly by the Ukraine war which has hit oil supplies. Unlike during earlier bouts of inflation, now an entire genre of mobile apps and websites has emerged to help Zimbabweans survive. "Clients get in touch via WhatsApp, select the groceries they want, pay into a South African account and

then I deliver," said Mason Mapuranga, a 44-year-old runner.

Branching out

He crosses the border up to three times a month, travelling along poorly maintained two-lane roads. Sometimes he's held up for days by delays at the border post. But he says it's worth the work. Mapuranga and his staff get paid in South Africa, sparing them the uncertainties of Zimbabwe's dollar. All they do in Zimbabwe is deliver.

The demand has handed opportunities to companies such as Mukuru, a fintech firm that started over a decade ago operating largely as a money transfer business mainly for Zimbabweans in the UK and South Africa. Now it works in 21 countries across Africa and Asia, and delivers groceries and school supplies in Zimbabwe and Malawi. It offers fixed baskets with basic groceries, but newer players like Ahoyi Africa and Malaicha.com allow people to choose what they want to buy. Some companies have branched into other financial services like insurance, and even repatriation of remains.

Ukraine war price pressure

Zimbabwe has about 15 million people but another three million are believed to have migrated to other countries, mainly South Africa, but also across the world. The World Bank says that the diaspora sends home \$1.8 billion a year, accounting for more than 10 percent of the country's GDP. There are no reliable estimates for the international shopping economy because all the financial transactions happen outside of the country.

Local retailers admit that their prices are higher but say they are forced to navigate a complex system of currency controls and erratic local supplies. The import trade is only set to grow after Zimbabwe earlier this month lifted border controls imposed during the pandemic, said Confederation of Zimbabwe Retailers president Denford Mutashu. — AFP



HARARE: A woman stands with her packages received from South Africa at a bus rank on March 21, 2022. — AFP

grilled over his wife Akshata Murthy's share in the Indian IT giant, Infosys, which was co-founded by her father N R Narayana Murthy. She owns a stake in the company worth around \$1.0 billion, according to the company's disclosure to the stock exchange.

With Britain and others seeking to isolate Russia economically over its invasion of Ukraine, he was asked whether Infosys was also reducing its presence there. "I have absolutely no idea because I have nothing to do with that company," an uncomfortable-looking Sunak told Sky News. "I am an elected politician

and I'm here to talk to you about what I am responsible for, my wife is not." Infosys itself said it had committed \$1.0 million towards relief efforts for victims of the war, saying it has "a small team of employees based out of Russia, that services some of our global clients, locally."

Personal wealth

Sunak's private wealth and the fortunes of his in-laws are more than likely to be used again as a weapon by his political opponents, particularly in financially straitened times. He was once dubbed "the Maharajah of the Yorkshire Dales" in a magazine profile, in a reference to his rural constituency in northern England. But his background is comparatively humble: His father was a doctor and mother a pharmacist, and he grew up in Southampton, on England's south coast.

He became the first person born in the 1980s to hold one of the top four jobs in British politics, after a career in finance and a first-class degree at Oxford University. Sunak and Murthy married in 2009, in a relatively modest affair, but the reception was attended by around 1,000 guests including politicians, industrialists and cricketers. Murthy's personal wealth has previously raised questions in the British media, with some of her reportedly lavish presents to her husband, including a £180 "smart mug" and £95 sliders, causing him embarrassment. — AFP



LONDON: This file photo taken on Feb 9, 2022 shows Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak with his wife Akshata Murthy during a reception to celebrate the British Asian Trust at The British Museum. — AFP

Business

Yes or No? Amazon union vote gets underway in New York

Skepticism about ALU's unproven track record

STATEN ISLAND, New York: Under hazy skies and in the calm of morning, workers waited patiently in line outside the JFK8 warehouse Friday for a say on whether to establish Amazon's first US labor union. The six-day election at the Staten Island warehouse, overseen by US officials, opens the polls to the facility's 5,000 workers for five hours each morning and then again in the evening for another five-hour round.

Led by former and current workers, Amazon Labor Union (ALU) qualified for a vote on unionization after obtaining signatures from 30 percent of the workforce. But majority support will be needed if Amazon is to have its first union since the company was established in 1994. Most of the workers who spoke with AFP shortly after the polls first opened Friday were not in favor of the campaign.

"The pay is more than minimum wage, we have benefits like health insurance from day one, and if I need something, I go directly to my manager," said Georgina Aponte, who was voting no. Each morning, Aponte, 40, takes a ferry, a subway and two buses from her Bronx home to Amazon. The trip takes two hours each way. "I like working here," she said.

Others expressed sympathy with the goals of the union, but skepticism about the group's unproven track record. "I give them a lot of credit for doing what they're doing," said Vinny T., before adding, "I think we have more to lose than gain." The Amazon job is "not that difficult," said the 57-year-old, who has worked in other unionized companies before.

Company texts 'Vote NO'

Another worker, Angel Arce, said he is not crazy

about the fact that Amazon's pay scale does not boost wages after three years. But "they are not experienced," Arce said of the union. Natalie Monarrez came to vote holding a sign that read "I joined ALU, I left ALU, I'm voting NO." Monarrez, who has worked for Amazon for five years, joined the campaign in May 2021 shortly after the group formed, but gave up on the ALU in January.

"We absolutely need a union," Monarrez said. "We're working for the richest man on the planet, literally," Monarrez said of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who sits near the top of Forbes' billionaire list. "The least they can do is give us a living wage and at least address the issues like harassment, discrimination, ageism, lack of promotions, lack of opportunity," she said.

But Monarrez said workers need an "experienced national union," not a "small independent union that's run by boys who have no experience". At a nearby bus stop, separated by the warehouse fence-line, stood Christian Smalls, the president of the ALU, who had been on hand since 7 am. Smalls, 33, was fired in March 2020 after organizing a campaign to demand personal protective equipment during the height of COVID-19.

He dismissed the criticism over his track record. Large national unions "had 28 years to do something," he said. If workers are waiting for an established group to come along, "they are going to wait a long time," he added. Smalls said he is hopeful about the vote and about a second election at another Amazon facility in Staten Island next month.

The company has been holding meetings with workers in an effort to stay union-free. "They are



STATEN ISLAND: Workers queue to cast their vote to unionize outside an Amazon warehouse on March 25, 2022. —AFP

telling us to vote no," said a young male worker who has sat for 30-minute weekly meetings the last three weeks. The worker, who did not want to give his name, also has received "No" texts from the compa-

ny, as well as a call from the ALU. "They were fair," the worker said of the union, adding that he voted "yes". The vote count is expected to start on March 31 and could take as long as several days. —AFP

ABK launches A+ Student Account with exciting features

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has launched the new A+ Student Account, purpose-built to encourage a healthy savings culture amongst the youth. The A+ Student Account reinforces ABK's commitment to financial literacy and educating the community, particularly young adults, on building a healthy financial foundation. In addition, the easy-to-open A+ Student Account is also a valuable tool for students in Colleges and Universities for the transfer of the Educational Allowance.

Upon the transfer of the educational allowance, A+ Student Account holders will receive a KD 50 instant cash gift upon allowance transfer and are eligible to enter the annual draw to win a 2022 Fiat 500 car. ABK A+ Student Account holders will also get a free prepaid card and can avail of the exclusive VOX Cinemas offer 'Buy 1 and Get 2 Tickets' across the country.

Speaking on the newly launched A+ Student Account, Johair Marafi, Acting General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, said, "We are proud to launch the new A+ Student which promotes financial literacy amongst young adults, effectively contributing to the development of a more responsible and efficient society. ABK delivers on its 'Simpler Banking' promise with this new launch, integrating customer needs with relevant products and services to ensure a more straightforward yet vibrant banking experience."

Johair Marafi continued, "Reaching the youth of Kuwait is an important component of ABK's outreach strategy. Not only do we look to employing the younger generation and helping them navigate their careers, we also incorporate their feedback as we develop products that fit their lifestyle. The A+ Student account is a banking proposition for young adults intended to incentivise a savings culture and encourage financial discipline, which is pivotal for their futures. The A+ Student account supplements the customers' lifestyle, offering them more exclusive services and the opportunity to win exciting gifts, including a 2022 Fiat 500 car."

The all-new A+ Student account is customised for youth between 16 - 25 years, ushering them to embrace the culture of financial responsibility and cashless payments as they begin their journey of financial independency. The A+ Student account offers the youth an array of banking services, a personalised debit card, and exclusive offers catered to their lifestyle.



Johair Marafi

KFH: Partnership between Qatar Airways Privilege Club and Baitak Rewards Program

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced its partnership with Qatar Airways Privilege Club through the Baitak Rewards Program. The partnership will allow members of Baitak Rewards to exchange their points for Avios, Privilege Club's new reward currency, using the Baitak Rewards mobile app or website. This new collaboration represents a significant addition for the program's customers, who will now be able to enjoy even more exciting rewards with Privilege Club, the loyalty program of the World's Best Airline as awarded by Skytrax.

The partnership will encourage and enhance the use of KFH credit and prepaid cards inside and outside Kuwait by providing KFH customers with more opportunities to spend Baitak points that they earn on every KD 1.

KFH Executive Manager Credit and Charge Card Products, Talal Al-Arbeed said that the new partnership with Qatar Airways Privilege Club is considered a new development in the rewards program which they have always worked to achieve. KFH customers will be able to exchange the earned points with Avios and enjoy award flights, cabin upgrades, extra baggage allowance, and even part-pay up to 50 percent of their flight bookings with the enhanced Cash + Avios.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Akbar Al-Baker, said: "Through our latest collaboration with KFH, we are offering our Privilege Club

members in Kuwait a new way to earn Avios with which they can access unique flight rewards and travel experiences, as they venture off to a new corner of the world and immerse themselves in new cultures."

Al-Arbeed emphasized that there are 3 different categories of cards in the Rewards Program. Each category determines the exclusive and special offers which the customer will get. Card categories include black cards and silver cards which entitle the holder to earn points and perform online shopping.

Also, the holders may transfer KFH points to any other member in the program. As for the holders of green cards, they will be able to earn points through shops participating in Baitak Rewards program only. Total KFH points may be added within 24 hours after each purchase transaction which is qualified to earn points provided that the customer is not a participant in any other credit cards promotional program.

He reiterated that the program followed the several developments made on KFH credit cards including shape, services and advantages which are aimed to encourage customers to use cards and benefit from the available advantages mainly security and easy use. The banking cards have become a global language and a safe method for financial transacting especially during travel.

He said that KFH provided the most modern pay-

various products and services that are characterized by growth, simplicity and innovation, as we continue to exceed the requirements and needs of our customers. Our team continues to pay close attention to the smallest of details in keeping with developments in the local and international banking market as we continue to consolidate Gulf Bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future."

Exclusive Loyalty Program

As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to reward customers for their loyalty, the AIDanah account provides account holders with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing AIDanah customers in 2021 have been transferred and added to the 2022 chances, and this will be repeated in 2023 onwards. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank encourages AIDanah account holders to increase their chances of winning by increasing the amounts deposited into their accounts. With Gulf Bank, depositing into an AIDanah account is now easier than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts using the ePay service, available through the Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services.

The AIDanah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive AIDanah ATM card, ideal for depositing money into their accounts at any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the AIDanah Calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

Opening an AIDanah Account

Gulf Bank's AIDanah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming AIDanah draws. If the customer's



Akbar Al-Baker



Talal Al-Arbeed

ment methods for customers locally and globally including digital wallet, smart watches, and mobiles in collaboration with the largest global applications: Samsung, Pay, Fitbit and Garmin including Visa and Mastercard. These cards are compatible with NFC technology, smart phones, iPad working on Android and IOS systems.

KFH also launched several campaigns to enhance the use of credit cards and give customers a unique banking experience and several chances to win valuable prizes including a Land Rover (Defender). KFH had previously launched "Ready for Summer" campaign and another campaign for the use of digital wallets, smart watches, and mobiles by its customers through Samsung Pay, Fitbit and Garmin.

account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days. To participate in this year's upcoming quarterly and annual AIDanah draws, customers must maintain the required balance.

To deposit into an AIDanah account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. In addition, customers can visit the dedicated AIDanah account website to learn more about the account and its winners.

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



Mohammed Al-Qattan

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo US screenwriter Sian Heder poses with the award for an Adapted Screenplay for the film 'CODA' at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards at the Royal Albert Hall in London.



In this file photo Daniel Durant, Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur, Sian Heder, guest, Fabrice Gianfermi, Philippe Rousselet and Patrick Wachsberger accept the Darryl F Zanuck Award for Outstanding Producer of Theatrical Motion Pictures for 'CODA' from Kristen Stewart onstage during the 33rd Annual Producers Guild Awards at Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles, California. — AFP photos

With 'CODA,' French producer revisits story and heads to Oscars

“CODA” producer Philippe Rousselet is pleased, but not surprised, that his heartwarming drama about a deaf family is now a hot favorite for best picture at the Oscars on Sunday. He always knew the story was good-so good he made it twice. “La Famille Belier” was a formidably successful comedy, as we like them in France,” Rousselet told AFP, referring to the original on which the Apple TV+ hit is based. “With ‘CODA,’ (director) Sian Heder has made it an American film as Americans like them-more of a dramatic comedy.

“I think both films took the best of what we know how to do in each country.” By domestic French standards, “La Famille Belier” (The Belier Family) was a hit, with three million people seeing it in theaters after its release in late 2014. “CODA” (an acronym for Child of Deaf Adults) had only a limited theatrical run and then went straight to streaming, where it has been an audience hit that has also pleased critics.

Both movies follow the fortunes of a

high school teen as she juggles her musical ambitions with her family’s dependence on her to communicate with the hearing world. In both versions, much of the dialogue is done in sign language. To make “CODA,” Emilia Jones, who plays teenager Ruby, and writer-director Heder both learned to sign.

But while “La Famille Belier” featured hearing stars playing deaf characters, the equivalent roles in “CODA” went to lesser-known actors who are deaf-the exception being past Oscar winner Marlee Matlin (“Children of a Lesser God,” “The West Wing”). “French films are largely financed by television. To make ‘La Famille Belier,’ we had to have known and recognized actors,” explains Rousselet. Ten years later, “it was obvious to us that we had to make ‘CODA’ with deaf actors.”

Reputation

“CODA” has gathered a head of steam in recent weeks, its reputation swelling as it picked up awards from the Screen Actors Guild, the Producers Guild of



In this file photo US screenwriter Sian Heder poses after being awarded for an Adapted Screenplay for the film 'CODA' at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

America and the BAFTAs. It is now neck-and-neck in most predictions for the top Oscars prize of best picture with “The Power of the Dog.” Jane Campion’s brooding Western about toxic masculinity. Adding to its momentum is that Troy Kotsur seems to be a shoo-in for best supporting actor honors, for his funny and

moving portrayal of Ruby’s eccentric father.

Like its predecessor, “CODA” was made relatively cheaply, its \$15 million budget less than a tenth of the cost of special effects-laden blockbuster “Dune”—a fellow best picture nominee. “It’s not really a question of budget; the story is unique and very strong,” says Rousselet. “This film deserves to be where it is in this period in which we live. It’s an important film, a film that does good.” And since the second time around is working out so well, the story looks like it’s going to get a third outing.

Rousselet is already working on a Broadway adaptation in the form of a musical, in partnership with a theater company composed of deaf actors. And success on the New York stage won’t be a surprise to Rousselet either. It’s all down to the content, he says. “It touches people and brings them together with its human values.”—AFP

Best picture Oscar winners of past 20 years

The following is a list of the best picture Oscar winners from the last 20 years, ahead of Sunday’s 94th Academy Awards in Hollywood. This year, 10 films are in contention for the top prize: “Belfast,” “CODA,” “Don’t Look Up,” “Drive My Car,” “Dune,” “King Richard,” “Licorice Pizza,” “Nightmare Alley,” “The Power of the Dog” and “West Side Story.”

- 2021 - “Nomadland”
- 2020 - “Parasite”
- 2019 - “Green Book”
- 2018 - “The Shape of Water”
- 2017 - “Moonlight”
- 2016 - “Spotlight”
- 2015 - “Birdman”
- 2014 - “12 Years A Slave”
- 2013 - “Argo”
- 2012 - “The Artist”
- 2011 - “The King’s Speech”
- 2010 - “The Hurt Locker”
- 2009 - “Slumdog Millionaire”
- 2008 - “No Country for Old Men”
- 2007 - “The Departed”
- 2006 - “Crash”
- 2005 - “Million Dollar Baby”
- 2004 - “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King”
- 2003 - “Chicago”
- 2002 - “A Beautiful Mind”—AFP

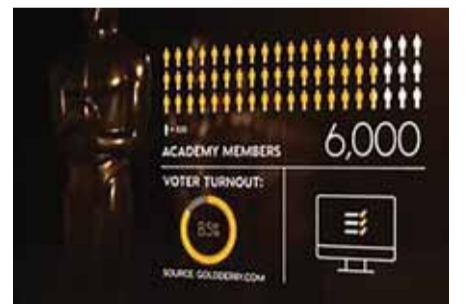


How are the nominees chosen?

Members of each of the 17 branches pick the nominees in their area of expertise. The actors’ branch—the largest voting group—submits nominations for the acting categories, directors submit nominations for best director and so on. Nominations for certain awards, like for best international film and best animated feature, are chosen by special committees. The entire membership votes to choose the nominees for best picture.

How are the winners chosen?

All voting members choose the winners. In 22 of 23 categories, the person with the most votes is the winner. But when it comes to the coveted best picture award, the Oscar voters have since 2009 used a complicated preferential ballot system in which they rank the films from most favorite to least favorite. As of this year, the Academy has returned to featuring 10 nominees in the category. If one film garners more than 50 percent of the vote outright, it automatically wins. Otherwise, the count unfolds in rounds—the film that received the lowest number of first-place votes is eliminated and those votes given to it are then allocated to the voters’ second choice.



The process of elimination continues until there is one film left with more than 50 percent of the vote. “The idea of the preferential ballot is to reflect the wishes of the greatest number of voters,” explained Ric Robertson, who was the Academy’s chief operating officer in 2009 when the process changed. “Otherwise you might end up with a movie that, say, 25 percent of the people love and the rest can’t stand,” he told the Los Angeles Times. “This way, hopefully, you have a winner that most people can live with.”

New ‘fan favorite’ prize

On Sunday, a new award will be bestowed on the year’s most popular film as voted for by fans, either on Twitter or a special website—but don’t call it an Oscar. The new award is not a formal category. Movie fans were able to vote up to 20 times per day until March 3. They also were asked to choose their favorite movie “cheer moment.” The Academy is hoping the new prizes might boost flagging viewership by possibly honoring crowd-pleasing blockbusters such as “Spider-Man: No Way Home.”—AFP

Six things to watch for at the Oscars

Will Hollywood go political about Ukraine at the Oscars on Sunday? Will director Jane Campion walk away with a golden statuette? Will records be broken? And will millions of viewers ever get “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” out of their heads? Here are six things to watch for at the ceremony:

Ukraine

The optics of millionaires giving each other prizes while war rages in Ukraine is a delicate issue for producers to handle. Host Amy Schumer pitched for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to speak at the ceremony via video. At a press conference, the show’s producer Will Packer declined to “definitively say one way or another,” while co-host Wanda Sykes quipped: “Isn’t he busy right now?” Still, the show will address Ukraine in an “organic” and “thoughtful” way, Sykes added—and Oscar winners are almost certain to mention Russia’s invasion throughout the night in their acceptance speeches.

‘Twitter Oscars’?

Producers have introduced two prizes chosen by popular vote for the ceremony—a “fan favorite” film from this year, and an “Oscars cheer moment” from any movie in history. While winners won’t receive actual Academy Awards, disgruntled critics complain that “real” prizes are being forced to make way for a “Twitter Oscars,” given that a handful of awards will be presented ahead of the main broadcast.



In this file photo US director-producer Lin-Manuel Miranda arrives for the 33rd Annual Producers Guild Awards at the Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles.



This combination of pictures shows Regina Hall, Amy Schumer and Wanda Sykes. — AFP

“As if we’re going to have a random Twitter user hand an Oscar to Meryl Streep! That’s not what’s happening,” said Packer. “Sometimes the show has felt like ‘It’s just us, just Hollywood, no one else is invited,’” he added. “This year, we want it to be a little more open in our embrace of the public.” How the prizes will be handed out—and how the experiment will be received—remains to be seen.

‘Godfather’ and Bond anniversaries

The gala will honor not just the movies nominated this year, but also timeless classics such as “The Godfather,” which turned 50 this week. “We’re going to have Francis Ford Coppola’s classic, we’re going to honor it. We got some surprises around that, wink wink,” said Packer. Packer also hinted that “60 years of Bond” would be “on the show.” The first 007 outing, “Dr No,” was released in 1962. Billie Eilish is already set to perform her theme song from latest Bond flick “No Time to Die.” What else is in store?

Power of the women

“Power of the Dog” director Jane Campion recently suggested it was “time to claim a sense of victory” in breaking Hollywood’s glass ceiling for women. Sunday’s Oscars could further that claim. Campion is expected to become the



In this file photo New Zealand director Jane Campion poses in the press room with the award for Best Director for “The Power of the Dog” at the 27th Annual Critics Choice Awards at the Fairmont Century Plaza hotel in Los Angeles.

Who votes for the Oscars, and how does it work?

Millions of television viewers around the globe will tune in Sunday to watch the Oscars, the glitziest night in showbiz, but most don’t know how the winners are chosen. Answer: nearly 9,500 people in the entertainment industry select the honorees. The number is again a record high this year. But who are they and how did they get to become voters? Here is a look at the complex, sometimes confounding process that leads to the winners of the 23 Academy Awards, and the new fan favorite award:

Who votes?

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles had 9,487 voting members as of mid-January, according to its website. Academy membership is divided into 17 branches—actors, directors, producers, costume designers and so on—and candidates must be active or otherwise have “achieved distinction” in the industry. Applicants must be sponsored by two Academy members representing their branch. Oscar winners and nominees are automatically considered for membership and do not need sponsors.

Applications are reviewed once a year in the spring by the Academy’s Board of Governors, which has the final say on who joins the elite group. Members used to enjoy voting rights for life but since 2016, “voting status” has been limited to 10 years, and is renewable, to avoid having voters who are no longer active in the business. Lifetime voting rights only come after three 10-year terms. Those not active become “emeritus” members who cannot vote.

Who are the Academy members?

For a long time, the Academy did not reveal its voting roll, though nothing prevents a member from saying he or she can cast a ballot. At the time of the #OscarsSoWhite uproar in 2015 and 2016, about the lack of nominees of color, the Academy revealed that of its 6,000 members, 93 percent were white and 76 percent were men. The median age was 63. The Academy announced it would double the number of women and minority members by 2020 to foster a more diverse environment.

Last year, it admitted just 395 new members, after years of rapid expansion to meet those goals. The 2021 class was 46 percent female, 39 percent of minority background, and more than half from outside the United States.

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This picture shows enthusiasts photographing a commuter train near a railway track in Hasuda, Saitama prefecture. — FP photos



Tsutomu Okawa posing with his photography equipment following an interview with AFP near a railway track after photographing trains in Hasuda.



Train-themed keychains collected by Tsutomu Okawa during an interview with AFP.

Japan's hardcore train fans accused of going off the rails

Crowding, confrontations and full-on attacks. Japan's many train fans are mostly mild-mannered enthusiasts passionate about the country's famed rail system, but a small group is gaining surprising notoriety. Japan's railway system has long inspired envy around the world, with its famed punctuality, cutting-edge technology and meticulous timetables. So it's no surprise that the country is home to a diverse landscape of train buffs, from those who enjoy poring over timetables to others who adore and even record the rumbling sound of passing trains.

Perhaps the best-known group, however, is a tribe dubbed "toritetsu" (train photographers), who strive to take perfect photos of approaching trains. They have been around for decades, but in recent years, reports of shouting matches, trespassing and even violence at stations have turned toritetsu into the bad boys of Japanese trainspotting. Some argue the out-of-control behavior isn't entirely new, citing frenzied farewells for retiring steam

locomotives in the 1960s and '70s.

But recent incidents, including the harassment of a photobombing cyclist and an assault that left a teen with a fractured skull last year, have some enthusiasts worried. "The manners have gotten worse for sure," lamented septuagenarian Masao Oda, who has been taking train photos for about 50 years.

'I love everything about trains'

It's an uncomfortable feeling for toritetsu like 27-year-old Akira Takahashi. "People now point fingers at me," said Takahashi, whose fondest obsession is the EF66 electric locomotive model, which he describes as his "idol." "The negative image of us now prevails... I don't want to be lumped together with some of us who are causing trouble." Most fans are more like 19-year-old Ryunosuke Takagai, a university student who has been known to get up at five in the morning to document his passion and sometimes takes on part-time factory work to finance his hobby. "I

love everything about trains—their sound, their atmosphere," he told AFP.

"That moment when you succeed in capturing the train you'd spent hours waiting for is truly fulfilling," he said. The increasingly raucous behavior of some toritetsu may be driven by their pursuit of the perfect photo, according to Jun Umehara, a freelance railway journalist formerly at one of Japan's top train magazines. He says factors including fewer "retiring" trains and more urban development mean hobbyist photographers are squeezed into smaller spaces as they chase their dream pictures. "Every train has its last moment, which, for them, is the last missing piece of the puzzle they need to make their photo collection complete," he said. "The idea of missing that final piece is almost unbearable for them," added Umehara. "Hence the desperation."

No longer 'the enemy'

Housing development over the years has also seen some old shooting spots

razed, making it even harder for toritetsu to emulate the "impeccable" train photos they grew up admiring. The images, featured by Japan's niche railway magazines with their devoted toritetsu readership, are often taken with a clear view of trains—devoid of obstacles like fences, trees and passengers.

"But imitating these exemplary photos in real-life situations is almost impossible," Umehara said. "And yet, that's what they're after." The community of train fans encompasses a diverse group of enthusiasts, including "noritetsu", who simply enjoy riding on trains, "ekibentetsu", who focus on the ekiben bento—boxed meals sold at train stations, and "soshikitetsu", so-called "mourners" of retiring trains.

Nationwide, there were an estimated five million train fans—from casual to hardcore—in 2015, according to Nobuaki Takada, a senior consultant at Tokyo-based firm NRI Social Information System Services. And encroaching toritetsu have become an increasing problem for rail

operators, which have often responded with heavier security.

But last year, industry behemoth East Japan Railway Company, commonly known as JR East, changed tack and launched an official fan club for train enthusiasts. "Toritetsu can actually be counted on to take beautiful pictures of our trains and promote them on the internet," said Yusuke Yamamoto, an official with subsidiary JR East Start UP Co. "So instead of treating them as our enemy, we wanted to build a good relationship with them through this fan community." He wants to see the community overcome the stigma associated with its fringe elements, citing the way anime and manga obsessives have become more mainstream and less socially isolated in Japan. "Toritetsu is a culture, and I hope its image will change," Yamamoto said.—AFP

Consuming artificial sweeteners linked to cancer risk: Study

Consuming artificial sweetener could increase the risk of developing cancer, a large-scale study suggested Thursday, but experts not involved in the research said it was not enough proof to consider changing current health advice. Sweeteners are consumed by millions every day in products like diet soda, partly as a way to avoid weight gain from sugar—but how healthy these substitutes are themselves has long been a matter of controversy.

To assess the cancer risk of sweeteners, researchers analyzed the data of more than 100,000 people in France who self-reported their diet, lifestyle and medical history in intervals between 2009-2021 as part of the NutriNet-Sante study. They then compared consumption to the rate of cancer, while adjusting for other variables such as smoking, poor diet, age and physical activity.

The participants who consumed the largest amount of sweeteners, "beyond the median amount, had an increased cancer risk of 13 percent compared to non-consumers," Mathilde Touvier, research director at France's INSERM institute and the study's supervisor, told AFP.

The study, published in the journal PLOS Medicine, said that a higher cancer risk was particularly seen with sweeteners aspartame and acesulfame potassium—both used in many soft drinks including Coke Zero. Out of the 103,000 participants, 79 percent were women and 37 percent consumed artificial sweeteners.

Soft drinks accounted for more than half of the artificial sweeteners consumed, while table-top sweeteners represented 29 percent. The study found that "higher risks were observed for breast cancer and obesity-related cancers". Touvier said "we cannot totally exclude biases linked to the lifestyle of consumers", calling for further research to confirm the study's results. The US National Cancer Institute and Cancer Research UK both say that sweeteners do not cause cancer, and they have been authorised for use by the European Food Safety Authority.

"The relationship between artificial sweetener consumption and cancer risk is a controversial one, going back to the 1970s when (sweetener) cyclamate was banned for being linked to bladder cancer in rats—although this was never shown to be the case in humans," said James Brown, a biomedical scientist at Britain's Aston University.—AFP



(From left) US actor Samuel L. Jackson, Norwegian actress Liv Ullmann, and US actor Danny Glover hold their honorary awards during the Academy Of Motion Picture Arts And Sciences' 12th Annual Governors Awards at the Ray Dolby Ballroom at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood.

Box office titan Samuel L Jackson receives honorary Oscar

No actor's films have made more money in box office history than Samuel L Jackson, but he had never won an Oscar until Friday, when he was awarded an honorary statuette by the Academy. The 73-year-old known for collaborations with Spike Lee and Quentin Tarantino, and a regular feature in blockbusters from Marvel to Star Wars, had previously secured only one Oscar nomination for "Pulp Fiction." Jackson was presented with a statuette honoring career achievement at a star-studded Governors Awards gala in Hollywood, just two days before the main Academy Awards in which last year's films and nominees will compete.

"152 movie titles, \$27 billion in box office, more than any other actor in history," said Denzel Washington, presenting Jackson with the award. Jackson, seated alongside Tarantino in the Dolby Ballroom, took the stage to reminisce on his career, which also includes the original "Jurassic Park" and action sequel "Die Hard with a Vengeance."

"It's been a real pleasure making indelible impressions on audiences as 'gang member number two,' 'hold-up man' and 'unforgettable black guy'—just to name a few," he joked. Also awarded a golden statuette was Norwegian actress Liv Ullmann, a frequent collaborator with Swedish auteur Ingmar Bergman in cinema classics such as "Persona" and "Scenes from a Marriage."

Ullmann, 83, earned two competitive Oscar nominations for best actress in the 1970s, for "The Emigrants" and Bergman's "Face to Face." "For those few who claim she would never have been called one of our greatest actors without Ingmar Bergman, I would answer Bergman would probably never have been called one of our greatest filmmakers without Liv Ullmann," said John Lithgow, presenting her award.

"Liv is long overdue, and Sam as well," Alfred Molina, a former Academy governor and actor known to wider audiences for "Spider Man 2," told AFP. "It's a really huge acknowledgement of a lifetime of work." Elaine May, 89, who broke down barriers for women in comedy and directing, and earned Oscar screenplay nominations for "Heaven Can Wait" and "Primary Colors," was the third honoree. Her prize was presented by Bill Murray. The honorary Oscars are handed out every year to honor lifetime achievement, and were spun off into a separate event in 2009 to declutter the main show's packed schedule.

Last year's ceremony was cancelled due to the pandemic, and this year's event was delayed by another Covid-19 surge. In the night's final prize, Danny Glover, 75, star of the "Lethal Weapon" franchise and Steven Spielberg's "The Color Purple,"



US actor Samuel L. Jackson speaks onstage during the Academy Of Motion Picture Arts And Sciences' 12th Annual Governors Awards at the Ray Dolby Ballroom at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood.—AFP photos

was honored for his political activism. Alongside his 40-year acting career, Glover has campaigned on causes from the US civil rights movement to ending apartheid in South Africa—he played Nelson Mandela in a 1987 HBO movie. The Jean Hersholt Humanitarian has been handed out by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences most years since 1957, with previous winners including Angelina Jolie, Oprah Winfrey and Elizabeth Taylor.—AFP

Elton John: Still standing at 75

British pop superstar Elton John turned 75 on Friday, but vowed to keep making music, even as he tours the world for the final time. The flamboyant former Reg Dwight has become a stalwart of the music scene since the 1970s, with a string of hits including "Crocodile Rock", "Candle in the Wind" and "Rocketman". He has also fronted a high-profile campaign for research against HIV/Aids, raising millions of pounds for charities.

The singer-songwriter, who became "Sir Elton" in 1998 when he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II, said he was not usually nostalgic but described the three-quarter century as a "milestone". "I'll definitely find time today to take stock and thank my lucky stars for my wonderful family, friends and career," he added.



Elton John

"I feel unbelievably lucky that at 75 I still love what I do so much—I'm still so energized about music and excited I get to play, listen and talk about this every single day." John has sold more than 300 million records worldwide, and scored his first UK number one single in 16 years last month with "Cold Heart", with the singer Dua Lipa.

He is currently on his "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour—an extravaganza of more than 300 gigs worldwide that began in 2018 — and said "the thrill of playing live is as amazing as it was 50 years ago". But he added: "I have so much to pass on to the new generation of fans and artists alike, and I'm determined to keep giving back to the industry that has given me so much."

To mark his birthday, he is releasing a digitally remastered version of his "Diamonds: The Ultimate Greatest Hits" album on streaming platforms for the first time. This weekend, his husband David Furnish will host the 30th annual Elton John Aids Foundation Academy Awards. Five years ago, John—a two-time Oscar music winner for his biopic "Rocketman" and "The Lion King"—sold 25 works donated by artists and collectors to mark the charity's 25th anniversary.—AFP

German orchestra stands by star Russian conductor Currentzis

Germany's SWR Symphony Orchestra on Friday said it would keep working with Greek-Russian conductor Teodor Currentzis despite his "problematic" ties to a Russian bank hit by sanctions over the war in Ukraine. The Stuttgart-based SWR radio orchestra said a European tour starting March 27 would go ahead as planned but the program would be changed to feature Russian, German and Ukrainian composers in "an appeal for peace and reconciliation".

Leading Russian artists working abroad have faced pressure to publicly denounce President Vladimir Putin's invasion, or risk losing their jobs. Currentzis, who has been chief conductor of the SWR orchestra since 2018, has not spoken out against Putin. But the SWR orchestra said in a statement it was satisfied that the cooperation with the celebrated maestro was based "on shared values and convictions".

"We are not helping anyone or ending the war by issuing a blanket condemnation of artists who live and work in Russia and by automatically ending collaboration," said SWR director Kai Gniffke. The company added it was "aware" that Currentzis' Saint Petersburg-based band MusicAeterna is funded by Russia's state-owned VTB Bank.

The bank is on a growing list of companies targeted by Western sanctions over Moscow's aggression in Ukraine. Currentzis' link with VTB Bank "is certainly problematic, but it has existed for a long time", the orchestra said. "A supportive stance for the ongoing Russian attack on Ukraine cannot be deduced from this," it added.



In this file photo Greek-Russian conductor Teodor Currentzis performs in front of media representatives at the Hotel de Ville in Paris. — AFP

Renowned Russian conductor and Kremlin loyalist Valery Gergiev was last month stripped of his role at the Munich Philharmonic and declared persona non grata at several prestigious concert halls for failing to criticize Putin. Operatic soprano Anna Netrebko, also seen as close to Putin, has cancelled concerts in Europe and the United States. Other stars have been vocal in their opposition to the war. Prima ballerina Olga Smirnova last week quit the Bolshoi in Moscow to join the Dutch National Ballet, after saying she was against the war "with all the fibers of my soul".—AFP



In this file photo Taylor Hawkins of Foo Fighters performs onstage at the after party for the Los Angeles premiere of "Studio 666" at the Fonda Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



In this file photo Taylor Hawkins, Dave Grohl and Nate Mendel of US rock band the Foo Fighters attend the The Museum Gala at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

FOO FIGHTERS DRUMMER TAYLOR HAWKINS DIES AGED 50

Drummer Taylor Hawkins of the multi-Grammy award-winning rock group the Foo Fighters has died, his bandmates said in a statement Friday. He was 50. "The Foo Fighters family is devastated by the tragic and untimely loss of our beloved Taylor Hawkins," the band said in a statement on Twitter. "His musical spirit and infectious laughter will live on with all of us forever," they added. The statement did not say the cause of Hawkins' death, news of which emerged the same day the band was due to play at the Festival Estereo Picnic in Bogota, Colombia.

US' most influential and critically-lauded alternative rock bands—since 1997, when he was taken on by lead singer and former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl. He provided percussion on some of the group's biggest hits including "Learn to Fly" and "Best of You." He previously drummed for Canadian indie songstress Alanis Morissette. The Foo Fighters celebrated their 25th anniversary last year, and had most recently produced "Studio 666," a rock-and-roll horror movie. Tributes poured in from across the music world, with legendary frontman Ozzy Osbourne hailing him as a "great person and an amazing musician" and punk rocker Billy Idol describing the news as "tragic."

Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello praised his "unstoppable rock power." "In utter disbelief at the news of Taylor Hawkins," rockers Nickelback said in a statement on Twitter. "Our deepest condolences to his family, his bandmates, his team, his friends and everyone that was ever touched by the music he created with @foofighters @Alanis and so many others." —AFP



In this file photo drummer Taylor Hawkins of the Foo Fighters performs at the Intersect music festival at the Las Vegas Festival Grounds in Las Vegas, Nevada.



LeBron James 'wins' Razzies for 'Space Jam' sequel

When LeBron James stepped into Michael Jordan's giant shoes for "Space Jam 2: A New Legacy," a Razzie probably isn't the movie award he had in mind. But the sporting great was "rewarded" for his acting turn in Warner Bros' Looney Tunes/basketball sequel with the one prize no performer wants. The annual tongue-in-cheek Razzies, or Golden Raspberry Awards, "honor" the worst in film, and are handed out the day before the Oscars, serving to mock the following night's self-congratulatory Tinseltown back-slapping. In fact, James and the film—slammed by awards organizers as "a 115 minute commercial for all things WarnerMedia"—took three Razzies in total. "Basketball phenom LeBron James was the MVP in both Worst Actor and Worst Screen Couple (along with all those cartoon co-stars and product plugs) while the film itself was chosen Worst Remake/Rip-Off or Sequel," they said in a press release. The film with the most Razzies overall was Netflix's screen version of Broadway mega-flop "Diana: The

Musical," panned by the Guardian as "the year's most hysterically awful hate-watch." It took five prizes, including worst picture and worst actress for star Jeanna de Waal. The Broadway show itself lasted just 33 performances. Jared Leto, whose flamboyant performance with campy Italian accent and heavy prosthetics in "House of Gucci" was nominated for several "actual" Hollywood prizes, was named worst supporting actor. Organizers this year felt obliged to create an entire new category labelled "Worst Performance by Bruce Willis in a 2021 Movie" to accommodate all of the former "Die Hard" star's questionable output last year. In the mainly ultra-low-budget action flicks released on streaming, Willis took roles including a washed-up sheriff, an ex-cop, a retired military general and a former CIA spy. Unsurprisingly, the Razzie went to... Bruce Willis, for critically panned sci-fi "Cosmic Sin." —AFP

Jared Leto on joining Marvel and turning into a vampire

Jared Leto has been a star for decades, but it's only now at 50 that he is fronting his first major blockbuster—transforming into a vampire for new Marvel flick "Morbis". Leto made his name in more independent and cult projects, such as his Oscar-winning turn in AIDS drama "Dallas Buyer's Club" or as a junkie in "Requiem for a Dream". But he has no qualms about joining the superhero juggernaut with "Morbis", that is hitting cinemas around the world next week. "You want Marvel to help pay the bills, then you can sneak in some other movies here and there," he told AFP during a visit



US actor Jared Leto waves to fans as he arrives for the premiere of the film "Morbis" in Madrid. — AFP photos



US actor Jared Leto poses during a photocall for the premiere of the film "Morbis" in Madrid.

is creating a character not yet seen in the Marvel Cinematic Universe: Dr Michael Morbuis is a scientist suffering from an incurable disease who accidentally turns himself into a vampire while trying to find a cure, and then can't stop killing people for their blood. "He's not exactly a hero, not a villain. He's somewhere in between—there's a classic Jekyll and Hyde thing happening here," said Leto. "I liked that there were three characters built into one. There was a significant transformation between them."

glad we did because it gave us a lot more freedom," he said, referring to computer generated imagery.

"I worked with people that have rare diseases. There was a certain way of walking that's actually common with stroke survivors. I didn't want to just get a cane and have a little limp or something—I wanted to make it specific." Leto first became a star in the 1990s as the heart-throb in teen drama "My So-Called Life" and has popped up in lots of cult favourites, including "Fight Club", "American Psycho" and "Blade Runner 2049".

Not that he has seen any of these—Leto hasn't watched himself on screen since the premiere of "Requiem for a Dream" at Cannes in 2000. "I never watch them. The whole goal as an actor is to be unselfconscious. So I do everything I can not to be thinking about myself from the outside," he said. —AFP

to Paris. "I'm excited. I've done a lot of smaller roles in bigger movies and made a career out of that, so it's interesting to star in a movie that's something new and different—I like a big, fun popcorn movie."

Leto is not a total stranger to superhero flicks, of course, having taken a turn as the Joker in "Suicide Squad". But now he

"I never watch them" For once, Leto was spared the extensive make-up, unlike his almost unrecognisable turn in last year's "The House of Gucci", or the fake nose and teeth he used for his creepy serial killer in "The Little Things". "Originally they wanted to use prosthetics with the monster and I pushed them to embrace technology and CGI. I'm

Polish Embassy holds Solidarity with Ukraine concert



The Polish embassy held a Solidarity with Ukraine concert performed by Polish and Ukrainian musicians and students from Kuwait Music Academy. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Sports

Ecuador, Uruguay qualify for WCup, with help from Brazil

Returning Messi scores as Argentina take unbeaten run to 30

News in brief

Van Aert wins E3 Classic

PARIS: Belgian ace Wout van Aert won the E3 one-day cycling classic on Friday as his Jumbo team once again proved too powerful for their rivals. Jumbo attacked after 80 kilometers, splitting the peloton. Then, with 42km to go, Van Aert and his new French teammate Christophe Laporte dropped what was left. The duo were part of a Jumbo effort that put a stranglehold on the recent Paris-Nice stage race, where the team twice swept the stage podium places with an astonishing demonstration of strength. "The team was impressive. I have to thank every single one of the guys to set us up in the final. Me and Christophe were supposed to be more defensive," Van Aert said after the race. "This is how we want to race and this is the way everybody believes we can have the biggest chance of winning." — AFP

Rahm win at WGC Match

WASHINGTON: Top-ranked Jon Rahm, the reigning US Open champion, rallied for a 5&4 victory over American Cameron Young to remain unbeaten at the WGC Match Play Championship. The 27-year-old Spaniard, who fought back from two down after five holes, improved to 2-0 to lead his group entering Friday's final group stage matches at Austin (Texas) Country Club. "I'm confident," Rahm said. "I'm happy, feeling good. Playing good golf. It was a tricky day." The 64-player field based upon world rankings was divided into 16 groups of four for round-robin matches. Group winners will play weekend knockout rounds. Young birdied to win the first hole, Rahm took the second with a par, but birdies from 17 feet at the par-3 fourth and seven feet at the par-4 fifth put Young 2-up. — AFP

Sakamoto grabs world gold

MONTPELLIER: Japan's Kaori Sakamoto on Friday added the world figure skating title to her Olympic bronze medal, capitalizing on the absence of Russian rivals banned following the invasion of Ukraine. The 21-year-old Sakamoto totaled 236.09 points with Belgium's Loena Hendrickx (217.70) taking silver and Alysa Liu of the United States claiming bronze (211.9). At the Beijing Olympics last month, Russia claimed gold and silver through Anna Shcherbakova and Alexandra Trusova while European champion Kamila Valieva was fourth after spending the Games embroiled in a drugs controversy. The tearful Sakamoto improved her personal bests in both the short and free programs in Montpellier. — AFP

Kyrgios stuns Rublev

MIAMI: Nick Kyrgios stressed Friday he's at peace with himself after a day where both sides of the Australian's character come into sharp focus at the ATP and WTA Miami Open. Hours before he wowed Hard Rock Stadium with a ruthless 52-minute demolition of seventh-ranked Andrey Rublev to reach the third round, the enigmatic world number 102 was fined \$25,000 by the ATP following a stormy defeat to Rafa Nadal at Indian Wells earlier this month. The 26-year-old Aussie was fined \$20,000 for unsportsmanlike conduct after hurling his racket near a ball boy and \$5,000 for an audible obscenity. Kyrgios, prone to emotional outbursts and controversial actions on court, remains among the sport's most exciting talents when he plays as he did to eliminate the Russian. — AFP

Da Silva steers West Indies

ST GEORGE'S: Joshua da Silva's unbeaten maiden Test half-century in the Caribbean anchored a West Indies lower-order revival which pushed the home side ahead of England on the second day of the third and final Test on Friday. Replying to the tourists' first innings total of 204, da Silva's unbeaten 54 and vital contributions from Kyle Mayers, Alzarri Joseph and Kemar Roach lifted the home side from the depths of 95 for six to 232 for eight at stumps. While not nearly as dramatic as the last-wicket stand of 90 between Saqib Mahmood and Jack Leach on day one which resuscitated the English from 114 for nine, the West Indian version of tail-end resistance saw 137 runs added for the loss of two wickets. — AFP

Australia win third Test

LAHORE: Australia claimed a historic victory against Pakistan on Friday, taking the three-Test series 1-0 with a 115-run win on the fifth day of the last match in Lahore. Australia are in Pakistan for the first time since 1998, having previously refused to tour over security fears. Jubilant crowds of Pakistani cricket lovers have flocked to stadiums in Rawalpindi, Karachi and Lahore throughout the series in full support of both Pakistan and Australia, undeterred by the presence of heavy security. The victory gives Australia the Benaud-Qadir Trophy, named after former Australian skipper Richie Benaud and Pakistan leg-spinner Abdul Qadir. — AFP

MONTEVIDEO: Giorgian de Arrascaeta sent Uruguay to the World Cup with the only goal of the game against Peru on Thursday, a result that also booked Ecuador's ticket to Qatar, with a helping hand from Brazil. Ecuador slumped to a 3-1 defeat in Paraguay but still qualified for a World Cup for the just the fourth time—all this century—thanks to Uruguay's victory and already-qualified Brazil's 4-0 win over Chile. Nineteen teams have now qualified for the finals in Qatar later this year, with 13 spots still available.

With Argentina, who played Venezuela on Friday, also already qualified, Peru and Chile will now vie for the fifth-place intercontinental play-off spot from the single South American qualification group alongside Colombia, who emphatically ended a seven-match goalless streak with a 3-0 win over Bolivia. It has been a remarkable turnaround for Uruguay since a disastrous spell at the end of last year when they lost four matches in a row, conceding 11 goals, scoring just one and slipping to seventh in the 10-team group.

That spelled the end for iconic coach Oscar Tabarez, who spent a record 15 years at the helm and guided the "Celeste" to a World Cup semi-final in 2010 and Copa America title a year later. But his successor Diego Alonso has won three out of three and taken Uruguay—winners in 1930 and 1950—to a fourth straight finals. Peru had a glorious early chance to take the lead when Andre Carrillo picked out Gianluca Lapadula unmarked 10 yards out but Sergio Rochet dived low to his left to keep out a firm header. Uruguay were well on top from then onwards and fully deserved their opener.

De Arrascaeta blasted home the rebound three minutes before half-time after Luis Suarez saw a shot crash back off the woodwork. Federico Valverde almost made it two soon after the break, slamming a stunning swerving 40-yard shot onto the bar. There were some jangling nerves late on, though, as Rochet was almost caught out by Miguel Trauco's looping mishit cross. VAR had to check Rochet had kept the ball from crossing the line, and there were barely millimeters in it.



BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's Lionel Messi (center) vies for the ball with Venezuela's Jhon Chancellor and Venezuela's Nahuel Ferraresi (right) during their South American qualification football match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 on March 25, 2022. — AFP

Shambolic

Ecuador's qualification owed more to a solid campaign than Thursday's shambolic performance in driving rain on a difficult pitch in Ciudad del Este. The omens were poor before kick-off as Ecuador had already lost on all eight previous trips to Paraguay for World Cup qualifiers dating back to 1981. The hosts took the lead on nine minutes after Ecuador gave away the ball just outside their area and Julio Enciso slipped in Robert Morales to fire high into the roof of the net. Piero Hincapie scored a comedy own goal from 40 yards deep into first half stoppage time, playing a blind back pass with too much power to a goalkeeper who was standing out of position. It could have been worse moments later but Enciso hit the bar with a volley when more inept defending had let in three Paraguay players behind the defense.

Argentina unbeaten run

Meanwhile, Lionel Messi scored on his return to the national team as Argentina stretched their world-leading unbeaten run to 30 matches with a routine 3-0 World Cup qualifying win over Venezuela on Friday. Goals from Nicolas Gonzalez and Angel Di Maria, both created by Rodrigo De Paul, also kept a packed Bombonera stadium enthralled in Buenos Aires for a match that had nothing riding on it.

Argentina have long qualified for the World Cup in Qatar later this year, while Venezuela were the first team in South America's single 10-nation qualification group to be eliminated. The victory kept Argentina just four points behind group leaders Brazil with two matches to go. Venezuela are now guaranteed to finish bottom after a 13th defeat in 17 qualifiers so far. — AFP



International Shooting Grand Prix wraps up

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Shooting Grand Prix came to a conclusion on Friday with the

Czech teen upsets Mertens at WTA Miami Open

MIAMI: Linda Fruhvirtova is only 16 years old but already dreaming of reaching the very top after producing a career-best performance Friday to stun Elise Mertens at the WTA Miami Open. The Czech wildcard, who arrived in South Florida with a ranking of 279, is making waves at her first major WTA event after upsetting the 24th seed from Belgium 7-5, 2-6, 6-1 in her first contest against a top-50 player. Fruhvirtova, whose 14-year-old sister Brenda has similarly lofty ambitions, wants to emulate Czech legend Petra Kvitova and capture a Wimbledon title.

Ousting Mertens was a solid first step in that direction. It made Fruhvirtova the youngest woman into the Miami third round since 15-year-old Cici Bellis in 2015. "It's unbelievable," she told AFP. "I worked really hard for this and I'm enjoying it." Her

Mitoma stakes WCup, Premier League claims

TOKYO: Two-goal hero Kaoru Mitoma could be Japan's secret weapon at the World Cup and will also hope to eventually make his mark in the Premier League with a Brighton side crying out for firepower. The tricky 24-year-old winger sent Japan to the Qatar showpiece with a late brace in a 2-0 win over Australia in Sydney on Thursday just minutes after coming on as a substitute.

Mitoma's heroics came in only his second appearance for his country and underlined why Brighton manager Graham Potter took a punt on him last summer from J-League champions Kawasaki Frontale, where he scored 30 times in 64 matches.



Skeet event for both men and women. Kuwaiti Shooter Abdelaziz Al-Saad won the silver medal after a heated competition with Bahrain's Altammar Ali who won gold while Qatar's Mohammad Al-Kawari won bronze.

In the women's event, Iman Al-Shammaa grabbed the women's skeet medal and her teammate won bronze while Kazakhstan's Assem Orynbay took the gold. In his conclusion statement, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federation Engineer Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi said that Kuwait shooters performed well and had new records, adding that Kuwait Shooting Sport Club will include the shoot-

ers in the most important international events that qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics. Al-Otaibi thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their major support.

Shooter Iman Al-Shammaa said she was happy with the silver medal following a very hard competition by shooters. She said the Grand Prix was successful as she gets ready for the Gulf Games to be held in Kuwait in May. Afrah Adel, the skeet bronze medal winner, dedicated her win to HH the Amir.

powers of recovery for someone so young were particularly impressive. Fruhvirtova was broken at the start and rallied from 0-40 down with the first set poised at 3-3 to take control of the match.

Mertens's experience began to show in a one-sided second set, yet the young Czech was strong enough mentally and physically to steamroll her opponent in the third. "I want to reach number one. I want to win Grand Slam titles," said Fruhvirtova, who will play former world number one Victoria Azarenka or Ekaterina Alexandrova next. "We always said that with my sister it's my goal and we just want to achieve that. "Petra is definitely one of the players that I grew up watching when I was younger. I watched her win Wimbledon two times, so she's definitely someone to look up to."

Following top-ranked Ashleigh Barty's surprise retirement earlier this week, women's tennis has opened up with several young stars pushing for elite spots. American Coco Gauff, 18, is one of the new wave of potential stars and joined Fruhvirtova in the next round after exacting revenge 7-5, 6-4 on China's Wang Qiang, who beat Gauff at the Australian Open.

Brighton, the third-lowest scorers in the Premier League, handed Mitoma a four-year contract and then sent him off to Belgian side Union Saint-Gilloise to gain experience.

"He's one we have tracked for a while so we are looking forward to seeing how he progresses in the next year and we will be watching him closely during his time in Belgium," said Brighton's then-technical director Dan Ashworth. Mitoma has thrived in Belgium's top flight, bagging five goals in 18 appearances and scoring a hat-trick for the surprise league leaders after coming off the bench with his team 2-0 down against RFC Seraing earlier this season.

Mitoma opted to go to university rather than turning professional straight out of school but he is progressing nicely now that he is playing regularly in Europe, although the Premier League would be a big step up from Belgium's first division. "I've been playing against lots of different players from around the world and I've got used to it," said Mitoma, who was part of the Japan team that finished fourth at



FLORIDA: Linda Fruhvirtova of Czechia returns a shot to Elise Mertens of Belgium during the 2022 Miami Open presented by Ita' at Hard Rock Stadium on March 25, 2022. — AFP

Gauff, who faces China's Zhang Shuai next, knows there has been a generational shift with Barty retiring and the likes of Serena Williams edging closer to the end of her storied career. — AFP

last year's Tokyo Olympics. "It's widened my range and increased the things that I can do. I'm a lot more confident than I was when I was in Japan."

Outshining Minamino

Mitoma upstaged Takumi Minamino in a wet Sydney. With the Liverpool forward misfiring in front of goal, Mitoma came off the bench in the 84th minute as Minamino departed and gave Japan the lead with a clinical finish just five minutes later. Mitoma's sublime second goal arrived four minutes into injury time, after he ghosted past several Australia defenders before unleashing a shot that goalkeeper Mat Ryan let slip past him.

Japan manager Hajime Moriyasu has largely stuck to a tried-and-trusted group of players in qualifying but Mitoma will be hoping to play a leading role in Qatar after his stunning cameo. "Whatever the situation, even if you only have one minute, you have to get results in this business," said Mitoma, who is right-footed and plays on either flank. — AFP

Sports

Egypt edge Senegal 1-0; Algeria stun Cameroon

Nigeria draw in Ghana after penalty award overturned

JOHANNESBURG: Prolific Liverpool scorer Mohamed Salah was the architect of the only goal as Egypt edged Senegal 1-0 in Cairo on Friday in a high-profile World Cup play-off first leg. Salah turned inside the box and slammed the ball against the crossbar with the rebound hitting Senegal defender Saliou Ciss and rolling into the net for an own-goal. The eagerly awaited clash was a repeat of the Africa Cup of Nations final last month, which Senegal won 4-2 on penalties in Cameroon after 120 goalless minutes.

Sadio Mane, a Liverpool teammate of Salah and scorer of the winning penalty in the African title decider, was closely guarded by Egypt. He did have a chance soon after half-time off a Bouna Sarr cross, but a close-range header flew just wide of the post. The Cairo clash was one of three first legs decided by a solitary goal with Algeria winning 1-0 against Cameroon in Douala and Tunisia achieving a similar result against Mali in Bamako.

Ghana and Nigeria played a 0-0 draw in Kumasi and Morocco came from behind to hold the Democratic Republic of Congo 1-1 in Kinshasa. The five second legs are scheduled for Tuesday and the aggregate winners will represent Africa at the World Cup in Qatar from November 21. Nigeria had to settle for a draw in Ghana after VAR overruled a decision to award the visitors a late penalty. A review found that Ghana midfielder Iddrisu Baba was fouled before he handled.

Ghana came closest to breaking the deadlock with Nigerian goalkeeper Francis Uzoho pulling off a superb save to deny Fatahu Ishaku in the first half. Veteran Lyon forward Islam Slimani scored five minutes before half-time to give Algeria victory over Cameroon. Slimani, 33, soared in a crowded goal-mouth to head a Youcef Belaïli free-kick powerfully past goalkeeper Andre Onana into the roof of the net.

Even 11 minutes of added time could not bring Cameroon an equalizer and they must win in Blida to avoid missing successive World Cups. Cameroon hold the record for World Cup appearances by an African nation with seven and have not missed two in a row since first qualifying in 1982. Success was particularly sweet for Algeria as they fared disastrously in the Atlantic port city of Douala when defending the Africa Cup of Nations title two months ago.

Humiliating exit

Algeria began the tournament boasting a 34-match unbeaten record only to draw with Sierra Leone and lose to Equatorial Guinea and the Ivory Coast to make a humiliating first-round exit. Mali defender Moussa Sissako conceded an own-goal and was sent off four minutes later as they lost 1-0 to Tunisia. Under pressure from Seifeddine Jaziri, Sissako pushed the ball toward his own goal on 36 minutes, unaware that goalkeeper Ibrahim Mounkoro had strayed off his line, and the ball landed in the net.

When Sissako committed a last-defender foul on Jaziri soon after he was shown a red card and although Mali created the better second-half chances, they failed to convert any. Mali gave a first cap to France-born Everton midfielder Abdoulaye Doucoure, who had long hoped to play for his country of birth before agreeing to represent the homeland of his parents. Tarik Tissoudali scored a brilliant equaliser as Morocco moved closer to a sixth World Cup appearance by drawing with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A move that began with a superb slide tackle by Moroccan defender Romain Saiss ended with Tissoudali rifling the ball into the net on 76 minutes. Yoane Wissa had given DR Congo a 12th-minute



CAIRO: Egypt's forward Mohamed Salah (right) and Egypt's midfielder Mahmoud 'Trezeguet' Hassan (left) celebrate after a goal during the 2022 Qatar World Cup African Qualifiers football match between Egypt and Senegal on March 25, 2022. — AFP

lead, sprinting down the wing, cutting inside and unleashing a shot from just outside the box that brushed Saiss and beat goalkeeper Yassine Bounou. With away goals counting double if teams tie on aggregate, a 0-0 draw in Casablanca would take Morocco to Qatar.

Morocco were unsettled after falling behind and Cedric Bakambu and Dieumerci Mbokani wasted

chances to put the Congolese further ahead lead on a gloomy and windy evening. The visitors squandered an early second-half chance to equalise when Ryan Mmaee blazed a penalty over the crossbar. DR Congo were reduced to 10 men with five minutes remaining when Ngonda Muzinga was sent off after being yellow-carded twice. He will miss the return match. — AFP

Italy miss out on World Cup again

PARIS: Reigning European champions Italy will miss a second straight World Cup after losing to a dramatic stoppage-time goal against North Macedonia, but Portugal, Wales and Sweden all made it through to qualifying play-off deciders. Four-time World Cup winners Italy were stunned in Palermo as Aleksandar Trajkovski—who used to play club football in the Sicilian city—fired past Gianluigi Donnarumma in the second minute of injury time to give North Macedonia an incredible 1-0 victory.

Italy will again be absent from the World Cup in Qatar after also failing to qualify for the 2018 tournament in Russia when they lost in a play-off to Sweden. That was a traumatic experience for a nation that had previously been to every tournament since 1958, and this failure is all the more remarkable given that they were crowned European champions less than nine months ago.

That success for Roberto Mancini's side came

during a world record 37-game unbeaten run, but four draws in their last five qualifiers last autumn saw them finish second in their group to Switzerland, exposing them to the dangers of the play-offs again. "It's hard to explain, it's such a huge disappointment," captain Giorgio Chiellini said to RAI.

"We've made mistakes since September and we've paid for them. We're distraught." North Macedonia, the Balkan nation of just two million people, held Italy to a draw in Turin in 2018 World Cup qualifying and beat Germany away in this campaign before appearing at their debut European Championship last year. "We won the Italian way against the Italians, a goal from just two shots," said their coach, Blagoja Milevski.

They will now go to Porto to face Portugal next Tuesday, after the Euro 2016 winners defeated Turkey 3-1 at the Estadio do Dragao, albeit only after Burak Yilmaz missed a crucial late penalty for the visitors. The home side were cruising thanks to first-half goals by Brazilian-born midfielder Otavio and Liverpool forward Diogo Jota. But Turkey's veteran skipper Yilmaz pulled a goal back in the 65th minute, setting up a tense finish. — AFP

Qatar hits back at 'ridiculous' WCup attack

DOHA: Qatar's top World Cup organizer has hit back at Louis van Gaal for criticizing the decision to hold the event in the Gulf state, saying the Netherlands coach has failed to understand the Arab world's passion for football. Van Gaal said this week that it was "ridiculous" for the World Cup to be held in Qatar and that FIFA had only been motivated by money.

In a rare outburst, Hassan al-Thawadi, chief executive of the World Cup Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, tore into van Gaal and insisted Qatar had no regrets over its efforts to stage the World Cup that kicks off on November 21. "For a

person who has had many years (as a coach) and who understands the power of football, it is ridiculous that he could actually make such a bland statement," Thawadi said in comments from an interview released by Bein Sports TV late Thursday.

"I am sure that he hasn't spent a lot of time understanding what football means, not only to Qatar but to the Arab world," Thawadi said Qatar had shown at the FIFA Arab Cup in November and December, where many stadiums were packed, that it could host major events. Thousands of journalists and officials will be in the state on April 1 for the World Cup draw and to see the World Cup stadiums that Qatar has spent billions of dollars to build.

It has also held the world athletics championships, a Formula One race and other top events. Its human rights record has been questioned, but Qatar says much of the criticism is unfair. "The passion of the people of the Arab world, what football means to us, I think it is not a ridiculous notion that an Arab nation hosts the World Cup," Thawadi said. — AFP



Kuwait women boxers grab gold medals

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Women Boxing team won the lion's share of gold medals in the first International Boxing Championship. The team won four first places out of seven final bouts that concluded on Friday at the Boxing Federation Hall in Sabah Al-Salem Area in the presence of Kuwait Olympic Committee member Fatima Hayat and members of Boxing Federation Board chaired by Mohammad Mansi.

The tournament saw 32 boxers from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Germany, Nigeria, Jordan and Tunis participating. Fatima Hayat said she was happy Kuwait held the first international boxing tournament, as well as the achievements



of the Kuwaiti boxers and the positive participation of Saudi boxers.

Chairman of Boxing Federation Mohammad Mansi said the Women International Tournament succeeded in having good representation of Kuwaiti women adding that "the first international participation of female boxers was distinguished and successful."

Results of the tournament were as follows: Faddah Al-Asfour (from Kuwait) won the first place in the 50 kg category after defeating Saudi Arabia's Atheer Abdulaziz. In the 54 kg, Rawan Al-Musallam won the second gold medal by defeating Sarah Al-Shahrani (from Saudi Arabia). Salma Al-Sammari (Saudi) won the gold medal. In the 60 Kg, Christine Reuters (Germany) won gold while silver went to Saudi Arabia's Reem Abdallah.

The 66kg category was all Kuwaiti as Noura Al-Mutairi defeated Moudhi Al-Muzaiel. Iman Al-Mudhaf won first place at the 75 kg category by defeating Latifa Buarki. Egypt's Jouy Sameer won the gold medal (80 kg) by defeating her compatriot Sarah Refaat.

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ATLANTA: Clint Capela #15 of the Atlanta Hawks rebounds the ball during the game against the Golden State Warriors on March 25, 2022 in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

Knicks rally to beat Heat

NBA Sixers rip Clippers; Young, Capela lift Atlanta

LOS ANGELES: New York reserve guard Immanuel Quickley scored 20 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter to spark the Knicks over NBA Eastern Conference leader Miami 111-103 on Friday. RJ Barrett added 18 as the visiting Knicks rallied from 17 points down in the fourth quarter, closing the game on a 38-13 run to beat the Heat. "We had to battle back for sure," Quickley said. "We just stuck with it. Thibs (Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau) was real calm in the locker room. Guys were staying together."

"That's just what we want to do. We want to stay together and try to get a win so I'm really proud of the guys." The Heat, led by 30 points from Jimmy Butler, fell to 47-27, only one-half game ahead of defending champion Milwaukee and Philadelphia and one game in front of Boston. Philadelphia's James Harden had 29 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists—all game highs—to

spark the 76ers over the host Los Angeles Clippers 122-97.

"As long as I'm aggressive, the plays open up for themselves," Harden said. "Tonight was one of those nights where I had it going for four quarters." Combined with Cameroonian big man Joel Embiid, who had 27 points and 10 rebounds, Harden led a two-man domination as the Sixers took their fifth victory in six games. "Our 1-2 punch is still a work in progress," Harden said. "We have to find that balance but I think we're getting there," said Harden. "We're building every single day, trying to figure each other out."

New York improved to 32-42 but remained five games behind Atlanta for the final East play-in spot with only eight games remaining in the regular season. Charlotte and Atlanta, holding the last two East play-spots, took home triumphs over top Western

Conference clubs to solidify their spots. Trey Young scored 33 points and passed off 15 assists while Clint Capela had 19 points and 13 rebounds to spark Atlanta over the Golden State Warriors 121-110.

Klay Thompson scored a game-high 37 points and Jordan Poole added 24 points and 10 assists to lead the Warriors, third in the West at 48-26. Miles Bridges scored 26 points and passes off 11 assists and Terry Rozier added 25 points to spark the Charlotte Hornets over visiting Utah 107-101. Donovan Mitchell led the Jazz with 26 points and French center Rudy Gobert grabbed 19 rebounds for fourth-place Utah, which fell to 45-29, three games behind Golden State and level with Dallas, which missed a chance to move ahead with a road loss as well.

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 20 points to lead seven double-figure scorers and also grabbed nine

rebounds to spark the Minnesota Timberwolves over visiting Dallas 116-95. Luka Doncic had 24 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for the Mavericks, who fell to 45-29, trailing Utah on tiebreakers. Minnesota improved to 43-32, one-half game behind Denver for sixth place and the last automatic playoff berth in the West.

Kristaps Porzingis sank the go-ahead basket with 29 seconds remaining and Deni Avdija added two free throws in the dying seconds to give Washington a 100-97 victory at Detroit. Rodney McGruder missed a tying three-point try and Porzingis grabbed a final rebound to seal the Wizards' triumph. Latvia's Porzingis had 30 points and 10 rebounds to lead Washington while Avdija added 21 points and 10 rebounds off the bench. Jalen Green scored 23 points to lead the NBA-worst Houston Rockets to a 125-106 home victory over Portland. —AFP



CHRISTCHURCH: Pakistan's Nida Dar (right) bats as New Zealand wicketkeeper Katey Martin looks on during the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup match between New Zealand and Pakistan on March 26, 2022. —AFP

'Bittersweet' as NZ beat Pakistan but exit WCup

CHRISTCHURCH: Century-maker Suzie Bates produced a milestone innings as New Zealand beat Pakistan by 71 runs in the Women's World Cup in Christchurch on Saturday. It was the final match of the tournament for both sides, and although New Zealand hold a mathematical chance of making the semi-finals, captain Sophie Devine said that was most unlikely and it was a "bittersweet" win to bow out on. "Absolutely, we're gutted that we're not moving forward in this tournament and I want to wish those teams that do manage to go through all the best," she said.

The tournament hosts posted 266 for eight with Bates scoring 126 before Hannah Rowe took five for 55 to restrict Pakistan to 194 for nine. It lifted New Zealand to six points, equal with fourth-placed England and India who each have a superior run rate and a game in hand which sees them both threaten to overtake third-placed West Indies—who are one point ahead but have completed their matches.

At a crowded Hagley Oval, on New Zealand's first day without COVID-enforced outdoor spectator restrictions, Bates con-

tributed nearly half the New Zealand total and along the way became only the fourth player in women's cricket to reach 5,000 ODI runs. Bates also became the first person to score a century in four consecutive World Cup tournaments but believed her player-of-the-match award should have gone to Rowe.

"I just really wanted to take the game deep and make sure we finished off the 50 overs and got a good score on the board," she said. "It's a nice record to have but I thought Hannah Rowe, I could share this player of the match with because she bowled outstandingly." Bates was given out lbw on 17 and deliberated on the dismissal until the final second before seeking a review which confirmed the ball was missing leg-stump.

When the opener was eventually dismissed, bowled by Nashra Sandhu in the 43rd over, she received a standing ovation as she walked from the field and New Zealand were well placed at 211 for five with more than seven overs remaining. But instead of New Zealand pushing up the run rate, Pakistan took the initiative with four wickets for 20 runs before Katey Martin and Frankie Mackay plundered 32 off the final two overs.

Martin finished unbeaten on 30 with 22 of her runs coming off eight deliveries in the final flurry. The star performer with the ball for Pakistan was Nida Dar, with the spinner taking three for 39 from her 10 overs. Dar then top-scored for Pakistan with 50 while captain Bismah Maroof contributed 38 but the side were behind the required run rate throughout, and after reaching three for 155 Pakistan added only 39 more runs and lost six wickets. —AFP

Swiatek becomes new WTA World Number 1

MIAMI: Poland's Iga Swiatek clinched becoming the new world number one in women's tennis on Friday by defeating Swiss player Viktorija Golubic 6-2, 6-0 at the WTA Miami Open. Swiatek will move into the top spot vacated by Australian Ashleigh Barty after the three-time Grand Slam champion announced her retirement earlier this week.

"Pretty surreal," Swiatek said. "On one hand, these are the most special moments that you're going to remember for the rest of your life, but on the other hand, that match was just another match." The 20-year-old Warsaw-born star had to win her second-round match at the South Florida hardcourt tournament to ensure she would replace Barty in the next rankings next month.

After the victory, there was a brief on-court ceremony where Swiatek was cheered and honored by tournament director James Blake and former WTA number one Lindsay Davenport. "I never really imagined that moment because, truth to be told, I was working day-by-day and playing tennis well, but I never had the strong belief that it can actually happen," Swiatek said. "So it's even more surreal for me."

She didn't feel slighted by the manner of it all, coming suddenly after Barty's shock farewell. "I loved every moment of it," Swiatek said. "It doesn't matter for me if there were fireworks. The crowd was really supportive. They were really excited. I'm just soaking everything in because I didn't have any expectations." Swiatek will be the first Polish woman to reach the rankings summit, eclipsing the old mark for players from her homeland she shared with former world number two Agnieszka Radwanska.

Poland's first Grand Slam singles title was won by Swiatek at the 2020 French Open. Swiatek has enjoyed a blistering start to the season, winning WTA titles at Doha and Indian Wells, and is now on a career-best 12-match win streak. She's also the first player since Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki in 2009 to win five or more titles before turning 21. Paula Badosa could have taken over as number one had Swiatek lost, but the Spaniard would have needed to win the Miami Open title to do it.

Swiatek becomes the 28th woman to reach the WTA pinnacle and the youngest since Wozniacki in 2010, but she doesn't expect much to change for her with the climb to the top. "I think it's going to be a little bit different. Maybe the hype is going to be a little bit bigger, but I'm ready for it. And honestly, it's part of the job," Swiatek said. "From my perspective, I don't think anything will change. Maybe I've got to watch if I'm wearing clean clothes and representing tennis well. So I'm going to be careful with that. But honestly, I'm the same person." —AFP



FLORIDA: Iga Swiatek of Poland returns a shot to Viktorija Golubic of Switzerland during the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on March 25, 2022. —AFP