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Coalition strikes Yemen as Houthis, UN seek truce

Raids target rebel camps • Guterres condemns sudden surge in violence

News in brief



JEDDAH: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen raises his trophy — AFP

Verstappen wins Saudi F1

JEDDAH: Red Bull's world champion Max Verstappen held off the Ferrari of Charles Leclerc to win Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. Carlos Sainz in the other Ferrari was third with Sergio Perez, Verstappen's teammate who had set off from pole, in fourth. Verstappen was securing his first points of the season after retiring late on behind winner Leclerc in the season-opener in Bahrain last weekend. — AFP

Iran ready for talks with Kuwait

TEHRAN: Iran is prepared for bilateral talks with Kuwait on developing the joint Arash/Durra gas field, Iran's deputy oil minister said on Sunday. "We believe that exploitation from the joint field should be done in an integrated manner, and this will lead to the strengthening of economic relations between the two countries," Ahmad Asadzadeh said. He said even if borders have not been defined, the field can be developed in an integrated manner using internationally experienced models. — Xinhua.

6 dead in Oman rockslides

MUSCAT: At least six workers were killed and others missing after rockslides engulfed a quarry in northern Oman on Sunday, emergency authorities said. Further slides in the wake of the deadly collapse were hampering rescue efforts at the quarry in Ibri, Al-Dhahirah governorate, the Gulf state's Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority said. —AFP



UR, Iraq: Spanish visitors tour on Feb 24, 2022 the Great Ziggurat temple in this ancient city. —AFP

Tourists trickle back to Iraq

HILLA, Iraq: Most Western governments still issue travel warnings for all or parts of Iraq, pointing to risks from kidnappings to bombings and unexploded ordnance from multiple wars. But for some explorers who are unafraid of the odd military roadblock, Iraq is a hot new destination with multiple World Heritage sites that is slowly reopening to the world. — AFP (See Page 13)

RIYADH: The Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes Sunday on Yemen hours after Houthi rebels announced a three-day truce, with the UN chief condemning a surge in violence as the war enters its eighth year. The raids targeted Sanaa, the rebel-held capital, according to Saudi Arabia's Al Ekhbariya TV, which tweeted "the start of air strikes on Houthi camps and strongholds in Sanaa" at around midnight.

The attacks came shortly after the Iran-backed Houthis announced a three-day truce and offered peace talks on condition that the Saudis stop their air strikes and blockade of Yemen and remove "foreign forces". On Friday, the rebels fired drones and missiles at 16 targets in Saudi Arabia, turning an oil plant near Jeddah's Formula One track into a raging inferno as aghast drivers looked on.

The office of the UN's special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, tweeted Sunday he is "engaging with

all sides and continues his efforts towards a truce during Ramadan", the Muslim holy month which begins in April. "He reiterates his call for de-escalation and welcomes all steps by the parties in that direction," it added. The coalition has not yet responded to the Houthis' truce announcement.

The flurry of attacks and diplomacy came as Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, on Saturday marked seven years since the Saudi-led military intervention against the Houthis, who seized Sanaa in 2014. The conflict has killed hundreds of thousands of people directly or indirectly and displaced millions, creating what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday condemned the sudden rise in hostilities. He said eight civilians were reportedly killed in retaliatory strikes on Sanaa following Friday's rebel attacks. The

UN staff compound in the city was also damaged, his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement. "The Secretary-General strongly condemns the recent escalation of the conflict in Yemen," the statement said, adding that Guterres is "deeply concerned" about reports of coalition attacks on the lifeline port of Hodeida. He urged the warring parties to "immediately de-escalate" and reach a "negotiated settlement" with Grundberg's help.

Thousands of people demonstrated in Sanaa on Saturday, holding placards and chanting, to denounce the Saudi-led intervention which included nine countries when it was launched on March 26, 2015. Today, it is largely just Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, the United Arab Emirates, which says it has withdrawn troops from Yemen but remains an active player, training militias on the ground.

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Qatar, Saudi decry lack of attention to Mideast conflicts

DOHA: Saudi Arabia and Qatar expressed regret Saturday at a lack of attention to Middle East conflicts, as the West pushes them to show more solidarity with Ukraine. "The humanitarian suffering that we have seen in Ukraine, and everyone is talking about it right now... has been the suffering of a lot of countries in this region for years and nothing happened," Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani told a roundtable at the annual Doha Forum.

"We have never seen a global response to address those sufferings," he added, evoking "the brutality against the Syrian people, or against the Palestinians

or against the Libyans or against the Iraqis, or against the Afghans". Neither oil kingpin Saudi Arabia nor gas-rich Qatar, both close to the West but with ties to Russia, have taken a strong position for or against Moscow since it invaded Ukraine last month.

Europe and the US hope the two countries will boost oil and gas production to help reduce Western reliance on Russian supplies. The Qatari diplomat expressed hope that the Ukraine conflict would serve as "a wake-up call for everyone in the international community, to look at our region and to address the issues... with the same level of commitment that we have seen between Russia and Ukraine".

Hundreds of thousands of people in Yemen have been killed, directly or indirectly, and millions have been displaced as a result of its years-long conflict, in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The war in Syria is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions more since it began with a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011.



DOHA: Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Thani (left) and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Al-Saud attend the Doha Forum on March 26, 2022. — AFP

In a video message to the Doha Forum earlier Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Qatar, to increase natural gas production because of the conflict.

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Biden's Putin gaffe scrambles US message

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's apparent call for Vladimir Putin's exit reverberated instantly around the world, sparking an administration rush to course-correct - and risks scrambling US efforts to rally a united front on the Ukraine conflict. Biden's comment that the Russian president "cannot remain in power" - delivered in Warsaw at the close of three days of marathon diplomacy -

was termed "a horrendous gaffe" by one Republican senator.

A senior US analyst said it could have the effect of lengthening the war. And even France's president warned such language could "escalate" a conflict the United States and its NATO allies have sought at all costs to contain, and undercut Western efforts to help suffering Ukrainians. The remark came as Biden wound up a forceful speech on Saturday capping what had been a widely-praised European visit, aimed at presenting a determined front against Russia's invasion.

His ad-libbed words - "For God's sake, this man cannot remain power" - caught even US advisors off guard,

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Meat off the menu in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Layla Ibrahim has cut down on her daily meat consumption, not because of a health fad but forced by Lebanon's bruising economic crisis. "I used to eat a slice of meat, chicken or fish every day, but the prices of these items have become ridiculous," the 44-year-old mother of two told AFP. "Out of necessity and not choice, I have almost become a vegetarian," she added.

Lebanon is grappling with an unprecedented financial crisis that the World Bank says is of a scale usually associated with full-scale wars. The currency has lost more than 90 percent of its value on the black market, more than 80 percent of the population lives in poverty, and prices have skyrocketed. The price of imported red meat has increased fivefold, with some cuts costing more than the monthly minimum wage of 675,000 Lebanese pounds (\$33).

As a result, dietary habits have changed and plant-based dishes - a popular part of Lebanon's Mediterranean cuisine - are now a main course in many households.

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KHARKIV, Ukraine: Ukrainian servicemen walk inside the destroyed regional headquarters of Kharkiv on March 27, 2022. — AFP



TRIPOLI: This file photo taken on July 28, 2020 shows people waiting for their orders at a butcher in this northern Lebanese port city. — AFP

Local

UNDP chief says Yemen faces 'extremely troubling outlook'

Impoverished country is at risk of being 'forgotten'

DOHA: War-torn Yemen faces an "extremely troubling outlook" after a serious escalation between Iran-backed Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia, the head of the United Nations Development Program warned on Sunday. Achim Steiner, the UNDP's administrator, also told AFP the impoverished country is at risk of being "forgotten" as Russia's war on Ukraine grabs the world's attention.

"It is an extremely troubling outlook at the moment for the people of Yemen," Steiner said in an interview at the Doha Forum, when asked about the latest surge in hostilities. "The reality is that desperation, poverty, destruction have reached a level in Yemen where the majority of the population is in one way or another unable to sustain itself anymore," he added.

On Friday, a rebel attack on a Saudi oil plant set off a huge fire near Jeddah's Formula One circuit dur-

ing televised practice sessions. The attack was one of 16 drone-and-missile assaults on the kingdom that day. The wave of attacks came just before Saturday's seventh anniversary of the Saudi-led coalition's military intervention in Yemen.

The coalition stepped in to support Yemen's internationally-recognized government in 2015, after the rebels seized the capital Sanaa the previous year. The war has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly and left millions on the brink of famine in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe. With the country almost completely dependent on imports, aid groups say the situation will only worsen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which produces nearly a third of Yemen's wheat supplies.

"Given the broader geopolitical reality, the risk is that Yemen will be in part forgotten and that will obviously be a tragedy," said Steiner. Some 80 per-

cent of Yemen's 30 million people depend on aid for survival.

'This war has solved nothing'

Steiner said the economic consequences of the Ukraine conflict "are having reverberations into the global economy" and this "will reduce the scope of international solidarity for international cooperation". "Right now the world is seized by the war in Ukraine, but the conflict in Yemen, the desperate situation in Afghanistan, these are still realities that will continue," he said. "They will receive inevitably less attention, and perhaps the greatest concern is... that the international donor community will essentially cut... funding." "That should be of concern for all of us," Steiner added.

At a donors' conference this month, the UN sought \$4.27 billion to help 17.3 million of Yemen's

needy. But it raised only \$1.3 billion, with some major hoped-for contributors failing to materialize. This means "that what we will see through during the year 2022 is a further reduction in humanitarian aid, cut of food ratios, and our ability to, for example, train Yemeni citizens", Steiner said. "All of this will be compromised," he warned.

On Saturday, the Iran-backed Houthis announced a three-day truce and offered peace talks on condition that the Saudis stop their air strikes and blockade of Yemen and remove "foreign forces". Shortly after, the Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes on Yemen, with UN chief Antonio Guterres condemning the surge in violence. Steiner appealed for "peace, peace, peace", adding: "This war... has not solved anything." "My appeal to regional powers... is to stop this war and find a way to reconcile... in a way that doesn't harm the population the way it is right now." — AFP



27th Qurain Cultural Festival

KUWAIT: The 27th Qurain Cultural Festival holds an event (the inheritance of horses among Arabs) to highlight its originality and ancient heritage. The festival was launched



on the 21st of this month under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, the Prime Minister, in the presence of the Minister of Information and Culture, and the

Chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din and will continue until the 30th of this month. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al Mohammad Al-Sabah meets the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell, as part of his official visit to

the country. The two officials discussed relations between Kuwait and EU, and means to boost and bolster them at all level. They also discussed issues of common interest, as well as the latest developments in the regional and international arenas. —KUNA



Secretary General of the GCC met with Yemen's Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmad bin Mubarak.

GCC supports peaceful solution to Yemen crisis

RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, on Sunday, renewed GCC's firm stance prioritizing a political solution to the stability and security. His

remarks came during his meeting with Yemen's Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmad bin Mubarak at the GCC General Secretariat in Riyadh, the secretariat said in a statement. He stressed the GCC's full support and solidarity with the Yemeni people to protect its land and restore stability in the region. The two sides also discussed the latest developments in the political, military and economic fields. The GCC called on Yemeni parties to host intra-Yemeni talks in Riyadh during the period between March 29 to April 7 to end the seven-year-long conflict, it noted. — KUNA

5 Indian nurses honored with excellence awards

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Five Indian nurses working in Kuwait hospitals were honored with 'Nursing Excellence Awards' for their exceptional contribution as medical professionals during the critical period of COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The awards, instituted by Asianet News, a leading Indian television channel, were in recognition of the dedication, initiative and excellence of the nurses as the front-line warriors during the harrowing time.

Susan Jacob Abraham won the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' for her remarkable service in Sabah Hospital for more than 43 years and Shiny Anil Jacob bagged the Nurse of the Year Award for her selfless service, particularly in helping embalm hundreds of dead bodies in mortuaries while Suja Laji Joseph took away 'Nursing Administrator Award' for her unique service as a nursing supervisor.

Vijesh Velayudhan, who works with the Sabah Hospital, was honored with COVID Warrior Award for his relentless service in helping hundreds of COVID patients during the crisis period and Roy K Yohannan was bestowed with Special Jury Award for his yeoman's services during the peak days of the pandemic.

Indian Ambassador Sibi George gave away the awards to the winners in the presence of the three-member jury, Reem Al-Marzouq (Legal dept, Ministry of Health), Kuwaiti dignitaries, Asianet officials, a large number of Indian nurses and guests, at an impressive ceremony held at the Millennium Hotel and Convention Center, on Saturday. The five awardees were selected by a four-member jury headed by Dr Mohan Thomas (Qatar) and Dr Roy K

George (India), Dr Amir Ahamed (Kuwait), and Brijit Vincent (USA).

"I am sure that today's Asianet Nursing Excellence Award ceremony will go a long way in further building India's vibrant bilateral relations with Kuwait, particularly our people-to-people connect initiative," the ambassador said in his inaugural address. He said the last two years had been a very difficult period for everyone. "When we look back today, the role played by Indian medical professionals in Kuwait, doctors and nurses and other medical staff always, stand out," he said.

"Despite all the odds stacked against them, despite all the pain and suffering from working long hours, spending sleepless nights, witnessing unpleasant scenes of death and pain every day; our nurses continued to save our lives. They are truly an embodiment of the indomitable human spirit. They have displayed true courage, fortitude and resilience. They made every Indian here proud," he said.

"We always call them our angels. They are indeed our angels. But they are much more. They are our warriors, warrior angels. I salute them, I thank them. I congratulate each one of them who are receiving the awards today. With them, it is the entire nursing community in Kuwait and everywhere in the world, who are getting honored here today," the ambassador said.

A one-minute candle light vigil was observed in remembrance of the 14 nurses who lost their lives in the fight against the COVID pandemic in Kuwait.

"It was a herculean task for the jury to come down to the finalists out of 5,000-plus nominations and pick the winners eventually. No doubt, it was a rigorous screening and evaluation process," said Anil Adoor (Asianet News), who arrived from India to oversee the award ceremony. Asianet officials Frank P Thomas (India), Surejkumar Sreedharan (Dubai), Arunkumar Raghavan (Dubai) and Nixon George (Kuwait) also attended the award ceremony. Indian actress and television star Jewel Mary anchored the show.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George presents 'Nursing Administrator Award' to Suja Laji Joseph.

Local

Crown Prince receives top officials, EU's Borrell

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Sunday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and the parliament members who attended Indonesia's 144th conference of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) which was held on March 20-24. His Highness also received at Bayan Palace His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. In another development, His Highness the Crown Prince received the visiting High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell and the accompanying official delegation, holding a meeting focusing on enhancing bilateral ties. Senior officials at the Crown Prince's office and Foreign Ministry attended the meeting. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and National Assembly Speaker Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince receives delegation partaking in Indonesia's 144th IPU conference.

Ministry of Health, medics stress importance of healthy lifestyles

Alarming rates of diabetes and obesity

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health has stressed the importance of raising the level of health awareness among members of society regarding healthy lifestyles through awareness programs. This was stated in a speech by the Head of the Internal Medicine Department at the Amiri Hospital Dr Saad Al-Zanki during the celebration of the first (Amiri Day) under the slogan "Nutrition and movement, health and blessing" in Al Shaheed Park under the patronage of the Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed and the presence of the hospital director Dr Ali Alanda.

The celebration included a "Waathon" race and many awareness programs as the holy month of Ramadan approaches. Al-Zanki stressed the importance of promoting awareness among community members about healthy lifestyles, achieving nutritional balance and reducing the intake of high-calorie foods during the holy month of Ramadan, especially patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes and blood pressure.

He pointed out that the greatest danger facing our societies today is the pandemic of chronic non-communicable diseases – pointing out that "Kuwaiti society in particular suffers from alarming rates of diabetes and obesity, in addition to other diseases



such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking, cirrhosis of the liver and chronic kidney disease."

Treatments of those diseases have strained the state budget and are likely to escalate unless successful and effective solutions are found. For his part, Head of the Diabetes Unit at the Amiri Hospital Dr Abdul-Nabi Al-Attar, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the event aims to educate the public about the importance of healthy nutrition and exercise.



Doctors and participants in the event provided medical advice to the attendees in order to maintain healthy lives. He stressed that the event created awareness about chronic diseases such as diabetes, pressure, heart and high triglycerides. He pointed out the need to adopt healthy lifestyle by eating healthy balanced food in general and during the

holy month and refraining from smoking.

Al-Attar urged replacing the wrong habits that some people follow by consuming sweetened and carbonated drinks when taking breakfast, and replacing it with a healthy meal, low-fat yogurt and drinking water to avoid indigestion and weight gain problems. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Photos show participant who attended the awareness program under the slogan eNutrition and movement, health and blessingi in Al Shaheed Park. — KUNA photos

Kuwait EPA observes 'World Earth Hour'

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority of Kuwait (EPA) joined millions of people around the globe in observing the World Earth Hour on Saturday, March 26. This global event is a reminder of the need to conserve energy and protect environment, Director of EPA Public Relations Dept Sheikha Al-Ibrahim told KUNA.

By taking part in this event, "Kuwait is showing commitment to the international effort to protect environment. This is an occasion to raise public awareness about the risks of climate change and irresponsible consumption of energy. It is aimed at highlighting the need of collective social responsibility for protecting Earth - our collective home," she noted.

Various agencies and associations as well as individuals across Kuwait took part in the event

by taking an hour off electricity at offices and homes to show support to the energy conservation drive. She highlighted the need to make the occasion of switching off electricity for an hour a sustainable commitment to environment protection to ensure better future for the new generations. —KUNA

MoH extends working hours

KUWAIT: The Health Ministry announced the extension of afternoon working hours at the Shuwaikh and Subhan labor examination centers from 1:00 pm until 7:00 pm from Sunday, March 27, 2022. This is to make it easier for people to have access to the services. The service is limited to private sector workers (article 18). Appointments must be booked in advance.

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Strategic Planning Supervisor at the State Audit Bureau
Abdullah Al-Marzouqi .

Audit Bureau partakes in ARABOSAI meeting

RIYADH: The Kuwait's Audit Bureau will participate in the strategic meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI), which will be held Monday in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. Strategic Planning Supervisor at the State Audit Bureau Abdullah Al-Marzouqi said in a statement to KUNA on Sunday that the meeting would discuss the Audit strategic plan. He affirmed the Kuwaiti Audit Bureau's interest in participating in meeting and other activities to improve the oversight work and build capacity for the valuable benefit of its affiliates. — KUNA



Minister inaugurates Ardiya transfer station

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ali Al-Mousa on Sunday inaugurated Ardiya main transfer station. The Ministry said Al-Ardiya Station (AX) is one of the important stations for the stability of the electrical network, noting that it was operated via the 300 KV overhead line from Doha West Electric Power and Water Distillation Station. She added that this will lead to the stability and increase the efficiency of the network. The inauguration was attended by the Undersecretary of the Electricity Transmission Networks Sector Engr Mutlaq Al-Otaibi and a number of Ministry officials. — KUNA

Gulf Bank participates in 'Environment Month'

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to prioritize and implement environmental, social and economic sustainability initiatives, and in support of Goal 14 of the United Nations, which states the need to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources to achieve sustainable development, Gulf Bank participated in Environment Month 2022, an annual initiative organized by The Scientific Center.

This year's activity took place from March 10 to April 9, and was focused on the theme, "Investing in Our Planet." This year's Environment Month 2022 initiative included the celebration of World Recycling Day, World Water Day, World Aquatic Animal Day, and World Health Day. Each activity welcomed a variety of age groups, with each event targeting specific age groups with tailored workshops and seminars.

The Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei, commented that a number of Gulf Bank employees conducted underwater cleaning operations near Kubbar Island. Prior to carrying out the cleaning process, the employees got an overview of the importance of preserving the marine environment.

In a related development, Al-Qenaei said that Gulf Bank also participated in International Recycling Day, which was held on March 18, with a campaign to collect plastic bottles through an iron sculpture (in the shape of a "zubaidi" fish). All bottles were collected throughout the month, and Gulf Bank is working to

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An aerial photo shows the Messila area. — Photo by Yesser Al-Zayyat

Mothers of the disabled honored



KUWAIT: The Public Authority for the Affairs of the Disabled on Sunday organized a festival to honor the best mothers of the disabled for the year 2022. The program shed light on the virtue of the mother and her importance in society.

The festival used the initiative to draw joy on the faces of people with disabilities and highlight their role - regardless of the obstacles they face in dealing with society and their challenges. — KUNA



Lujain Al-Qenaei

recycle them in cooperation with Recycle Kuwait. The campaign gathered more than five thousand plastic bottles in a week.

Al-Qenaei affirmed Gulf Bank's keenness to promote and implement various sustainability initiatives at the environmental, societal and economic levels, in keeping with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the national development plan (Kuwait Vision 2035), and Gulf Bank's 2025 Strategy.

She noted that Gulf Bank has spearheaded various sustainability initiatives in partnership with local projects and organizations to recycle paper and plastic. In addition, the Bank has worked on implementing various digital banking services, drastically decreasing its paper use and elevating its online and mobile banking services.

On the societal level, Gulf Bank regularly leads community efforts throughout the year, including beach clean-ups and more. The Bank also continues to support INJAZ Kuwait, a non-governmental, non-profit organization that aims to develop young talent and enhance students' financial literacy and entrepreneurship. This partnership has resulted in the establishment of several youth-led companies that prioritize environmental sustainability.

Al-Qenaei concluded by saying: "Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels. As one of the leading financial institutions in the region, we are proud to lead with sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank."



Gulf Bank team cleaning under water.



Plastic bottles in an iron sculpture in the shape of a 'zubaidi' fish.



After COVID, India tries to get on top of tuberculosis

Malta’s government claims third term after elections

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WARSAW, Poland: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) and US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin (R) listen while US President Joe Biden speaks with the Polish President during a meeting on Russia's war on Ukraine at the presidential palace in Warsaw. —AFP

Macron warns against ‘escalation’

Kremlin reacted in fury over Biden’s comments

PARIS: France’s President Emmanuel Macron warned Sunday against a verbal “escalation” of Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, after US President Joe Biden branded Vladimir Putin a “butcher” who “cannot remain in power”. The Kremlin had reacted in fury over Biden’s comments which it said narrows the window for bilateral relations, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine now into a second month.

Macron said he would speak to Putin in the next two days to organise the evacuation of civilians from the heavily bombarded port city of Mariupol. The French leader told broadcaster France 3 that he saw his task as “achieving first a ceasefire and then the total withdrawal of (Russian) troops by diplomatic means.” “If we want to do that, we can’t escalate either in words or actions.”

Ukraine was making a new push to get civilians out of the city on Sunday, with an aid route agreement for people to leave by cars or on evacuation buses, said Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk. Several attempts at establishing safe routes for civilians to flee have collapsed as both sides trade blame for violating temporary ceasefires.

Mariupol, in the region of Donetsk, has borne the brunt of Russia’s assaults, and residents who managed to flee have recounted harrowing scenes of death and destruction. About 170,000 people remain trapped in the besieged city and authorities have said they fear some 300 civilians may have died in a Russian strike on March 17 that hit a theatre being used as a bomb shelter.

In an impassioned speech from the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Biden blasted Putin over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. “For God’s sake, this man cannot remain in power,” the US leader said, before the White House clarified that Washington was not seeking regime change. The Kremlin snapped back, saying “a head of state should stay sober”.

‘Going to die anyway’

Personal attacks, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, were “narrowing down the window of opportunity” for bilateral relations. “Biden is weak, sick and unhappy,” said Vyacheslav Volodin, president of the lower house of parliament.

Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 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 it has hit hospitals, residential buildings and schools in increasingly deadly attacks on civilians.

In Kharkiv, where authorities reported 44 artillery strikes and 140 rocket assaults in a single day, residents were resigned to the incessant bombardments. Anna Kolinichenko, who lives in a three-room flat with her sister and brother-in-law, said they do not even bother to head down to the cellar when the sirens go off.

“If a bomb drops, we’re going to die anyway,” she told AFP. “We are getting a little used to explosions.” Others have found ways to cope with the shelling. Tamara Osyphchuk, 72, told AFP she wrote poetry to calm herself in her apartment in the devastated Ukrainian town of Irpin when the bombs rained down. “The explosions were very strong. Like a volcano is exploding, as if the earth explodes,” she said as she rested on a chair at an evacuation centre on the outskirts of Kyiv.

Recapture town

“I write poems and when there are explosions I feel great inspiration,” he told AFP. Bombardments continued over the last 24 hours in Irpin, as well as other cities around Kyiv, said Ukrainian authorities. Ukraine’s determined fighters continue to hold back Russia’s far-bigger military on the frontlines, and some units are beginning to snatch back control.

Two people were killed by shelling in the village of Stanislav, close to the city of Kherson, where Ukrainian forces have mounted a counter-offensive. In an update early Sunday, the Ukrainian General Staff said “the allied forces repulsed seven attacks” and destroyed eight tanks in the Donetsk and Lugansk areas of the Donbas.

The Ukrainian defence ministry said its forces had also recaptured Trostianets, a town near the Russian border that was one of the first to fall under Moscow’s control. Images published by the ministry showed Ukrainian soldiers and civilians among heavily damaged buildings and what

appeared to be abandoned Russian military equipment.

Elsewhere, Russian forces took control of Slavutych, the town where workers at the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant live, briefly detaining the mayor, Ukrainian authorities said. Residents of the town protested, prompting the Russians to fire shots in the air and lob stun grenades into the crowd, they added.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it was “closely monitoring the situation” and was concerned about the ability of employees at Chernobyl to rotate and return to their homes to rest.

‘One percent’

“There has been no staff rotation at the NPP for nearly a week now,” the IAEA said. Russia’s army, which Western analysts said appeared bogged down by tactical, communications and logistics problems, had suggested on Friday it would shift its concentration to eastern Ukraine. But Biden had cast doubt, saying he was “not sure” Moscow has indeed changed its objectives.

Biden, who was winding up a whirlwind visit to Poland after holding a series of urgent summits in Brussels with Western allies, met key Ukrainian cabinet ministers on Saturday. In a possible shift on a plan to transfer Soviet-era fighter jets from Poland to Kyiv to boost Ukraine’s firepower in the skies-rejected last month by the Pentagon as too “high risk”—Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the United States now did not object.

“As far as we can conclude, the ball is now on the Polish side,” Kuleba said in written comments to AFP after the meeting. In a video address, Zelensky reiterated a call for planes while urging allies to supply Ukraine with more weapons. “We need more ammunition. We need it to protect not only Ukraine but other Eastern European countries that Russia threatened to invade,” he said.

“During the meeting... with our American colleagues in Poland, we made it clear again,” he said. “What is NATO is doing? Is it being run by Russia? What are they waiting for? It’s been 31 days. We are only asking for one percent of what NATO has, nothing more.” —AFP

Macron’s rivals turn up the volume two weeks from vote

PARIS: Candidates in France’s looming presidential election pushed at the weekend to make themselves heard over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, with a re-run of 2017’s final showdown still the most likely outcome. Buoyed in part by his shuttle diplomacy ahead of the conflict and toughness on Moscow since the tanks began to roll, liberal incumbent Emmanuel Macron is riding high in the polls with two weeks to go.

But as the president “is totally absorbed by the international crisis, it’s very difficult to be present and to campaign”, a source close to him told AFP on condition of anonymity. Short of a major upset, his opponent in the runoff will be far-right National Rally leader Marine Le Pen—exactly the same setup as five years ago.

A trio of candidates—far-right rival Eric Zemmour, conservative Valerie Pécresse and left-winger Jean-Luc Mélenchon—still hope they can break out from the pack and take on Macron in the second round. “Everything could be decided in the two weeks to come, they could count double,” Adelaide Zulfikarpasic of the BVA Opinion polling group told AFP. “Four out of ten voters who say they are certain to cast their ballot are still undecided” on a candidate, she said.

On Sunday, Zemmour hopes to rally up to 50,000 people a stone’s throw from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, bussing in supporters from other parts of France. “This will be the event of the campaign, the biggest gathering,” the candidate told Sud Radio on Friday, insisting that “since the beginning, my meetings have touched off the greatest excitement.”

Yet Zemmour, a former columnist and TV commentator, has fallen below the 10 percent mark in some polls. That is far short of support ranging around 20 percent for Le Pen and close to 30 percent for Macron.

The National Rally leader strove to project serenity as members of her own camp—including her niece Marion Marechal—deserted her for tougher-talking Zemmour. Instead Le Pen has pounded the pavements campaigning on French streets and market squares, and this week urged potential Zemmour voters to back her if she reaches the second round as forecast.

“No one owns their voters,” she told M6 television, adding that “I hope if I’m in the second round they’ll join us.” With Zemmour and Le Pen slogging it out for the hard-right vote and Macron sounding pro-business and law-and-order notes, conservative Valerie Pécresse has struggled to make herself heard. —AFP

Second black box of crashed China plane recovered

BEIJING, China: The second black box has been recovered from last week’s deadly China Eastern plane crash, officials said Sunday, and could help solve the mystery of the jet’s breakneck descent. The Boeing 737-800 was flying between the cities of Kunming and Guangzhou on Monday when it nosedived into a mountainside, disintegrating on impact and killing all 132 people on board.

The cause of the disaster, China’s deadliest plane crash in more than 30 years, is not yet known. An “orange cylindrical object was unearthed” Sunday morning, Zhu Tao, director of safety at China’s Civil Aviation Administration (CAAC), told reporters.

“Investigators on site have confirmed... it is the storage unit of the flight data recorder.” The plane was equipped with two flight recorders: a cockpit voice recorder and one in the rear passenger cabin tracking flight data.

The former was found on Wednesday and sent to Beijing for analysis, which is expected to take several more days. This second black box contains crucial information such as the speed of the aircraft, its altitude and heading.

“While other parts of the recorder were seriously damaged, the data storage unit appears relatively intact” and “has been sent to a professional lab to be decoded”, Zhu said. Hundreds of people, including firefighters, doctors and investigators — some dressed in full-body protective suits — remained at the scene of the tragedy on Sunday recovering human remains and the wreckage of the plane. —AFP

Palestinians elect West Bank councils

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: Voters cast ballots Saturday for municipal councils in the Zionist-occupied West Bank in a rare democratic exercise following a decade and a half of delays to Palestinian elections. It was the second phase of municipal polls after a first round of voting in December in 154 West Bank villages.

Saturday’s vote was held in 50 towns and cities, with many elections uncontested, or without any candidates in some cases. Turnout was 52.8 percent, according to the Central Elections Commission. Wasfi Ramhi, voting in the city of Al-Bireh, said he hoped it would lead to national elections.

“If they are democratic, fair and free, they will help us to hold legislative and presidential elections,” he told AFP. As he cast his vote in Al-Bireh, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas defended his decision to call off scheduled presidential and legislative elections last year, saying they had to be held in “all the Palestinian territories”.

Zionist entity had barred voting from taking place in annexed east Jerusalem. 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. 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 the Gaza Strip. Hamas is also boycotting this year’s election in protest at the indefinite postponement of parliamen-



RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: A handout picture provided by the Palestinian Authority’s press office (PPO) shows President Mahmud Abbas as he votes in the local elections, in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. —AFP

tary and presidential elections.

Central Elections Commission chief Hanna Nasser said a number of candidates had been arrested in the lead-up to the vote. “There are candidates who were arrested before today,” Nasser said. “This indicates blatant interference in the election process. The arrests were made for political reasons to prevent certain candidates from running in the elections,” he told a news conference.

No elections are being held in Gaza or in east Jerusalem. In the Jordan Valley city of Jericho, independents dominated 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 Barahme, a businessman who heads one of the independent lists running in Jericho. —AFP

Land For Sale

At Duqum

(Sultanate of Oman) – Industrial land

Area: 30000m2

Location: Duqum, Industrial Area, Wilayat of Duqum, Sultanate of Oman

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

International

Malta's government claims third term after elections

'We are very satisfied that Malta will again have a Labour government'

Naxxar, Malta: Malta's Labour party claimed victory Sunday in general elections, securing a third term in government despite a legacy of corruption and following the lowest turnout in decades. Although official results are not expected for hours, Prime Minister Robert Abela claimed victory in a call with Maltese television, while in the counting hall in the town of Naxxar, Labour delegates monitoring the vote erupted into cheers.

"We are very satisfied that for the next five years Malta will again have a Labour government," Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearnle told AFP at the count, saying all signs were of an "absolute majority" for his party.

Michael Piccinino, general secretary of the opposition Nationalist Party, confirmed leader Bernard Grech had spoken to the prime minister to concede. The outcome of Saturday's polls represents the first electoral mandate for Abela, a lawyer who took the reins of the tiny Mediterranean island nation in January 2020 in an internal party vote.

His predecessor, Joseph Muscat, had been forced to quit following public protests over the 2017 car bomb murder of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who had exposed corruption at the top of his administration. A public inquiry last year found the state under Muscat created a "culture of impunity" in which her enemies felt they could silence her. Abela has since moved to strengthen good governance and press freedom, although Caruana Galizia's family say he has not gone far enough.

The Nationalist Party pressed the issue of corruption, but Labour's handling of the coronavirus pandem-

ic and its economy record in nine years in power took centre stage. Many residents complained however of a lacklustre campaign involving two largely similar parties—there has been no third party in Malta's parliament since before independence from Britain in 1964.

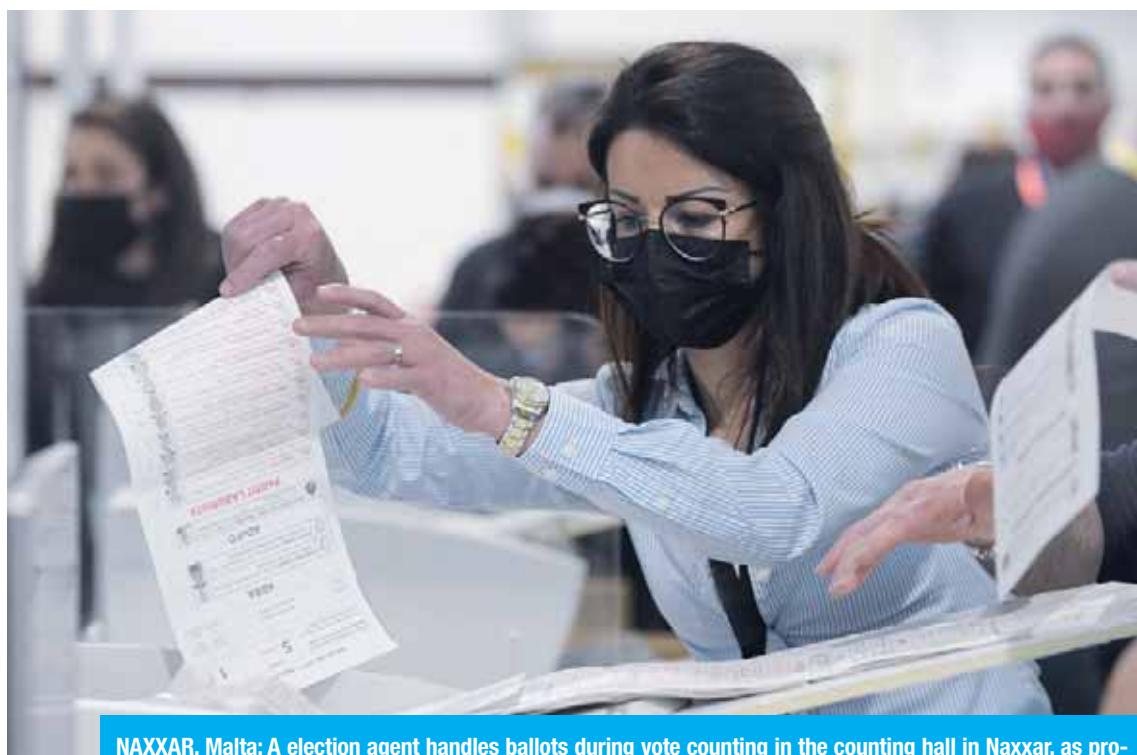
It was also overshadowed by concerns over the war in Ukraine, with the government forced to spend millions of euros mitigating spiking commodity prices—and the sense the result was inevitable, with all polls pointing to a Labour landslide.

The Electoral Commission said overnight that turnout looked set to be 85.5 percent, the lowest in a general election since 1955, and the first time it has dropped below 90 percent since 1966. However, Fearnle, who is also Malta's health minister, insisted the turnout was "high by European standards".

This was the first general election in Malta in which 16- and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote, although they have previously had that right in local and European Parliament elections. 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).

Despite few natural resources, it has built a thriving economy based largely on tourism, financial services and online gaming, but it has long fought allegations it acts as a quasi-tax haven. International anti-money-laundering organisation FATF grey-listed Malta last year, although business leaders hope recent progress will see it removed this summer.

The archipelago has also been criticised by the EU and anti-corruption campaigners for its "golden pass-



NAXXAR, Malta: A election agent handles ballots during vote counting in the counting hall in Naxxar, as provisional results show the Labour Party party won a third landslide victory in Malta's general elections. —AFP

ports" scheme, which awards citizenship to wealthy investors. Under political pressure, Abela suspended

the scheme for Russians and Belarusians after Russia invaded Ukraine. —AFP

Egypt police abusing Sudanese refugees: HRW

BEIRUT: Egyptian police have arbitrarily detained at least 30 Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers, subjecting some to abuse and "forced physical labour", Human Rights Watch (HRW) said Sunday. According to three Sudanese refugees and a Cairo-based civil society group interviewed by HRW, police carried out raids on December 27 and January 5, in nearly identical circumstances. Plainclothes police arbitrarily arrested some two dozen refugees and asylum seekers from their homes, coffeeshops, on the street and at community centres. They were taken to a security facility and forced to "unload boxes from large trucks into warehouses" by police, who hurled racist insults and "used batons to beat those who they claimed were not working hard enough".

The next day, police dropped off those detained at a highway crossroads in eastern Cairo, without levelling any charges against them. The New York-based watchdog called on Egypt's public prosecutor to "investigate and hold accountable those responsible for arbitrary arrests and mistreatment of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers", HRW's Joe Stork said.

According to HRW, some of those targeted had mobilised protests in May and August 2021 at the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, in Cairo "over harassment and racist treatment by Egyptians, a lack of protection and resettlement delays".

Last May, they also held a protest at the Sudanese embassy in Cairo in support of demonstrations in their home country. As of January 2022, over 52,000 Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt are registered with the UNHCR, though official figures estimate between two and five million Sudanese live in Egypt. —AFP

El Salvador declares state of emergency

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: El Salvadoran lawmakers Sunday declared a state of emergency, the president of the Legislative Assembly said, curtailing civil liberties and expanding police power as the country faces a wave of gang-related bloodshed that has left dozens dead in just two days. Gang violence has soared in El Salvador, with police reporting that 62 people were killed on Saturday alone.

According to official figures, 12 of the killings took place in the central department of La Libertad, with the capital San Salvador and the western department of Ahuachapan recording nine each. The rest were distributed across the country's remaining departments.

Hours earlier, police and the military arrested several leaders of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang over the spate of killings. "We will not back down in this war against gangs, we will not rest until the criminals responsible for these acts are captured and brought to justice," the country's National Civil Police posted on Twitter.

In response to the surge in violence, President Nayib Bukele asked the legislature-controlled by his ruling party — to approve a state of emergency, under which certain freedoms are curtailed. Lawmakers did so early Sunday morning, in a decree that "declares an emergency regime throughout the national territory derived from serious disturbances to public order by criminal groups."

The declaration—approved by a large majority—restricts free assembly, the inviolability of correspondence and communications, and allows for arrests without a warrant. "We approve the #emergencyregime that will allow our Government to protect the lives of Salvadorans and confront criminality head-on," Legislative Assembly President Ernesto Castro said in a tweet.



COLON, El Salvador: Police work at the scene where a man was killed by alleged gang members in Colon, La Libertad department, El Salvador on March 26, 2022. —AFP

"Since yesterday, we have had a new spike in homicides, something that we had worked so hard to reduce," Bukele said in a statement posted on Twitter by Congress president Ernesto Castro. "While we fight criminals in the streets, we must try to figure out what is happening and who is financing this."

Bukele said the country "must let the agents and soldiers do their job and must defend them from the accusations of those who protect the gang members." He also asked the prosecutor's office "to be effective with all" gang member cases it processes, warning he would keep an eye on "judges who favor criminals." Top government human rights lawyer Ricardo Martinez asked the population to "remain calm" and contribute to the promotion of "a culture of peace" in the country.

Last November, El Salvador suffered another spike in homicides that claimed the lives of some 45 people in

three days. The Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio-18 gangs, among others, have about 70,000 members in El Salvador, according to authorities, and their operations involve homicides, extortion and drug trafficking.

The country registered 1,140 murders in 2021 — an average of 18 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants—fewer than the 1,341 registered the previous year and the lowest figure since the end of the civil war in 1992, according to official data.

Elected in 2019, Bukele enjoys broad support in El Salvador over his promises to fight organized crime and improve security in the violence-wracked country. His allies also hold a large majority in the country's Congress—a situation not seen since a peace deal in 1992 put an end to 12 years of bloody civil war. But he has also long been accused of authoritarian tendencies. —AFP

Coalition strikes Yemen as...

Continued from Page 1

The coalition's intervention has reversed the Houthis' advances in the south and east of the country but has been unable to push them out of the north, including Sanaa.

"Militarily, the war is now at stalemate," Elisabeth Kendall, a researcher at Oxford University, told AFP

Biden's Putin gaffe scrambles...

Continued from Page 1

representing a stark departure from oft-stated American policy. The White House sprung immediately into action, clarifying within minutes that Biden was not advocating "regime change" in Russia. But the comments by Biden — who hours earlier called Putin a "butcher" — drew predictable fury from Moscow, raised eyebrows in allied countries, and sent the president's advisors into high gear to mollify the criticism.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in Jerusalem, joined in forcefully denying Biden was calling for Putin's ouster. Biden's point, Blinken said, was that "Putin cannot be empowered to wage war, or engage in aggression against Ukraine, or anyone else." The choice of Russia's leader, Blinken said, is "up to the Russians."

The administration sent out the US ambassador to NATO, Julianne Smith, to underscore the same message — stating across multiple TV networks that

this week. Saudi Arabia "may at this point be keen to extract itself" from Yemen, she said. The rise in violence and Russia's war in Ukraine have complicated the picture for Yemen, the head of the UN Development Program told AFP.

"Given the broader geopolitical reality, the risk is that Yemen will be in part forgotten and that will obviously be a tragedy," UNDP administrator Achim Steiner told AFP in an interview at the Doha Forum. With the country almost completely dependent on imports, aid groups say the situation will only worsen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which produces nearly a third of Yemen's wheat supplies. —AFP

"the US does not have a policy of regime change towards Russia, full stop." Biden's comments, Smith told CNN's "State of the Union", were "a principled human reaction to the stories that he had heard" during an emotional visit with Ukrainian refugees.

But President Emmanuel Macron of France, a close US ally who has spoken frequently with Putin since the invasion, warned the West not to "escalate in words or actions" — or risk hampering vital humanitarian efforts, including hopes of evacuating the devastated city of Mariupol. As noted by a senior Republican lawmaker, Senator Jim Risch, the remarks ran 180-degrees counter to the Biden administration's constant efforts until now to stop the conflict from escalating. "There's not a whole lot more you can do to escalate than to call for regime change," he told CNN.

Biden has a decades-long reputation for unfortunate off-the-cuff remarks — newspapers have previously listed his "top 10 gaffes of all time" — and Risch, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the president had again shot himself in the foot. Biden delivered "a good speech," Risch told CNN, with "a horrendous gaffe right at the end of it. My gosh, I wish they would keep him on script." —AFP

Meat off the menu...

Continued from Page 1

For Ibrahim and her family, meat is served only once a week and even then in small portions. "We started using smaller quantities of minced meat in stuffings and stews," Ibrahim said. "Even the Sunday family barbecue has been scrapped."

Nabil Fahed, head of the syndicate of supermarket owners, said customers are opting for poultry or grain as a cheaper alternative. Chicken is almost three times cheaper than beef and sells at around 120,000 pounds (\$5) a kilo. The demand for red meat has plummeted since the government lifted subsidies on certain food imports in March 2021, Fahed said. Sales dropped by around 70 percent in large supermarkets and the decline is even steeper in popular markets frequented by people with low incomes, he said.

Nancy Awada, a food inspector working with the Beirut municipality, has noticed a change in supply. "The quantities of meat stored in a butcher's refrigerator... today are a quarter or a third of what they

used to be," she said. "Instead of slaughtering two or three calves a day, butchers make do with only one."

Lebanon's cash-strapped government is struggling to afford fuel imports to feed its power plants, causing outages that last up to 22 hours a day in most parts of the country. To safeguard stocks, traders and distributors have to pay for expensive generator subscriptions to power refrigerators, said meat importer Imad Harouk of the Fed Distribution company.

A spike in transport costs due to the lifting of fuel subsidies last year has also raised the overall meat bill, Harouk told AFP. Adjusting to demand, importers have sized down on stocks. "Lebanon used to import 70 containers of frozen meat every month, but now the number is nearly 40," Harouk said. Tony Al-Rami, head of the restaurant owners' union, said inflation has altered ordering habits even in cheap fast-food chains. "Demand has dropped for meat shawarma sandwiches, with consumers leaning more towards chicken," he said.

This trend has played out at the Kababji grill house, a restaurant famous for its wide selection of meat skewers. "The economic crisis combined with the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant decline in overall sales, especially of meat-based dishes," said Hala Jebai, the manager of Kababji's customer service department. —AFP

Qatar, Saudi decry lack of attention...

Continued from Page 1

"The future of Europe rests with your efforts," he told the audience that included the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. He drew comparisons between the war in his country and the conflict

in Syria, where Russia's intervention in 2015 was seen as having turned the tide in President Bashar Al-Assad's favor.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan appeared to support the Qatari position. "The engagement of the global community... now and then, it's quite different," he said at the forum. "The trans-Atlantic unity right now, it's commendable. But I think you have to have a much better conversation with the rest of the global community," he said, addressing US and European officials at his side. —AFP

International

Myanmar army says will ‘annihilate’ coup opponents on crackdown ‘versary

Armed Forces Day commemorates the start of resistance to the Japanese occupation during WW II

NAYPYIDAW, Myanmar: Myanmar’s junta will “annihilate” coup opponents, army chief Min Aung Hlaing said Sunday as the military staged a show of force on the anniversary of its bloodiest crackdown so far on democracy protests. The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since a putsch in February 2021, with more than 1,700 people killed in crackdowns on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.



The junta has become isolated

Across Myanmar “People’s Defence Force” fighters—often armed with homemade or rudimentary weapons—clash regularly with junta troops, with some analysts suggesting the military has struggled to respond effectively to their hit-and-run tactics. Fighting has also flared with more established ethnic rebel groups along the Thai and Chinese borders.

Presiding over the annual parade that showcased tanks, truck-mounted missiles, artillery and troops on horseback, Min Aung Hlaing told about 8,000 assembled security personnel that the army would not let up. The military will “no longer negotiate... and annihilate until the end” groups fighting to overturn its rule, he said ahead of the Armed Forces Day procession in army-built capital Naypyidaw.

Jets flew overhead trailing the yellow, red and green of the national flag, while state media showed women lining the streets leading to the parade ground to give flowers and place garlands on the marching soldiers. In commercial hub Yangon around a dozen anti-junta flashmob protesters set off flares and shouted slogans, according to footage posted on social media. Others on social media called for residents to switch off their lights at home in a national “power strike” on Sunday evening.

Bloodiest Day

Armed Forces Day commemorates the start of local resistance to the Japanese occupation during World War II, and usually features a military parade attended by foreign officers and diplomats. Last year, as new junta chief Min Aung Hlaing inspected the parade, troops brutalised those protesting the coup that had ousted Aung San Suu Kyi’s government.

The violence was the bloodiest day in the military’s crackdown on democracy rallies and left around 160 protesters dead, according to a local monitoring group, sparking widespread international condemnation. The junta has become increasingly isolated, with Cambodian strongman Hun Sen the only foreign leader to visit since the putsch. On Sunday Min Aung Hlaing accused unnamed “foreign aggressors” of working against the military and called for the armed forces to remain united against “internal and external mischiefs”. Russia’s vice defence minister—a major arms supplier and ally—had been due to attend this year’s parade but was unable to because of his “country’s affairs”, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun added.

In February a UN expert on Myanmar said Russia—along with other major ally China—was continuing to supply the military with weapons, including fighter jets



NAYPYIDAW, Myanmar: Handout photo taken and released on March 27, 2022 by the Myanmar Military Information Team shows Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attending a ceremony to mark the country’s 77th Armed Forces Day in Naypyidaw. — AFP

and armoured vehicles.

The EU and the United States—among others including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK—called for the army to “cease its violence and restore Myanmar’s path to democracy”. The joint statement also urged nations to “immediately” end the sale or transfer

of arms and military equipment to the country.

It follows the United States and Britain’s announcement of new sanctions against Myanmar’s army Friday. The measures came days after the US said it had concluded that the country’s military committed genocide against the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority. — AFP

Montenegro faces Ukraine war fallout

BUDVA, Montenegro: Long a magnet for super yachts, tourists and real estate speculators from Russia, Montenegro faces an uncertain future. Its once reliable flow of cash is in doubt now the Adriatic nation has vowed to follow the EU in its crackdown on Moscow.

Following Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine last month, the new member of NATO and a candidate to join the European Union has found itself in an unexpected bind as sanctions threaten to upend its economic status quo. Any hit could prove dire in the country of just 620,000. Roughly a quarter of the economy is linked to a tourist sector that has been bolstered by Russians for well over a decade. “We like Russians ... and depend on them,” says Danica Kazanegra Gregovic, executive director of the Gulliver Montenegro travel agency in the coastal resort of Budva.

Along the main promenade in Budva, Russian is often more commonly heard than Montenegrin and a range of businesses and schools cater to the expatriate community of several thousand. For Gregovic and many others, the invasion of Ukraine, swiftly followed by a raft of Western sanctions on Russian financial institutions and flight bans across Europe, has stoked fears of negative fallout for Montenegro. The timing could not have been worse.

For pandemic-battered, tourism-dependent destinations like Montenegro, the forthcoming high season was eagerly anticipated as a chance to cash in on travel-starved tourists. “We already survived a couple of years with not a great tourist season. This will hit us more than we like to admit,” says Gregovic.

Uncertain future

To add to its mounting woes, the wellspring of cash that buoyed the property market along Montenegro’s coast appears to be running dry already, as Russians are increasingly blocked from moving money abroad.

For years, visa-free entry and lax investment laws lay the foundations for a pipeline of Russian money to the Balkan nation, sparking a real estate boom that transformed swathes of its pristine coastline into a mass of apartment blocks and condos.

“The majority of the money which was invested in the coast was coming from Russia,” explains Dejan Milovac, deputy executive director of anti-corruption group Mans. “Montenegro was a very favourable venue for the rich Russians to buy property or to actually hide their assets from the law.” Russians have also been major beneficiaries of Montenegro’s economic citizenship scheme, which

awards passports to individuals who have invested up to 450,000 euros (\$496,000). Just over 65 percent of gold-en passports in the past 14 months have gone to Russian nationals.

But following the invasion and accompanying sanctions, two separate real estate companies in Budva told AFP the purchase of properties in the city had ground to a standstill. “Everything is stopped. Construction is stopped, or people operate with great difficulties,” says Jovan, a 44-year-old bar owner in Budva.

“It’s a few months before tourism season and this brings problems that will harm our business here.” Montenegrin officials have been quick to soothe fears that arose after the government promised to pass sanctions targeting Russia in line with those of the 27-nation EU.

The sanctions have stalled amid political infighting but officials have nonetheless pledged to implement measure to offset the economic damage tied to the war, which include a spike in the price of fuel and basic food items. “Unfortunately, the war happened and we will have to divert our attention to other markets,” Foreign Minister Djordje Radulovic tells AFP, saying the moment requires fresh thinking. “Maybe it’s high time for us to try to diversify our economy. Maybe it’s high time to just not be dependent on one branch of industry, namely tourism,” Radulovic adds.

Russian relations

The war and its fallout follow centuries of largely harmonious ties between Montenegro and Russia, undergirded by their Slavic and Orthodox heritage. After Montenegro became independent from Serbia in 2006, the country cemented stable relations with Moscow and quickly became a favourite destination for Russians looking to relocate abroad, invest and travel. But the relationship has not been without upsets. In 2016, Montenegrin officials accused Moscow of masterminding a purported coup plot aimed at halting the former Yugoslav republic’s plans to join NATO. The Kremlin has repeatedly denied having a hand in any putsch conspiracy.

In the years since the alleged coup attempt, Montenegro has joined the US-led military alliance and the government has continued its negotiations for accession to the EU. These brief periods of turmoil have done little to prevent Russians from flocking to Montenegro. But for Russians based in Montenegro, Putin’s war on Ukraine has come with its own pitfalls.

Many are now cut off from Russia, unable to access cash in banks back home and their credit cards have been blocked. “Maybe it is our fault that we did not explain how dangerous [Putin] is,” says Marat Gelman, a Russian art collector based in Budva and a vocal critic of Putin. “All people connected in some way with Russia [will] lose a lot.” — AFP

Philippine coastguard accuses China ship of risking collision

MANILA, Philippines: The Philippine Coast Guard has accused its Chinese counterpart of steering one of its ships within metres of a Filipino patrol vessel in the disputed South China Sea, breaking international rules and risking a collision. The incident happened on March 2 near the contested Scarborough Shoal—one of the region’s richest fishing grounds and a flashpoint between the two countries—but was only made public Sunday. It was the fourth time in the past year that a Chinese coastguard vessel had conducted “close distance manoeuvring” near the shoal, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said in a statement.

China seized Scarborough from the Philippines in 2012 following a tense standoff. The Southeast Asian country continues to patrol the waters around the shoal, which is inside its Exclusive Economic Zone.

“The behaviour of the involved (China Coast Guard) vessels increased the risk of collision with four of our capital ships,” PCG chief Admiral Artemio Abu said. In the March 2 incident, the PCG said the Chinese

vessel came within about 19 metres of its patrol boat, which was in “clear violation” of the 1972 International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

The PCG has referred the matter to the foreign ministry, which recently summoned China’s ambassador over a separate incident involving a Chinese navy ship “lingering” in the Philippines’ archipelagic waters. Abu said his agency was under government orders to maintain patrols near Scarborough Shoal, where Filipino fishermen continue to fish. There was no immediate comment from the Chinese embassy or the Philippine foreign ministry. Tensions between Manila and Beijing over the South China Sea, which China claims almost its entirety, have intensified in the final year of President Rodrigo Duterte’s term in office.

Beijing has ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared its historical claim over most of the South China Sea to be without basis. Duterte set aside the ruling in exchange for promises of trade and investment, which critics said have not materialised.

But in November he hardened his stance, expressing outrage after Chinese coastguard ships fired water cannon at Filipino boats. This latest incident comes on the eve of the biggest-ever war games between the Philippines and the United States.

Recent manoeuvres between the longtime allies have focused on potential conflict in the South China Sea, where Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam also have competing claims. — AFP

After COVID, India tries to get on top of tuberculosis

MUMBAI: When COVID-19 ripped through India in 2020–21, several million people are thought to have died. Desperate efforts to stem the pandemic hurt the battle against another huge killer: Tuberculosis. India is the home to a quarter of the world’s TB infections and an estimated half a million people died of the curable lung disease in 2020 in the South Asian nation—a third of the global toll. Because of the pandemic, global deaths from the “silent killer” rose in 2020 for the first time in more than a decade, reversing years of progress, the World Health Organization says. In India, the number of new cases detected in 2020 actually fell by a quarter to around 1.8 million due to COVID restrictions and as the pandemic diverted resources.

Nearly two-thirds of people with TB symptoms did not seek treatment, according to a 2019–21 nationwide government survey released on World TB Day on Thursday. Ashna Ashesh, 29, diagnosed with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis four years ago, saw how patients, many isolated and jobless because of lockdowns, struggled for support. “They were incredibly afraid... They were reaching out for any kind of information that could be offered about how to access tests and medication,” the public health professional with the Survivors Against TB collective told AFP.

“The impact has been immense... COVID has set back the fight against TB quite significantly. A recovery plan for TB is critical, both in India and globally.” India now faces an uphill battle to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s goal of ending the spread of TB by 2025, five years earlier than the UN’s target. Experts and survivors are calling for intensive grassroots campaigns to find “missing” cases, more vaccine funding and support to combat malnutrition, a major trigger for TB. Kuldeep Singh Sachdeva from the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease said states need to increase services such as house-to-house visits and mass screenings.

“That’s the only way now where you can eliminate TB,” Sachdeva, who previously led the government’s National Tuberculosis Elimination Program, told AFP.

Silver lining

Officially COVID has killed almost 520,000 Indians, but experts believe the true toll to be far higher. The pandemic—which saw COVID replace TB as the world’s



MUMBAI: A school girl holds a placard as she watches health workers perform a street play to raise awareness on the tuberculosis disease, at a school in Dharavi slum in Mumbai. — AFP



BUDVA, Montenegro: Tourists sit at outdoor tables of a restaurant in Budva on Montenegro’s coast on March 16, 2022. Following Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine last month, the newly minted member of NATO and an aspirant candidate for European Union membership has found itself in an unexpected bind as sanctions threaten to upend its economic status quo. — AFP

deadliest infectious disease—did however have one silver lining: increased mask-wearing.

Sachdeva estimates this might have cut TB transmission by 20 percent. Additional diagnostic machines procured for COVID could be redeployed for TB, he added. Mumbai—a megapolis of 20 million people and a TB hotspot—has rolled out a programme with young survivors such as Seema Kunchikorve, who was diagnosed with TB five years ago at 20, to keep current patients on track with medications. “The treatment has a lot of (side) effects which patients can’t take,” Kunchikorve told AFP during a TB awareness play staged at a school in India’s biggest slum Dharavi. Vijay Chavan, who treats patients with drug-resistant TB at a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) clinic in Mumbai, said the COVID battle had shown the way to fight the older pandemic.

At the clinic, which treats children as young as five, patients spend hours undergoing check-ups beside brightly coloured wallpapers featuring famous comic characters, before collecting a large tray of pills for their treatments. “If there is a political will for TB, just like COVID, it definitely will give us good results,” he told AFP. — AFP

MONDAY, MARCH 28, 2022

Business

Zain Business launches managed cloud services and cybersecurity solutions

Launch in partnership with ZainTech, Zain Group's regional digital and ICT solutions arm

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of managed cloud services and cybersecurity solutions, offering a wide and comprehensive range of world-class services to its corporate customers in the Kuwaiti market. The new services are powered by ZainTech, Zain Group's regional digital and ICT solutions arm in the MENA region.

The announcement is part of the company's continuous efforts to offer a portfolio of world-class, advanced security solutions to the local business community, serving businesses of all sizes, including large enterprises, SMEs, start-ups, and government institutions. This comes in line with Zain's digital transformation strategy that aims at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market under the New Kuwait 2035 vision.

ZainTech was introduced in October 2021 as Zain Group's regional digital and ICT solutions arm. The company unifies Zain Group's ICT assets to offer enterprises and governments a unique value proposition and comprehensive enterprise digital solutions and transformation services under one roof across the MENA markets.

Commenting on the announcement, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "Today, we take a new step towards our pledge to enable a full and secure digital transformation within the Kuwaiti business community. We are introducing an integrated portfolio of managed cloud services and cybersecurity solutions to enterprises in joint collaboration with our colleagues at ZainTech".

Al-Marzouq added: "During the past few years, the local business market witnessed an accelerated wave of implementing digital transformation within private sector companies, SMEs and start-ups, and government institutions. However, at the same time, many new challenges surfaced along with this wave,



Hamad Al-Marzouq: Kuwaiti market witnessed accelerated wave of digital transformation recently, bringing new challenges and emphasizing the importance of cloud and cybersecurity solutions



Andrew Hanna: ZainTech's establishment as the driver of the Zain Group digital and ICT solutions regionally makes us acutely aware of the need to continue to upgrade and evolve business solutions in order to manage the needs of transformational enterprises

emphasizing the importance of preserving data and protecting the digital infrastructures of companies from security breaches. We have taken the responsibility to offer an all-inclusive and integrated portfolio of cloud services and digital solutions built on the latest world-class technologies and provide cybersecurity solutions to the local business community".

Partnership

Commenting on the partnership, ZainTech CEO Andrew Hanna said: "Kuwait has always been a flagship market for Zain Group operations, and its pioneering developments in the enterprise segment have helped inspire initiatives in other Zain markets. ZainTech's establishment as the driver of the Group's digital and ICT solutions regionally makes us acutely aware of the need to continue to upgrade and evolve business solutions in order to manage the needs of transformational enterprises and continue providing customers, through the Zain opera-

tions, with the best-in-class services."

Hanna continued: "Technologies such as big data, cloud, artificial intelligence, IoT and cybersecurity are defining the next stage of digital solutions, and we are pleased to be positioned to support entities such as Zain Business in Kuwait with a wide range of best-in-class business offerings, leveraging our own expertise as well as the deep and wide partner relationships that we possess."

Zain recognizes the importance of data in driving digital transformation in Kuwait. For this, the company has partnered with renowned global providers in cloud computing, data center solutions, and IT services to bring the best-in-class solutions to its business customers.

Zain's cloud solutions are custom-built by our talented solution architects to enable sustainable digital transformation, innovation, cost optimization and accelerated time to market. Zain solutions are backed by industry-leading SLAs with proactive 24/7 support through an



advanced network operations center. Zain's portfolio covers a wide range of solutions from cloud advisory, virtual private servers and cloud containers to in-country datacenters and fully managed applications.

As global cyber threats continue to rise, the early detection and fast response to cyber security incidents can significantly help organizations contain risk and reduce the economic impacts on their operations, and bottom lines.

Cybersecurity solutions

Zain's fully managed cybersecurity solutions are built on the same premise and are designed to help businesses in Kuwait in swiftly detecting and responding to cyber threats, to ensure full protection of their operations and meet compliance requirements. Zain's solutions are custom-built by skilled security engineers and offer flexible payment models to suit every customer's specific requirements.

Zain Group recently introduced ZainTech across MENA, providing a center of excellence and managed solutions across the ICT stack including cloud, cybersecurity, big data, IoT, AI, smart cities, robotics, drones, and emerging technologies. ZainTech leverages Zain's global reach, unique footprint and infrastructure across its operations as well as other key markets in the Middle East to offer a single point of contact for sales and personalized customer care for multi-national corporations with multiple points of presence across the region.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. Today's launch will contribute to prove the company's full potential in triggering the digital community.

CBK concludes consultations on e-payments

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) concluded its public consultation on the draft updated instructions published on January 31, 2022. The instructions were updated to keep abreast of developments in fintech and e-payments, introduce governing frameworks, enable fintechs to offer value-added services, and supersede the 2018 instructions.

In a statement the CBK announced it has concluded the review of all feedback shared via the designated e-mail by March 24, 2022.

The town hall was held on Sunday March 27, 2022 at the CBK headquarters chaired by the Executive Director - Supervision Sector. The session started with a presentation of the draft e-payment instructions highlighting the key changes of the updated instructions which include: the CBK's direct supervision over e-payment services providers, licensing and capital requirements, operational ceiling, financial guarantee, etc., and their impact on the local market once applied. In attendance were participants from banks, the financial



sector and telecommunications companies. In addition, all inquiries and comments received from the attendees or via the designated email were

addressed. The CBK is updating its instructions to be considerate of all stakeholders, and to support the development of the payment ecosystem.

Sri Lanka fuel prices soar as economy reels

COLOMBO: One of Sri Lanka's biggest fuel suppliers hiked the price of gasoline by nearly 20 percent on Saturday, the second increase in as many weeks, as the country struggles to import oil without dollars.

Lanka IOC, a fuel retailer which accounts for a third of the market, said it raised the petrol price to 303 rupees (just over \$1) a liter, up from 254 rupees. Two weeks ago, the company increased the price of gasoline by 25 percent. The company said the 30 percent depreciation of the rupee against the US dollar and other major currencies this month fuelled the increase.

There was no immediate price revi-

sion from the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation but its representatives, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP it was almost certain to follow Lanka IOC.

Sri Lanka is in the grip of its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948. The island's foreign reserves have hit rock bottom, with commercial banks unable to secure dollars to finance imports of food, fuel and medicines. At least four people have died while waiting in long queues to buy fuel in the past week. Sri Lanka was in a deep economic crisis when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, reducing foreign worker remittances and crippling the lucrative tourism sector—a key source of dollars for the economy.

The government imposed a broad import ban in March 2020 to save foreign currency. The shortages pushed food prices up 25 percent last month, with overall inflation at 17.5 percent-



COLOMBO: People stand in a queue to buy kerosene oil for home use at a petrol station in Colombo. — AFP

the fifth consecutive monthly record high. Sri Lanka is also facing five-hour rolling electricity blackouts as thermal generators have run out of oil.

Three international rating agencies have downgraded the island since late

last year, on fears it may not be able to service its \$51 billion sovereign debt. Sri Lanka announced earlier this month that it will seek an IMF bailout and talks are expected to open next month in Washington. —AFP

Microsoft says it addressed graft allegations in MEA

WASHINGTON: Microsoft, accused by a former employee of paying bribes in Africa and the Middle East, said Saturday it has already probed the allegations and fired several employees as a result.

A former Microsoft employee accused the tech giant of corruption in The Wall Street Journal, and in an essay posted Friday to the website Lioness, which publishes whistleblower accounts. The employee says he was fired after working for Microsoft from 1998 to 2018 in Africa, where he said he saw company employees involved in corrupt practices in several countries in the region. He said the practices included using local partner companies to help sell Microsoft products.

Asked about the allegations, a Microsoft executive said Saturday, "We believe we've previously investigated these allegations, which are many years old, and addressed them." "We cooperated with government agencies to resolve any concerns," Becky Lenaburg, vice president and deputy general counsel for compliance and ethics at Microsoft, told AFP.

Employees were fired and partnerships were ended as part of the response to the original allegations, the company said.

"We are committed to doing business in a responsible way," Lenaburg added. Microsoft "always encourage(s) anyone to report anything they see that may violate the law, our policies, or our ethical standards," she said.

The Journal said the whistleblower employee also warned the US financial watchdog, the Securities and Exchange Commission, of his concerns in 2019. In deposition documents, the employee claimed Microsoft had "engaged for many years in rampant bribery practices," according to the Journal.

The employee estimates that Microsoft spent more than \$200 million per year on bribes and kickbacks in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, according to news website The Verge. — AFP

Business

NBK Money Markets Report

Russia-Ukraine war exacerbates existing inflationary pressures

Concerted effort to reduce dependence on Russian energy in Europe

KUWAIT: The Russia-Ukraine war currently shows no imminent signs of abating. On Ukrainian ground, troops are pushing Russian forces further from Kyiv after hundreds were killed in last week's Russian airstrike on a Mariupol theater. The US and allies warned Russia's Vladimir Putin against the use of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons in Ukraine. US President Joe Biden headed to Poland on Friday in a bid to call for Russia's removal from the G20 group of major economies.

American and European officials are on an endeavor to hinder major parts of Russia's economy from global commerce. A European Union summit focused on Russia will continue in Brussels with modest tightening of sanctions likely to occur. So far, Russia has been blocked from much of the international financial system by banning transactions with the Russian central bank. Additionally, Russia has been cut off from an essential global bank messaging system called SWIFT, assets of Russian leaders and oligarchs have been frozen, and export from the United States and other nations of advanced technology to Russia have been banned. Russia has responded with its own export bans on food, cars and timber. Russia is on the course for a deep recession and 20 percent inflation.

Fed could raise rates faster

US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell spoke at the National Association for Business Economics a week after the central bank decided to lift its benchmark rate from near zero to between 0.25 percent and 0.5 percent. While the central bank typically raises rates in quarter-point increments, Powell mentioned that moving forward the Fed could raise interest rates by 50 basis points if needed to cool down inflation. He expressed confidence that the Fed will be able to achieve a "soft, or at least, soft-ish" landing.

Powell mentioned that while the labor market is performing strongly, "inflation is much too high". With inflation running at a 40-year high, many critics believe the Fed is now playing catch up in raising rates after waiting too long to pull back from its pandemic era economic stimulus. For a long time, Powell had managed inflation expectations by telling Americans that the spike was driven by "transitory" factors. Today, that rhetoric is far behind us with policy makers starting to get more aggressive after delivering the first hike since 2018 and ending the pandemic-era stimulus program. Financial markets are now forecasting 8 hikes this year, with a 77 percent probability of a 50 basis points hike at the Fed's next meeting on May 4th.

Slowdown in German manufacturing

A surge in inflationary pressures across the German economy was revealed by the latest flash PMI data out from Europe. Businesses registered record increases in both input output prices, while growth was impacted by rising costs, material shortages and geopolitical uncertainty. The headline Flash German PMI Composite Output Index slipped to 54.6 in March from February's 6-month high of 55.6. Nevertheless, declines were smaller than expected as easing supply bottlenecks and fewer COVID restrictions gave the German economy room to recover before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The slowdown was led by the manufacturing sector amid supply issues, weaker demand due to the war in Ukraine, and COVID related staff absences. Flash manufacturing and services PMIs came in at 57.6 and 55, respectively. Meanwhile, the service sector maintained a more solid rate of growth amid further easing of pandemic restrictions. With that being said, the rate of expansion in services activity did ease since February as firms also commented mostly on the influence of strong price pressure, high COVID cases, and geopolitical uncertainty.

SNB shifts focus to inflation

Last week, the Swiss National Bank said it will take "all necessary measures" to tackle higher prices according to Chairman Thomas Jordan, marking a shift in tone for a central bank that had battled to tame the strong Swiss franc for years. The SNB cited higher energy costs, production bottlenecks, and the Ukraine war after doubling its inflation forecast for the year. Today, the bank sees 2022 inflation at 2.1 percent, exceeding its 0-2 percent target though remains well below many countries.

Contrasting the US Fed and the BoE, the SNB has held off hiking interest rates, and stuck to the world's lowest interest rate of -0.75 percent in their latest meeting as widely expected. "We are not at all powerless, we look at these inflation forecasts and we will take all necessary measures in order to maintain price stability over the medium to long term," Jordan told journalists. While keeping policy unchanged, the SNB took back its description of the franc as "highly valued", despite the currency recently hitting its highest level against the euro in seven years.

Mounting inflationary pressures

UK inflation registered an annual reading of 6.2 percent in February as the country faces a severe cost-of-living crisis. The 30-year high figure came above expectations for a 5.9 percent rise, and vastly outstripped

January's 30-year high of 5.5 percent. On a monthly basis, CPI exceeded expectations for a 0.6 percent rise, registering a 13-year high of 0.8 percent. So far, the Bank of England has hiked interest rates at three consecutive monetary policy meetings. Borrowing costs are now at 0.75 percent after the central bank cut rates to a historic low of 0.1 percent as it attempts to contain intensifying inflation without harming economic growth. The MPC delivered a more dovish tone than markets had anticipated, stressing the squeeze on household incomes and noting the sharp rise in commodity prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Today, policymakers expect inflation to peak at eight percent in Q2 of this year.

Consumer confidence

Consumers across Britain are facing soaring living costs alongside 30-year high inflation, rising fuel and food prices, higher taxation, and the Bank of England's hawkish approach with the prospect of 6 more increases to come this year alone. Declining for the fourth consecutive month, the consumer confidence barometer fell to -31 in March from -26 in February, marking the lowest level since November 2020 when consumers were faced with a surge in COVID-19 cases.

Commodities

Oil prices eased slightly after the European Union decided to hold off on banning Russian crude imports. Additionally, Kazakhstan said disruption at a key export terminal is set to ease, allowing oil tankers to be loaded again. Nevertheless, the price for Brent crude gained 12.23 percent last week, ending at \$120.65 after rising to a high of \$139.13 two weeks prior.

Dependence on Russian energy

Moreover, the US and European Union will aim to boost supplies of liquefied natural gas to European countries by the end of 2022 in an effort to displace Russian gas. Under the agreement, Europe will receive around 15 billion cubic meters of additional liquefied natural gas supplies by the end of this year. Plans are also pending regarding an additional 50 billion cubic meters of supply. It is a huge endeavor given Russia is the EU's biggest gas supplier, shipping about 150 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe via pipelines each year and another 18 billion cubic meters of LNG.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30410.

Argentina to get \$9.7bn under \$44bn deal: IMF

BEUNOS AIRES: The IMF executive board on Friday approved a \$44 billion loan for Argentina to help the inflation-wracked country's economy, with \$9.7 billion of the funding available immediately.

The Washington-based crisis lender said the financing "aims to provide Argentina with balance of payments and budget support" and also "strengthen debt sustainability, tackle high inflation, boost reserves, address the country's social and infrastructure gaps and promote inclusive growth."

These arrangements are a "step forward" for the "macroeconomic stabilization" and the "economic recovery" of the country, said Argentine Economy Minister Martin Guzman. The deal "allows the country to continue creating conditions to be able to continue the strong economic recovery it is experiencing," Guzman told AFP in Paris.

Argentina's Senate last month had greenlit a deal with the International Monetary Fund to restructure \$45 billion in debt, the legacy of a record loan contracted in 2018 under former president Mauricio Macri. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva noted the country struggles with both rapid price increases and low incomes.

"Against this backdrop, the authorities' economic program sets pragmatic and realistic objectives, along with credible policies to strengthen macroeconomic stability and begin to address Argentina's deep-seated challenges," she said in a statement.

However, she noted that "risks to the program are exceptionally high, and spillovers from the war in Ukraine are already materializing." In 2018, under the government of center-right Macri, the IMF approved its biggest-ever loan of \$57 billion to Argentina. The country received \$44 billion of that amount.—AFP

AL SAFAT

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AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 24 MARCH 2022

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

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	36,868	8,926.14	2.7%	7.3%	16.8%	588,086,145	254,638,598	30,809	33.0	2.8	77.8%
Main Market	10,494	6,222.73	0.6%	-1.1%	5.7%	608,946,404	74,103,601	28,505	15.4	1.3	22.2%
All Share	47,362	8,042.64	2.2%	5.3%	14.2%	1,197,032,549	328,742,199	59,314	28.8	2.4	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	28,106	1,893.12	2.8%	7.8%	16.7%	366,968,943	165,236,197	14,961	32.5	2.7	58.76%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,035	1,160.79	0.7%	2.6%	13.3%	12,593,454	6,013,531	1,112	29.9	1.7	2.16%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	785	1,534.29	0.1%	-0.6%	14.8%	128,864,310	11,159,731	5,333	31.9	6.6	1.64%
CONSUMER STAPLES	222	715.14	-0.5%	-1.0%	-2.2%	3,475,072	1,975,783	304	17.9	1.5	0.46%
ENERGY	287	1,376.73	0.2%	0.4%	-3.6%	32,829,269	1,334,526	1,246	13.4	1.4	0.60%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,738	1,632.12	1.1%	3.5%	14.7%	444,395,077	75,784,903	17,298	12.0	2.2	9.91%
HEALTH CARE	254	511.54	2.9%	-37.1%	-35.8%	24,619	12,939	26	15.9	2.6	0.53%
INDUSTRIALS	4,583	1,290.60	3.0%	1.9%	13.1%	42,702,843	32,598,847	7,889	42.0	1.4	9.58%
INSURANCE	677	1,618.54	-1.5%	0.3%	5.6%	2,571,021	467,831	244	7.9	1.2	1.42%
REAL ESTATE	2,998	1,393.84	1.0%	3.5%	5.1%	141,086,225	20,539,436	7,502	15.8	1.3	6.27%
TECHNOLOGY	10	727.50	6.4%	5.3%	6.4%	2,508	250	3	-	0.9	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,884	1,266.42	1.2%	4.0%	16.3%	17,272,478	12,662,463	3,113	17.5	2.2	8.12%
UTILITIES	249	594.74	0.0%	2.3%	-0.9%	4,246,730	955,762	283	19.2	4.0	0.52%

Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
FTI	53	21.56	34,01	1,631	11
TAMINV	440	13.99	1,533,145	643,793	122
NINV	385	8.45	30,235,927	11,613,448	1,309
KHOT	123	7.90	6,961	829	37
TAAMEER	37.5	7.45	4,083,658	149,707	209

Top Losers

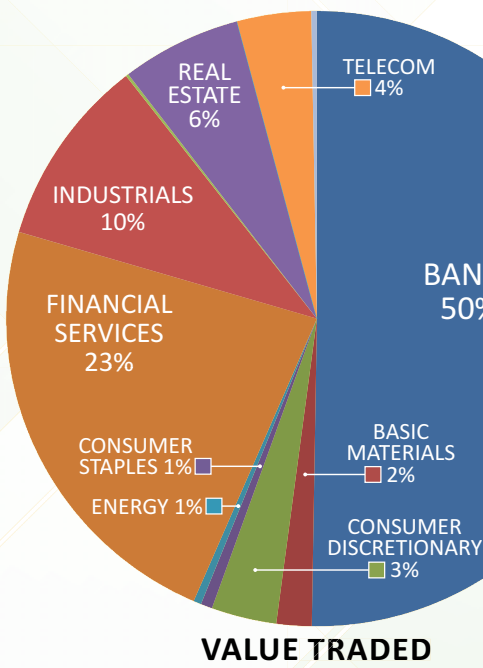
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
JIYAD	53.7	-33.46	111,535,666	6,280,413	3,263
GFC	85	-29.75	369,669	32,811	116
AGHC	360	-20.70	11,440,352	4,811,414	1,287
URC	95	-11.21	10,337,126	1,067,742	686
SANAM	85	-8.60	953,683	82,311	63

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AUB	313	5.03	201,851,669	60,949,881	3,212
JIYAD	53.7	-33.46	111,535,666	6,280,413	3,263
GFH	101	3.06	110,430,018	10,993,333	2,526
KPROJ	199	-4.78	79,428,134	16,162,704	1,75
KFH	1,026	3.43	38,673,629	38,767,665	3,994

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
AUB	313	5.03	201,851,669	60,949,881	3,212
KFH	1,026	3.43	38,673,629	38,767,665	3,994
NBK	1,150	2.68	30,573,225	34,623,694	2,493
AGLTY	1,084	5.35	19,260,896	20,449,797	3,126
KPROJ	199	-4.78	79,428,134	16,162,704	1,75



All Share Price Index YTD



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value decreased 4% and 5%, respectively. Main market volume and value increased 5% and 4%, respectively.
- Premier index registered a new peak following strong trading last week. The Main index rebounded from the support level but is still considered as weak as the technical signals are not positive.
- Technically, the All-Share index registered a new all-time high-level closing at 8042, support levels at 8013, 7954, and 7934, while resistance at 8043. Premier index registered a new all-time high-level closing at 8926, support levels at 8887, 8845, 8813, and 8754, while resistance at 8926. The Main index closed at 6222, support levels at 6216, 6182, and 6153, while resistance at 6235, 6267, and 6320.

Business

Canada torn between economy, climate in deciding oil project

Norwegian firm Equinor seeking to develop oil discoveries in Flemish Pass Basin

MONTREAL: Eco warrior turned Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault, picked by Justin Trudeau five months ago to guide Canada's climate policy, will soon face his first major test in deciding on a new offshore oil project. Norwegian firm Equinor is seeking to develop oil discoveries in the Flemish Pass Basin, some 500 kilometers (310 miles) east of St Johns, Newfoundland.

Its proposed Bay du Nord project promises to create thousands of jobs and generate Can\$3.5 billion (US\$2.8 billion) in royalties for the Atlantic island province, rescuing its floundering economy.

But exploiting an estimated 300 million barrels of oil over 30 years would set back efforts to curb climate change. Oil market turmoil caused by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and Western sanctions against the Russian energy sector could further complicate matters.

Guilbeault, a longtime activist who scaled Toronto's CN Tower in 2001 to draw attention to climate change, is to announce a decision in the coming weeks.

Environmentalists say this will be a "real test" of his and Prime Minister Trudeau's climate bona fides.

The Trudeau administration faces "a very big dilemma," Pierre-Olivier Pineau, an energy policy expert at HEC Montreal business school, told AFP.

"If I had to bet, I think there is a slightly higher chance that he rejects the project," he said, opining that the government needs to show itself to be taking real climate actions, especially after being thrashed in 2018 for salvaging construction of a major pipeline from the Alberta oil sands to the Pacific coast.

"If he rejects (Bay du Nord), this sends a message reinforcing Canada's image of being a champion in the fight against climate change," Pineau

explained. Equiterre, an environmental advocacy group co-created by Guilbeault in 1993 following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro that produced the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, said Ottawa must reject Bay du Nord.

"Canada is far from meeting its greenhouse gas reduction targets," Equiterre analyst Emile Boisseau-Bouvier told AFP. The Trudeau government last year enhanced its Paris Agreement target to reduce carbon emissions by 40-45 percent from 2005 levels by 2030. But it is still short of EU and US goals.

"It is not by betting on a moribund industry that we are going to solve the (climate) problem," said Boisseau-Bouvier, explaining that "the next few weeks will be pivotal" for Canada, as it also prepares to unveil a plan to reach its emissions target.

Climate politics

Trudeau's Liberals in the last election won six out of seven House of Commons seats in Newfoundland, out of a total 338 seats. Those six-including former resources minister Seamus O'Regan, who is now labor minister-have lobbied fiercely for approval of the oil project, but have reportedly faced pushback within the Liberal caucus.

With the highest unemployment rate in the country, Newfoundland needs the economic boost Bay du Nord would provide-especially after reduced oil demand and prices related to pandemic restrictions on travel brought construction of another offshore oil project to a halt in 2020.

Ottawa had provided Newfoundland's oil industry Can\$320 million in aid back then.

Newfoundland Premier Andrew Furey said he has pressed Trudeau on "the importance of this



This handout illustration provided by Equinor shows an illustration of the planned Bay du Nord Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel. Replenish its coffers with billions of dollars or renounce hydrocarbons by betting on its climate commitments: Canada, the world's fourth largest oil producer, will have to decide in the coming weeks on the fate of a controversial offshore project, a decision that should waves whatever. —AFP

project to our province," calling it "critical" to the regional economy. After a four-year environmental review, Ottawa has twice in recent months postponed announcing a decision on Bay du Nord.

"Folks are pretty down about the delay," said Paul Barnes, Atlantic director for Canada's Oil and Natural Gas Producers. Canada's environmental impact agency last August concluded Bay du Nord was "not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects, taking into account the implementation of mitigation measures."

Pineau acknowledged that intuitively approving the project would seem to go "against climate objectives," but argued that rejecting it would see oil investments go elsewhere, "which is not necessarily any better for the climate."

University of Waterloo professor Angela Carter, who researches ecological and political-economic risks of fossil fuel dependence, sees the issue simply. "We cannot have it both ways," she said. "Canada cannot meet its climate commitments and expand oil and gas production." —AFP

British consumer confidence sinks amid inflation crisis

WASHINGTON: UK consumer confidence "continues to nosedive" as surging inflation causes a cost-of-living crisis, a survey revealed, as the government faces pressure to better ease the financial pain. GfK's Consumer Confidence Index fell five points to minus 31 in March—a fourth monthly drop in a row, as separate official data showed a fall in UK retail sales.

The last time consumer confidence was this low was in the final quarter of 2020 when Covid numbers were rising, the data analyst group added.

'Wall of worry'

"A wall of worry is confronting consumers this month and there is an unmistakable sense of crisis in our numbers," said Client Strategy Director GfK, Joe Staton. "Consumers across the UK are experiencing the impact of soaring living costs with 30-year-high levels of inflation... against a background of stagnant pay rises that cannot compensate for the financial duress."

Staton said that confidence in people's personal financial situation and in the wider economy were "severely depressed" also owing to the Ukraine war and rising COVID numbers across the UK. "The outlook for consumer confidence is not good: it's certain there's more bad news to come," he predicted.

Retail sales drop

The GfK survey, conducted on 2,000 people aged above 16, came as official data showed UK retail sales dropped in February as soaring inflation put the brakes on most purchases. Bucking the trend, car fuel purchases were above pre-pandemic levels for the first time despite rocketing prices as the economy reopens from COVID lockdowns.

And clothes purchases jumped by more than 13 percent as workers return to offices, the Office for National Statistics noted. Overall, however, UK retail sales volumes contracted by 0.3 percent last month compared with January, the ONS said. "The squeeze on household budgets is set to worsen over the coming months, exerting further downward pressure on retail sales," said Karl Thompson, economist at Centre for Economics and Business Research.

PM vows to 'fix it'

Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Thursday acknowledged the government would have to do more to help Britons struggling with rocketing costs. He spoke as finance minister Rishi Sunak faces pressure from within even the ruling Conservative party for not going far enough in his budget update this week, as the government forecast that UK inflation would reach a 40-year high by the end of 2022.

Johnson told LBC radio that "as we go forward, we need to do more" and "the cost of living is the single biggest thing we're having to fix, and we will fix it".

Chancellor of the Exchequer Sunak on Wednesday unveiled measures to help household finances, including a cut on fuel duty and an easing of the tax burden for the lowest earners. —AFP

Venezuela's risky currency stabilization to tackle inflation

CARACAS: Venezuela has been in recession for eight years, suffered four years of hyperinflation and endured a currency in free fall. But the beleaguered bolivar has, against all odds, managed to stabilize since October.

It is thanks to a \$2.2 billion investment by the state in a bid to slow down inflation in the South American nation. Last year ended with inflation at 686 percent—the highest in the world.

But that was a significant improvement on the 130,000 percent in 2018, 9,585 percent in 2019 and 3,000 percent in 2020. According to consultancy Aristimuno Herrera & Associates, Venezuela's central bank has injected \$2.2 billion into the internal market in 2021-2022.

Banned for 15 years by the government, the US dollar was once scarce and highly prized, exchanging hands on the black market for significantly more than the official exchange rate. Suffering a cashflow crisis, the government was forced to lift the ban in 2019.

Can it be sustained?

"Offering more dollars than there is demand generates stability in the exchange rate," Cesar Aristimuno, director at Aristimuno Herrera & Associates, told AFP. The bank has acknowledged 29 "interventions" since October 2021, although without giving details of the amounts.

Last October, the bank slashed six zeros off the bolivar-making one new bolivar worth a million old ones—with the government saying this would improve faith in the local currency.

Germany moves to wean itself off Russian energy

BERLIN: Germany said Friday it was drastically slashing its energy purchases from Russia amid Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, with oil imports to be halved by June and coal deliveries to end by the autumn. "In recent weeks, together with all relevant players, we have made intensive efforts to import less fossil energy from Russia and broaden out our supply base," said Economy Minister Robert Habeck.

"The first important milestones have been reached to free us from the grip of Russian imports," he added. Before Moscow began its war in Ukraine, a third of Germany's oil imports, 45 percent of its coal purchases and 55 percent of gas imports came from Russia.

The reliance of Europe's biggest economy on Russian energy has been exposed as an Achilles' heel as Western allies scramble to penalize Vladimir Putin for his attack on Ukraine.

With calls for an energy embargo growing louder, companies with Russian suppliers are letting their contracts run out and turning to other suppliers "at a crazy speed," said Habeck. Germany has been reluctant to back an embargo so far, but the United States and European Union announced Friday a task force

aimed at cutting the bloc's reliance on Russian fossil fuels.

'Independent'

As a result of the contract switches, oil deliveries from Russia can already be seen dropping by 25 percent, halving by the middle of the year and drying up completely by the end of the year. Likewise, German power companies were ditching Russian coal. "By the autumn, we can be independent from Russian coal," said the economy ministry.

On gas imports, however, Habeck acknowledged that it was more complicated, and Germany is expected to be able to largely wean itself off Russian deliveries only in mid-2024. Germany already said in March that it was ploughing 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) into buying liquefied natural gas (LNG) from suppliers like Qatar or the United States.

However, the receiving terminals for the gas are not in place. As a result, it is dependent on neighboring countries' terminals. Plans to build terrestrial LNG terminals are being accelerated, although they are unlikely to be up and running before 2026. For now, three floating LNG terminals—essentially huge ships moored by a port to receive gas stocks—are due to be reserved by energy giants Uniper and RWE, said the ministry.

Security standby

Germany's coalition of Social



Venezuela continues to register the highest inflation in the world with 686 percent in 2021. —AFP

Aristimuno. Since inflation is high and the exchange rate is stable, the dollar's buying power is falling. Likewise, "exports are losing their attractiveness" compared to imports. Carlos Fernandez Gallardo, president of the FEDECAMARAS employers federation, said he is worried.

"There is an increase in dollar costs for producers, with a pernicious effect on the consumer," he told AFP. "What will happen if these dollars disappear?" In 2018, the government attempted to tackle inflation by obliging banks to keep 85 percent of their reserves in the central bank in an attempt to limit the printing of money. That served to reduce credit, which was already in free fall with the depreciating bolivar. Venezuela is a credit minnow with less than \$140 million in 2021, compared to \$14 billion in neighboring Colombia.

Aware that credit, investments and growth are intimately related, Caracas partially changed tack in February, allowing loans indexed against the dollar under certain conditions and reducing the obligatory reserves to 73 percent. But the challenge remains, how to promote growth while keeping inflation under control. —AFP



BRIESENSEE, Germany: In this file photo taken on August 14, 2021 the sun sets behind wind turbines near the small village of Briesensee in Brandenburg, eastern Germany, at the end of a warm summer day. —AFP

Democrats, Greens and the liberal FDP had eyed an energy transition to renewables that would make Europe's biggest economy climate-neutral by 2045. It had therefore planned to wind down its coal usage, with an end seen by 2030, while natural gas use was due to rise in the meantime until the switch to renewables was complete.

But the war in Ukraine has reshuffled the country's calculations while also exposing the economic powerhouse's devastating reliance on Russian energy. Habeck, himself of the Green party, has therefore found himself looking around

the world to purchase coal.

And Berlin on Thursday it is now looking at keeping its coal plants open longer "as a security standby".

Under Friday's US-EU task force announcement, the United States pledged to help the bloc cut its reliance on Russian energy by supplying an extra 15 billion cubic metres of LNG this year.

But with Russia pressing on with its war despite unprecedented sanctions imposed by Western allies, pressure is rising for the EU to sever Moscow's economic lifeline by banning energy imports. —AFP



Proprietor of Goviers, Simon Willis inspects a Platinum Jubilee HM Queen Elizabeth II Character Jug, as part of their Royal Commemoratives collection, in Stoke-on-Trent, central England. — AFP photos



Graham Lockett selects the correct blend of paints to mix used to produce silk screen printed transfers to be applied to Goviers' Platinum Jubilee Commemorative pottery in his factory in Stoke-on-Trent.



A finished Platinum Jubilee Commemorative Beaker for Goviers, as part of their Royal Commemoratives collection, rests on top of as-yet undecorated beakers in Stoke-on-Trent.

UK ceramist fired up for Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee

In his ceramics workshop, Simon Willis proudly displays the crockery set he has created for Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, dreaming it will end up in the monarch's personal collection. "It's an event which won't ever happen again, we won't have the chance of seeing another queen or king on the throne for 70 years. So it's a big deal," he told AFP. Willis is the owner of Goviers in Stoke-on-Trent, central England, which has specialized in making commemorative ceramics for more than 30 years.

Elizabeth became queen on February 6, 1952, and June will be the focal point of public celebrations to mark her unprecedented 70-year reign. To celebrate the occasion, Goviers has been selling a "Platinum Jubilee" range of cups and plates with traditionally English floral designs since last July. The work is meticulous, with each colored pattern in the motif individually printed onto a transfer and applied by hand on the fine porcelain cups and plates.

A ceramist brushes the final golden touches to the piece, which is then fired

to make it ready for sale. From the rough cup to the final dabs of paint, everything is made in Stoke-on-Trent, which is also known as The Potteries. The city has been renowned for its pottery for centuries, taking advantage of local clay for making the ceramics and coal deposits for firing them. It became the world's centre of pottery production in around 1800, prospering for decades before going into sharp decline, with factories closing and relocating to Asia.

'Very English tradition'

"A lot of the manufacturing has gone abroad," due to cost of production, said the 58-year-old owner. But those factories don't produce jubilee pieces because "they see the market is not big enough for them", he added. Willis stumbled into the ceramics industry after studying economics, specializing in the auto industry. Given most of his customer are collectors from Britain, he had no hesitation in creating a new jubilee line. "They've probably got plates to celebrate the queen's marriage, or the coro-



nation, all these other events," he said of his clientele. "They are just a tradition, I suppose, that is very English."

Selling for between £45 (\$59, 54 euros) for a small cup and £175 for a large plate, Goviers crockery is not intended to be used as a mere kitchen utensil. Instead it is meant to be displayed alongside other commemorative ceramics. "The British ceramics industry has always been good at marking those occasions, big or small," said Willis. "The great thing about ceramics is that... whatever is produced today, if it's looked after will still be around when my son is proba-



Gilder Claire Wright applies gold paint by hand as she works to produce a Platinum Jubilee Commemorative Limited Edition Loving Cup for Goviers.

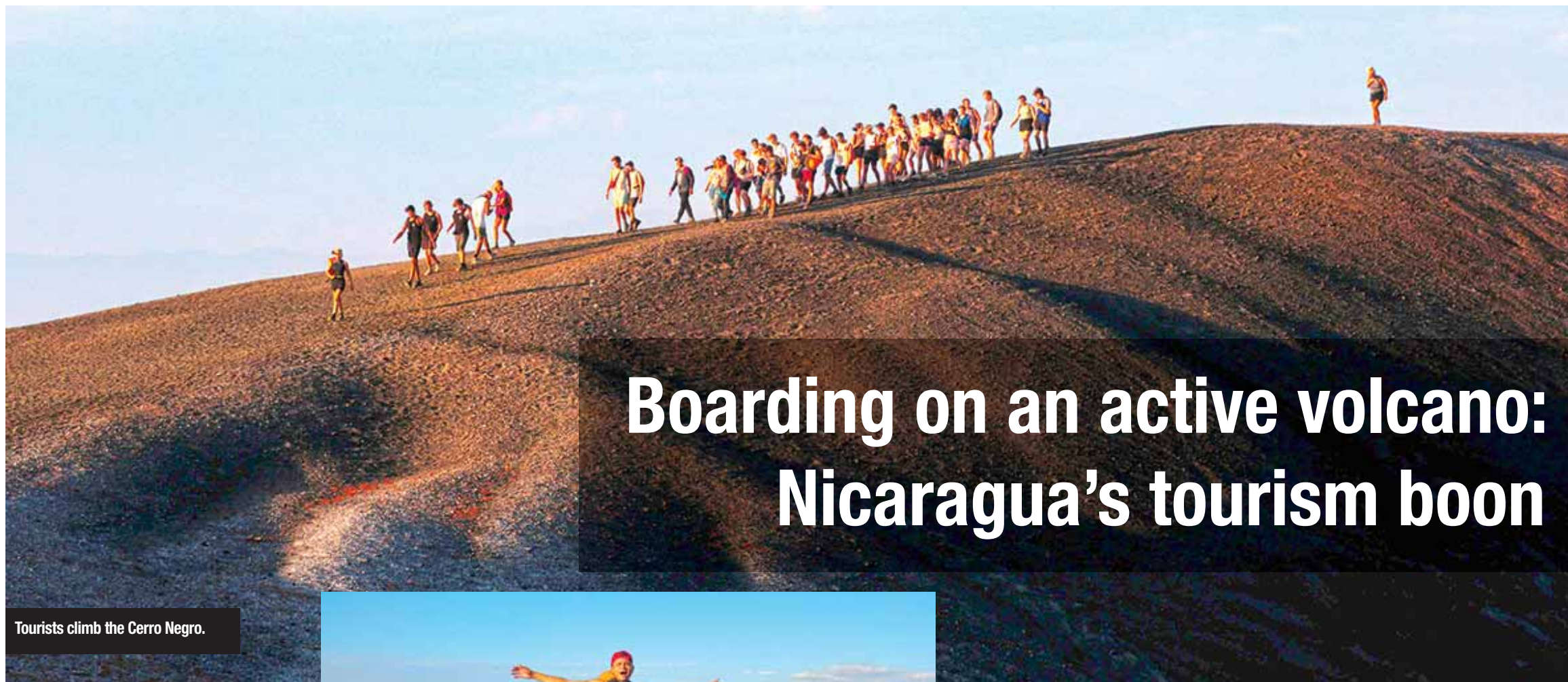
bly gone. "We're producing something that is intrinsically there forever," he added.

Economic benefits

Souvenirs dedicated to the popular queen, who turns 96 next month, and the wider royal family are typically rolled out to mark every birth, wedding and celebration. Such souvenirs generated

almost £200 million in revenue during the Diamond Jubilee in 2012, with five million commemorative cups and ceramics sold, according to the UK's Centre for Retail Trade. Four days of public festivities are planned for early June, including a military parade, a large concert and thousands of street parties around the country.

Despite Brexit and the pandemic, tourists are expected in their droves. Goviers expects to sell only a few hundred cups and plates, but its boss hopes his tableware will be remembered. "It is a little bit special doing something that is associated with a royal event, a big event... for an occasion which has been celebrated all over the world," said Willis. He is particularly keen to impress one potential customer. "We do know that the queen obviously has a massive collection of ceramics. But a couple of things that we've done, they may well get into the hands of Her Majesty," he added. — AFP

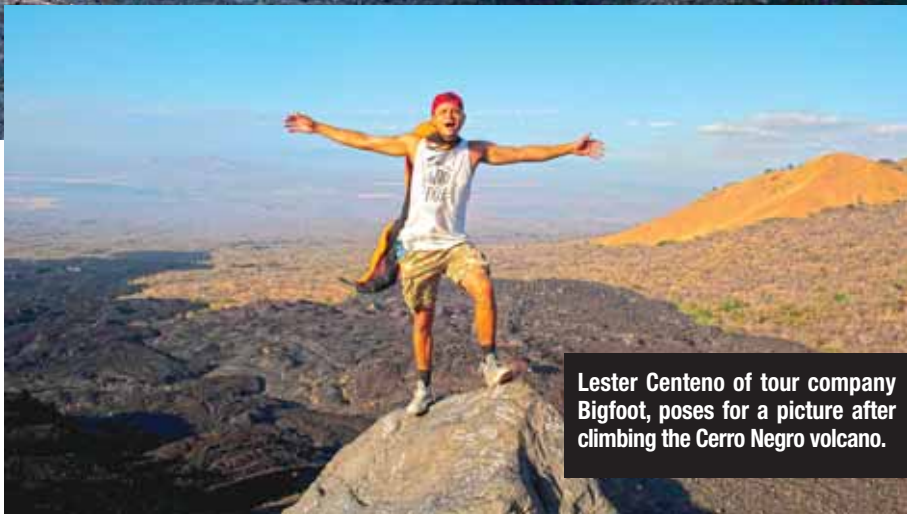


Boarding on an active volcano: Nicaragua's tourism boon

Tourists climb the Cerro Negro.

It took Ana Muller half an hour to trek to the peak of the Cerro Negro volcano, a small effort given the reward on offer at Nicaragua's top tourist attraction: volcano boarding. The active Cerro Negro is just 728 meters (2,400 feet) high, but sliding down its ash-covered slopes on a board is a 40-second thrill that allows participants to say they have surfed a volcano. "It is a unique experience," said Muller, a German tourist who enjoyed the "adrenaline." "You can only do it in a few places in the world."

"There are many volcanoes here in Central America, but only volcano boarding here in Nicaragua, in Leon." Although active, Cerro Negro does not spit out smoke-its last major eruption was in 1999. "Little scary, but fun. High, very high, but it's once in a lifetime," said American tourist Eduardo Shandro. "It



Lester Centeno of tour company Bigfoot, poses for a picture after climbing the Cerro Negro volcano.

was really good, you go really fast. You lose control a little bit, but you get a hang of it after a little bit, and it's a really cool experience," added his compatriot Adolfo Adofen. "I never thought I would do this in my life, to go down a volcano, but it was amazing."

The best part for Portuguese tourist Carina Mora was "being in contact with the earth. I think it's the best human experience you can have to feel the warmth of the earth." The hike up the volcano "is a little bit tiring... but then when you come back

down it's perfect. You want to go again and again."

'Only place in the world'

Hundreds of adrenaline junkie tourists converge on Cerro Negro, a boon for tourism in a country that has been hampered by a political crisis sparked in 2018 with the brutal repression of street protesters and exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. The pioneers of volcano boarding in Nicaragua first tackled the Cerro Negro slopes in 2006. One of them, Lester Centeno, is now head of the Bigfoot tour company. Like all tourism in Nicaragua, volcano boarding was hit by the political crisis and pandemic. "It took a long time to get the activity going again. For about eight months, we had almost nothing, but now people are starting to come back to the

country and obviously they always come looking for this," said Centeno.

"It's the only place in the world where you can go boarding on an active volcano!" In Leon, the closest big town to the volcano, there are at least 12 tour operators offering boarding experiences on Cerro Negro for around \$30. Twelve communities living close to the volcano, making up half a million people, live directly or indirectly off tourism, said Matilde Hernandez, the volcano park ranger. Local resident Jose Gonzalez carries tourists' boards up the volcano. "That is our salary. If we don't carry the board up, we don't earn any money," he said. Depending on how busy it is, he can earn up to \$20 a day. — AFP



Tourists climb the Cerro Negro volcano, the youngest in Central America (167 years old) and one of the most active in the country, to later surfing down its slopes in Leon, Nicaragua. — AFP photos



A tourist slides down the slopes of the Cerro Negro volcano.



Women hug a dog in the “Home for Rescued Animals” shelter in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. — AFP photos



This photograph shows dogs in an aviary in the “Home for Rescued Animals” shelter in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.



Shelter manager Orest Zalypskyi (left) removes identification tag before give up a dog to the new family in the “Home for Rescued Animals” shelter in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

ABANDONED ANIMALS JOIN UKRAINE’S WAR EXODUS

At the “Home for Rescued Animals” in the city of Lviv, exotic creatures are now sheltered alongside everyday pets—those left behind in the rush of refugees fleeing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. A milky-eyed wolf prowls in its enclosure. Boris the goat bathes his bedraggled face in the spring sunshine. A parliament of owls peers out from the perches of their shaded roost.

In a side building around a dozen cats from Kyiv are lodged. Dogs yowl from an industrial barn, courting volunteers arriving to walk them round nearby parkland. “Migrants who come from Kharkiv, Kyiv, Mykolaiv and go abroad via Lviv leave animals en masse,” said 24-year-old shelter manager Orest Zalypskyi. His hilltop sanctuary in the 13th century city of Lviv was once a “haven” reserved for exotic animals, he says. “This war has made us more engaged.”

Left behind

The UN estimates more than 3.7 million Ukrainians have fled the country since the



A woman walks with dogs at the “Home for Rescued Animals” shelter in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

war began a month ago. More than two million of those crossed the border to Poland, where AFP has witnessed droves of animal lovers ferrying dogs, cats, parrots and turtles to safety. Lviv—just 70 kilometers

(45 miles) from the border—has been the final stopover on Ukrainian soil for many making the journey out of the war zone. Some soon-to-be refugees felt unable to take their pets further. Zalypskyi estimates

his shelter has taken in 1,500 animals since the war began, from migrants and shelters in “hot spots” to the east.

Between 10 and 20 were collected from Lviv’s train station—the locus of chaos in the first days of the war, where carriages and platforms heaved with desperate passengers. “There’s been no system,” says Zalypskyi. “We just have many volunteers who head out and fetch them.” One dog from a war-torn region in the east did not leave its pen for two weeks. A cat abandoned by its owner of seven years is distraught. “We are all bitten and scratched,” said Zalypskyi of his volunteer teams. “The animals are very stressed.”

Onward travel

However the animals left here do not languish. Around 200 have been adopted by the locals of Lviv, while most of the rest are taken onwards by volunteers to Germany, Latvia and Lithuania. There are currently no cats available for adoption—they are all bound for Poland. By noon Zalypskyi has already signed his third set

of dog adoption paperwork for the day. Meanwhile the shelter is inundated with couples, friends and families arriving to borrow dogs for a weekend stroll.

“Ukrainians really adore animals,” says 36-year-old Kateryna Chernikova. “It’s just in the DNA.” With her husband Ihor, 36, and four-year-old daughter Solomiia, Chernikova fled Kyiv a week before war broke out. The young family plus their two guinea pigs Apelsynka and Lymonadka (Orange and Lemonade) — now live in the relative safety of Lviv, which has been largely untouched by violence.

On Saturday morning they leashed a pair of boisterous hunting dogs and set out through the shelter gates, under a fluttering Ukrainian flag. “We’re not in the war conditions itself, but it’s psychologically very hard,” said Chernikova. “When you have a walk with a dog, it just feels as if you’re living a normal life.” —AFP



Queen Elizabeth

Queen Elizabeth receives luxury golf buggy to help with mobility

Queen Elizabeth has taken delivery of a luxury golf buggy to help her move around in comfort. The 95-year-old monarch - who has been using a walking stick at recent engagement after suffering with mobility issues - reportedly received the £62,000 four-seater cart two weeks ago and has already used it to travel around the grounds of Windsor Castle with her beloved dogs. A source told The Sun on Sunday newspaper: “The cart arrived in the last fortnight. She and her aides have already used it. Last week she took the dogs out in it for a tour around the private grounds.”

“Her Majesty is struggling with stiffness in her legs, so the cart is a perfect solution to getting her around. She’s been through a lot of physical battles recently with Covid and her back sprain, which would take its toll on anyone - let alone someone who turns 96 next month.” The 43mph electric cart was built by Danish firm Garia as part of a tie-up with Mercedes-Benz and is described as putting “many passenger cars to shame”.

It has a range of 50 miles before its battery needs recharging and while she’s relaxing on one of the four brown leather seats, the queen can tuck into treats from its fridge, or check for weather updates and mapping on the tablet-style 10in screen next to the steering wheel. The buggy has “weather enclosure” doors and windows, so the monarch will be able to use it all-year round, and it also has headlights, 14in alloy wheels, a lockable boot, heated windscreen, cup holders and even Bluetooth speakers. The source added: “The cart is a new addition to the castle, and they all think it’s a great idea. It’s certainly fit for a Queen and hopefully it will help her fulfil her engagements. “Everyone wants her to carry on for as long as possible being seen by the public.” —BangShowbiz

African mask sold for €4.2 million in France despite protest

A carved mask from Central Africa, dating from the 19th century, was sold in France for 4.2 million euros (\$4.6 million) on Saturday, despite Gabonese protesters in the auction house calling for the item’s “restitution”. The rare wooden “Ngil” mask, used in ceremonies by the Fang ethnic people of Gabon, smashed its estimate of 300,000-400,000 euros at the auction in the southern French city of Montpellier. “It’s a case of receiving stolen goods,” a man describing himself as a member of the Gabonese community in Montpellier exclaimed from the back of the auction room, surrounded by half a dozen compatriots.

“We’ll file a complaint. Our ancestors, my ancestors, from the Fang community, we will recover this object”, the protester added, describing the mask as a “colonial ill-gotten gain”. Auctioneer Jean-Christophe Giuseppe said the auction was “entirely legal”, as far as he was aware. Accompanied by security guards, the demonstrators left the auction hall calmly, but continued their protest against the sale of African works of art. Saturday’s auction also included a Congolese chair which sold for 44,000 euros. With added costs and fees the total paid by the successful bidder for the Fang mask was 5.25 million euros, close to a record for such an item. In 2006 a similar Fang mask brought in 2.09 million euros at a Paris auction. — AFP



This photograph shows a “Ngil” mask of the Fang people of Gabon which is estimated at 300,000/400,000 euros. — AFP



Musicians play for people living in a metro station used as a bomb shelter in Kharkiv during Russia’s military invasion launched on Ukraine. — AFP

Music plays on in Kharkiv under Russia bombardment

Russian bombs fall daily on Kharkiv since the invasion of Ukraine, but time stood still briefly on Saturday as a group of Ukrainian musicians moved listeners with a classical concert. Three violinists, a cellist and a bass player delighted an audience of a few dozen people for half an hour in one of the largest subway stations in Ukraine’s second city, close to the Russian border. Underground and protected from rockets and missiles, the musicians, aged 20-35, played the national anthem and several tunes from popular Ukrainian folklore.

The enraptured listeners were displaced people, enjoying the concert taking place on a marble staircase. They have been living in the station since the invasion began on February 24, fleeing the war above and sleeping in old wagons. “When our heart is full, it helps us overcome difficult times,” said Sergiy Polututsky, director of Kharkiv Music Fest, one of the most prestigious music festivals in Ukraine. The concert was his idea, organized on the same day that the annual event would have begun.

Despite the sounds of war, “music doesn’t stop”, he said. “This mini concert is a symbol that light will overcome darkness, that the truth will triumph over lies... the organization was a bit complicated because of security, but we made it!” The musicians thrilled the audience with an extract from Bach’s Orchestral Suite No. 3 as well as Dvorak’s humoresques. They then played a tune by Myroslav Skoryk—a Ukrainian composer who died in 2020 — which is often used by President

Volodymyr Zelensky in his videos and messages posted on social media.

‘Right track’

Protected by armed guards, Kharkiv governor Oleg Sinegubov and the city’s mayor Igor Terekhov also attended the recital. “A month ago, we couldn’t have imagined that our soldiers and our soldiers could, hand in hand, protect the city,” Terekhov said. “In times of war, we work all together for victory, this concert shows that we are on the right track,” he added. Videos of professional cellist, Denys Karachevsev, have been shared on social media where he performs in front of buildings destroyed by bombs, magical moments between frightening periods of ferocious Russian bombing.

“It was just an idea, to be useful to my people, my country and my hometown. I love this city, its residents. Anything I can do to help, I will do it,” he told AFP. “People tell me my videos bring a little normality back to their lives. It’s important at this moment... We aren’t scared, we are strong, and everyone can help in their own way,” he added. Other Ukrainian musicians have also shared clips of hope on social media.

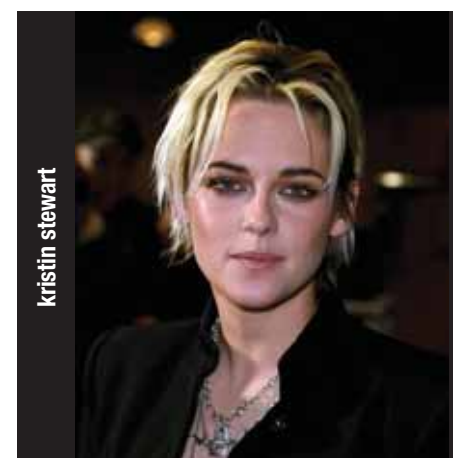
Violinist Vera Lytovchenko in her shelter in Kharkiv, pianist Irina Maniukina in her damaged home near Kyiv or other members of the opera in Odessa, in front of their rooms protected by sandbags. “Everyone came to my house for a single rehearsal,” beamed Tatiana Chukh, one of the violinists who performed at the subway concert. “In the first few days of the war, there was silence within me. Then I understood that we must continue to live, for our ideals, for our country, for our future,” she added. “Playing our instruments is what we know best, we will do this in all circumstances,” she said, adding with a big smile and misty eyes: “Maybe it was the best concert of my life.” — AFP

Kristen Stewart felt ‘taller’ playing Princess Diana

The 31-year old actress - who received her first Oscar nomination for her portrayal of the late royal in Pablo Larrain’s 2021 historical fiction film ‘Spencer’ - felt empowered playing the princess and the role made her believe she could bring people together, just as the beloved Princess of Wales did in her lifetime. She explained: “I felt this power. I felt taller playing her. I felt like I could bring people together. I felt like I could put my arms around people in a completely cheesy, conceptual, metaphorical, way. I mean it. Even if it was totally made up by me and something I was convincing myself of, her life helped me do that. And that felt good.”

The movie is set shortly before Diana - who died in a car accident in 1997 - and Prince Charles separated, and although it depicted a “sad and tumultuous time”, Kristen still had a lot of “fun”. She told Britain’s OK! magazine: “What I take away from my experience of the film is mainly how much fun it was to do it. “This is a time that is hard, sad and tumultuous - but I was elated because I think Diana made me feel that way.”

“I think she made everyone feel that way. “Even though there are things we can’t know about her and she’s such a mystery, I think those are only the things in between. The way she communicated was so cryptic and sideways.” The ‘Twilight’ star admits she has never considered herself worthy of an Oscar nomination. She said of the nod: “I was shocked. False modesty is the most embarrassing thing ever. I was stunned! I never saw myself in this realm. I don’t always say the right things, sometimes that is what does it - but I love this movie. I love the people that made this movie.” — Bang Showbiz



Lifestyle | Features



Spanish visitors of the Marshes of Jabayesh in southern Iraq ride boats as they tour the area. — AFP photos



Foreign tourists visit the ancient city of Babylon, some 100 km south of the Iraqi capital Baghdad.



Foreign tourists visit the ancient city of Babylon.



Emma Witters, 54, a Scottish Youtuber visits the National Museum of Baghdad, in the Iraqi capital.

IN A ‘DANGEROUS’ LAND: TOURISTS TRICKLE BACK TO IRAQ

An American tourist poses for a holiday snap in Iraq, in front of the blue-brick Ishtar Gate that was rebuilt at the ancient site of Babylon under dictator Saddam Hussein. Most foreigners here since Saddam's ouster in a 2003 US-led invasion have worn army fatigues and carried guns-but more recently there has been a trickle of camera-toting travel pioneers. "Iraq was in my top three countries," said the visitor to Babylon, 50-year-old Californian Ileana Ovalle, who was excited to see the millennia-old Mesopotamian site.

"This is where civilization started," said the passionate globetrotter with some 40 countries under her belt. "I think too few people understand how important this region is." Most Western governments still issue travel warnings for all or parts of Iraq, pointing to risks from kidnappings to jihadist bombings and unexploded ordnance from multiple wars.

But for some explorers who are unafraid of the odd military roadblock, Iraq is a hot new destination with multiple World Heritage sites that is slowly reopening to the world. Retirees and YouTubers, on package tours or lugging backpacks, are braving Iraq's still basic tourist infrastructure to visit ancient sites that rival those of Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

Scary travel warnings

Whether in Baghdad or Mosul, the northern city that was a jihadist stronghold, they can be seen strolling through

streets that still bear the scars of years of conflict. Blogs and vlogs have proliferated with names such as "American in Baghdad, Iraq", "Two German guys alone in Iraq" and "Exploring Baghdad-how dangerous is it?" The tourist mini-boom has

rubbish is strewn about. Not so long ago, a nearby base housed US and Polish coalition troops. "I think everyone has hesitations, especially coming from the United States," said another visitor, 35-year-old New Yorker Justin Gonzales.



An aerial picture shows the Great Ziggurat temple (back) in the ancient city of Ur in Iraq's southern province of Dhi Qar near the city of Nasiriyah.

gained momentum since Iraq started granting visas on arrival for dozens of nationalities a year ago.

Ovalle, along with 14 other tourists, said she was happy to take part in a trip organized by a travel agency which offers cultural, sports and adventure trips. "The first thing that I noticed is the warmth, the generosity and the kindness of the Iraqi people," she said. "They smile, they welcome you, they are very polite."

In Babylon, more than 4,000 years old, weeds grow among the old bricks and

"If you go on our government website, they have a travel advisory saying: 'Do not travel to Iraq, it's dangerous, you can get kidnapped, there is often violence.' 'But I haven't seen any of that, and I don't think I will.'"

'Happy and generous'

Last year, Iraq attracted 107,000 tourists including from Britain, France, the United States, Turkey and Norway. That was over three times more than the 30,000 in 2020, according to Tourism

Authority data. Apart from tourists, hundreds of thousands of religious pilgrims-especially Shiite Muslims, mostly from Iran-flock each year to the shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf, south of Baghdad.

Elsewhere in Iraq, however, "we need

But industry trailblazers want to see more done-among them Aya Salih, who runs the Safraty travel agency with her husband. The government "has authorized visas on arrival, but everything else is still complicated," she said. "Half of the trip



Foreign tourists visit the Ishtar Gate, the eighth gate to the ancient city of Babylon.

infrastructure, private investment to have hotels, buses", said the owner of the Bil Weekend agency, Ali al-Makhzoumi, who has 30 to 40 clients a month. There has been progress.

Baghdad's National Museum reopened earlier in March after three years of closure, and the city's famed booksellers' street Al-Mutanabi was given a facelift in December. Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, is attracting more Westerners following a much-publicized Iraq visit by Pope Francis in 2021.

is wasted at roadblocks even though we have the necessary permits." Some visitors love the more edgy, authentic travel experience.

"I like to go to places that are not so touristy yet," said Emma Witters, 54, who has over 70,000 subscribers on her YouTube channel. After so much war and isolation, she said, "you would think that they would be unhappy, miserable people. But they are so happy to see people and foreigners, they are so generous."—AFP



Nelson Mandela

NFT of Mandela's arrest warrant auctioned for \$130,000

An NFT version of an arrest warrant for anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela has raised \$130,550 at auction, with proceeds going towards a museum preserving the history of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. South Africa's first democratic, black president was arrested on August 5, 1962, and later jailed for 27 years. The reserve price at the Saturday night auction in Cape Town was 900,000 rand (\$61,800), but the non-fungible tokens or NFT, "sold for 1.9 million (\$130,550) via a buyer online," Ahren Posthumus, CEO of the digital auctioneer Momint said on Sunday.

The buyer was a foreigner, based in the United Arab Emirates. "Proceeds for the Mandela NFT will go to Liliesleaf museum, to keep their doors open and stay afloat," Posthumus told AFP. Liliesleaf shuttered its doors in September 2021 due to financial difficulties. Selling art as non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, uses the same technology as crypto-currencies such as Bitcoin. The buyer receives a verified digital token, which proves the artwork is an original.—AFP

Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins used marijuana, opioids before death

Preliminary toxicology tests found that Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins had marijuana, opioids and other drugs in his system before he died, Colombian investigators said Saturday. Hawkins, the 50-year-old drummer for the Grammy award-winning rock group, passed away in a hotel in Bogota shortly before the group was set to perform at the Festival Estereo Picnic on the city's outskirts, according to a statement Saturday from the mayor's office.

Colombian investigators said preliminary post-mortem tests found several drugs in the musician's system, but did not specify whether the mix caused his death. "The urine toxicology tests performed on Taylor Hawkins' body preliminarily found 10 types of substances," including THC-which is found in marijuana-tricyclic anti-depressants, benzodiazepines and opioids, investigators said in a statement.

Forensic doctors were working "to achieve full clarity of the facts that led to (Hawkins') death," they added. The mayor's office said a local emergency line received a call late Friday about a "patient complaining of chest pains." A doctor "performed the respective resuscitation maneuvers, but there was no response and the patient was declared deceased," it added, giving no cause of death.

The festival announced the cancellation of the group's show, as well as another one set for Sunday in Sao Paulo. Thousands of shocked and tearful fans at

the Bogota venue lit candles and held a minute of silence after the news broke. "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."

'Amazing drummer'

As part of one of the world's most influential and critically lauded alternative rock bands, Hawkins was known for his on-stage charisma and classic rock-inspired beats, which he once said were influenced by legends like Phil Collins and Queen's Roger Taylor. He had

played with Foo Fighters since 1997, when he was taken on by lead singer and former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl, providing percussion on some of the group's biggest hits, including "Learn to Fly" and "Best of You."

Prior to joining Foo Fighters, Hawkins drummed for Canadian indie songstress Alanis Morissette. In an interview with 95.5 KLOS last year, Grohl described his first meeting with Hawkins and how he convinced him to join his band. "I was like, 'Wow, you're either my twin or my spirit animal, or my best friend!' in the first 10 seconds of meeting him," he said.

"And, of course, I'd seen him play the drums and I thought he was an amazing

drummer," he added. "When I called him and said, 'Hey, I'm looking for a drummer,' he said, 'You know I'm your guy.' And I think it had more to do with our personal relationship than anything musical." Foo Fighters celebrated their 25th anniversary last year in a pandemic-delayed tour and had most recently produced "Studio 666," a rock-and-roll horror movie. Tributes poured in from across the music world, with Black Sabbath frontman Ozzy Osbourne hailing Hawkins 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 Hawkins' "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." "Long live Taylor Hawkins," rock band Pearl Jam said on Twitter. "He brought so much joy to the world of music, he will be forever missed," they said, offering condolences to Hawkins' family and bandmates. — AFP



In this file photo musician Taylor Hawkins attends the Open Road's premiere of "Studio 666" at the TCL Chinese Theater in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Sports

Head injury concerns for Barrett, Banks as Brumbies stay unbeaten

Brumbies edge Force 39-38 in Perth

SYDNEY: Wallabies star Tom Banks was hospitalized with a facial fracture as the ACT Brumbies maintained their unbeaten start to the Super Rugby Pacific season on a brutal weekend that saw All Blacks fly-half Beauden Barrett suffer another head knock.

The Brumbies edged Force 39-38 in Perth, recovering after a controversial red card was given to full-back Banks in the 29th minute for what appeared to be an accidental head clash with Toni Pulu. Force were trailing 20-3 at the time but after being awarded a penalty try, they ran in another three tries to one during the 20 minutes the Brumbies were down to 14 men-new rules this season that mean a player sent off can be replaced after that period has elapsed.

Once back to full strength, Dan McKellar's men clung on to bank their sixth straight win on the back of a hat-trick from winger Andy Muirhead. Brumbies coach McKellar said Banks didn't

deserve a red card. "Deliberate foul play-throw red cards at them all the time. But for accidents, for god's sake, we're going to have accidents every week," he told reporters.

"Banksy is sitting in hospital now with a facial fracture. I don't think he deliberately went in to do that. I think it's ridiculous." The win kept the Brumbies top of the 12-team table on 26 points, four clear of the Queensland Reds who silenced the NSW Waratahs 32-20 in Brisbane. The Canterbury Crusaders downed the Waikato Chiefs 34-19 to retain third spot and seven adrift of the Brumbies with a game in hand.

Fat lip, bleeding nose

The injury is likely to keep Banks out for some time, with Barrett also being closely monitored after leaving the pitch with blood pouring from his nose during the Auckland Blues' 32-25 win over the Otago Highlanders in Dunedin. Barrett had

only just returned after a concussion suffered in a Test against Ireland in November and was taken from the field in the 41st minute after a high-speed collision.

Blues coach Leon MacDonald said Barrett had "a good fat lip and a bleeding nose" and they would take no chances with him. "Hopefully it's nothing too much more than that, but we'll have to track him and see how he turns up," he told reporters. Defeat consigned the Highlanders to a fifth straight loss. "Rugby can be cruel sometimes and we're catching nothing at the moment," said skipper Aaron Smith.

In Hamilton, competition heavyweights the Crusaders got revenge against the Chiefs after narrowly losing to them in round four. The game turned on a devastating line break and try from Sevu Reece with 23 minutes left after they led by just three points at half-time. "Last time the Chiefs had the better of it, dominated physically," said Crusaders skipper Scott Barrett. "We had to turn up

physically and I thought the boys showed plenty of effort in that area."

The Reds' barnstorming season continued against the 'Tahs, clocking a fifth win from six despite a red card for prop Dane Zander and a yellow for captain Tate McDermott, both at the same time which left them two men short for 10 minutes. Tries from Jock Campbell, Taniela Tupou, Fraser McReight and McDermott, along with 10 points from James O'Connor's boot, saw them over the line.

In other games, Moana Pasifika beat the Wellington Hurricanes 24-19 for their first win of the season but fellow Pacific newcomers Fijian Drua crashed 42-27 to the Rebels in Melbourne. Victory was a massive relief for the Rebels, who snapped a five-game losing streak this season. "I'm so proud-I feel relief but also so happy for the boys," coach Kevin Foote said after the five tries to three win. "It's been a tough start for us but that was awesome." —AFP



AUSTIN: Ducks are seen on course as Dustin Johnson of the United States and Brooks Koepka of the United States look over their putt on the 11th green in their quarterfinal match on the fourth day of the World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play on March 26, 2022. —AFP

Johnson outguns Koepka in WGC Match Play duel

AUSTIN: Former world number one Dustin Johnson recovered from an early deficit to defeat Brooks Koepka and reach the semi-finals of the PGA Tour's WGC-Dell Technologies Match Play in Texas on Saturday. Johnson relied on a red-hot putter to battle back from two holes down early on to grind out a 2-up victory over Koepka, who had advanced to the last eight at the Austin Country Club after eliminating current world number one Jon Rahm in the last 16 earlier Saturday.

The 37-year-old Johnson—a winner of the WGC Match Play in 2017 — was forced onto the back foot early on after four-time major winner Koepka picked up birdies on the second and third holes to go 2-up. Koepka's lead was trimmed to one at the turn after a disastrous three-putt on the par-3 seventh hole.

Johnson then drained a 14-foot birdie putt on the 11th to tie it up, and kept the match all square with a nerveless 12-footer on the 12th to save par. With little to separate the two men down the stretch, the deadlock was broken on the 15th when Johnson brilliantly rolled in a 27-foot birdie putt to take the lead for the first time in the match. After matching each other par-for-par on the 16th and 17th, Koepka went to the par-4 18th knowing he would need something special to force sudden death. But it was Johnson who threw down the gauntlet, crushing a drive 353 yards onto the green to set up a birdie that sealed victory. "Felt like I'm playing really good golf," Johnson said afterwards. "I like this golf course ... if you're hitting good shots, then you can shoot some good scores. I like the way I'm hitting the ball right now. "I feel like I'm controlling the golf ball pretty well. I'm hitting a lot of quality golf shots and giving myself a lot of looks. That's what you've got to do in match play."

Scheffler eyes top spot

Johnson will play last year's beaten finalist Scottie Scheffler in Sunday's semi-finals. Scheffler, who eliminated defending champion Billy Horschel in the last 16 earlier Saturday, advanced to the last four with a 3&2 win over Ireland's Seamus Power. Scheffler clinched victory in spectacular fashion, pitching in from 91 feet for an eagle three on the par-5 16th. The Austin Country Club is a home-from-home for the 25-year-old Scheffler, who played regularly on the course during his college career at the University of Texas.

"I think it's fun. You can play some aggressive golf, you can play conservative," Scheffler said. "There's a few different ways you can kind of plot your way around here. It gets challenging when it's this firm and you've got the wind blowing." Scheffler is in blistering form this season with two wins already on the PGA Tour at the Phoenix Open and Arnold Palmer Invitational. A victory in Austin could see him overtake Rahm as world number one.

On the other side of the draw, Kevin Kisner will play Canada's Corey Conners in Sunday's other semi-final after a comfortable 4&3 win over Will Zalatoris. Conners advanced to the last four after beating Mexico's 15th seed Abraham Ancer 2 up. Ancer had looked to be in blistering form earlier Saturday after routing world number two and second seed Collin Morikawa in the last 16. Ancer roared into a 5-up lead after nine holes to set up his 7&6 victory over the reigning British Open champion. —AFP

An's closing disaster leaves Dane Madsen with LPGA lead

LOS ANGELES: Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen seized a three-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the LPGA JTBC Classic after South Korea's An Na-rin closed with a triple bogey disaster. The 27-year-old Dane, who won her first LPGA title two weeks ago in Thailand in her 93rd career start, fired a three-under par 69 to stand on 14-under 202 after 54 holes at Aviara Golf Club in Carlsbad, California. Back-to-back titles would bring a huge confidence boost if she can manage the feat, Madsen said.

"That would be really cool," she said. "It will tell me that I belong here, I belong in the winner's circle. It wasn't just one time. So it will give me a lot mentally." An was second on 205 after shooting 69 as well but she had shared the lead with Madsen until the final hole after a back-nine battle for the lead. Madsen was the first Danish player to capture an LPGA crown when she eagled the second playoff hole to beat China's Xiyu Lin for the Honda LPGA Thailand title on March 13.

"I do think it'll be easier going into tomorrow with a lead than it was in Thailand, but going in with a lead you still want to win, so you still have all excitement in your body that you've got to control," Madsen said. Madsen birdied the par-3 third, par-5 fifth and par-3 sixth holes, but followed with a bogey at seven and a double-bogey at the par-5 eighth. That opened the door for An to grab the lead with a birdie at the ninth, her fourth birdie of the front side.

Madsen rallied with birdies at the ninth and par-5 10th to reclaim the lead and a bogey by An at the 12th hole gave Madsen a two-stroke edge. "It does tell me that I've come a long way," Madsen said after her fightback. "Normally I probably would've freaked out after eight. I was not happy with my



CARLSBAD: Nana Koerstz Madsen of Denmark on the fifth green during the third round of the JTBC Classic presented by Barbasol at Aviara Golf Club on March 26, 2022. —AFP

double bogey, but I knew there was a lot of chances out there on the back nine as well. "So I just got to continue doing what I was doing. I was still hitting good shots. I just made two bad shots, and that's what happens."

A rollercoaster finish

An eagled the par-4 16th to grab a share of the lead. Madsen missed a 15-foot eagle putt at 16 but tapped in for birdie, only to have An match her at the top again with a birdie at the par-5 17th. While Madsen was paring 17, An was melting down at the par-4 18th. She missed the fairway, then bounced her second shot off a left-side cart path, the ball wedging against the root of a bush. After taking a

penalty, An's drop left her just off the path with a bush blocking her backswing. She smacked the ball of the curb of the path and hit a golf cart only a few yards up the concrete.

An punched her fifth shot onto the green, then two-putted for triple bogey while Madsen, who endured a long delay, made a routine par to finish ahead by three. "Only made the mistakes on seven and eight, but bounced back really quick from that, so pretty solid round," Madsen said. Sharing third on 206 were Thailand's Pajaree Anannarukarn, Canadian Maude-Aimee Leblanc and world number one Ko Jin-young of South Korea. Ko, the 18-hole leader after an opening 65, fired a 70 for her 33rd consecutive under-par LPGA round. —AFP

Montpellier rally against Biarritz in Top 14 as tributes paid to Aramburu

TOULON: On an emotional afternoon, bottom club Biarritz started furiously against Top 14 leaders Montpellier but could not sustain their energy and lost 37-22. As the funeral for murdered former player Federico Aramburu was taking place back in Biarritz, the team with which he won two French titles took to the field in Montpellier wearing t-shirts bearing his photo. Biarritz took a quick lead when winger David O'Callaghan crossed after five minutes.

That marked the start of a five-try first half. With lock Paul Willemse and

winger Gabriel N'Gandebe scoring for the hosts and hooker Lucas Peyresblanques and finally winger Mathieu Hirigoyen for the visitors, who led 22-14 at the break. Willemse added a second try in the 49th minute. Louis Foursans converted and then kicked a penalty to put Montpellier ahead for the first time. Foursans booted two more penalties before converting a late try by Kelian Galletier.

Montpellier cemented their grip on top spot two points ahead of second-placed Bordeaux-Begles who beat Stade Francais 31-18. Biarritz remain anchored to the bottom of the table, 11 points behind Perpignan who lost 27-22 at Pau. The match in Pau was not as close as the final score suggested. The hosts led comfortably through three tries by Jordan Joseph before Piula Fa'asalele and Genesis Mamea Lemalu salvaged some pride for Perpignan with tries in the last 10 minutes.



MONTPELLIER: Biarritz's players gather in tribute by a portrait of late Argentine player Federico Martin Aramburu at warm up before the French TOP 14 rugby union match between Montpellier and Biarritz at the GGL stadium on March 26, 2022. —AFP

Fatat Club Basketball team beat Gulf University 82-62



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Fatat Club Basketball team defeated Gulf University 82-62 during their third round of Women



Basketball League. The second match saw Salva Al-Sabah team handing Fatayat Al-Oyoun a heavy loss 61-15. The Fatat and Gust match was competitive as Jaidaa Al-Essa excelled and Fatat ended the first



quarter 23-14. Gust players improved in the second quarter and had a score of 18-17 after the first half ended 40-32. In the second half Fatat scored 42 points while Gust players scored 28 only.

Sports

Eriksen scores on Denmark return; England, Germany and Spain win

Chelsea's Werner, Havertz score as Germans see off Zionists

PARIS: Denmark's Christian Eriksen made an emotional goal-scoring return to international football on Saturday as England, Germany and Spain carved out friendly victories. Eriksen found the net two minutes after coming on with a powerful drive in a 4-2 defeat against fellow World Cup qualifiers Netherlands in Amsterdam. It was his first national team appearance since suffering a cardiac arrest in Denmark's opening game of the European Championships against Finland in Copenhagen last June.

On Saturday, to the resounding applause of fans and even Dutch manager Louis van Gaal, the 30-year-old came off the bench and raised his hands to the sky in thanks. His goal was 37th in 110 appearances. It was fitting he scored in the Amsterdam Arena, the home of Ajax. Eriksen came through the ranks at the Dutch side, making 162 appearances for the club and winning five trophies, including three consecutive league titles between 2011 and 2013.

Meanwhile, Harry Kane converted a late penalty to close in on the all-time England goal-scoring record and secure a 2-1 win over Switzerland who will also be at the World Cup in Qatar in November. Kane netted from the spot to reach 49 England goals, moving him ahead of Gary Lineker and into a second place tie with Bobby Charlton.

Only Wayne Rooney, with 53 goals, has scored more times for England. Brel Embolo put Switzerland ahead at Wembley after 22 minutes in a first half dominated by the visitors before Luke Shaw's equaliser in first-half injury time. Kane restored order with his 78th-minute winner. "You have to be ready for any chance at any moment. Penalties are a great way of getting on the scoresheet, I practice and work on them a lot," said Kane.

'Amazing company'

"It is amazing company to be with, super proud to be doing that but we look forward to the next one. A big year ahead to get more caps and more goals," Chelsea pair Kai Havertz and Timo Werner both hit the net as Germany eased past Zionists 2-0 in Sinshheim. After the Premier League pair scored first-half goals, Germany's stand-in captain Thomas Mueller and Zionist sub Yonatan Cohen both failed to convert late penalty attempts.

Germany head coach Hansi Flick has now won his first eight internationals to extend his record start. "On the whole, it was a good performance from us for the first game of the new year," Werner told broadcaster ZDF. Spain, World Cup winners in 2010, had to work hard to carve out a 2-1 win against Albania in Barcelona,

the team's first game in Catalonia since 2004.

Ferran Torres opened the scoring for Spain in the 75th minute at Espanyol's RCDE Stadium with Myrto Uzuni equalizing 10 minutes later. However, Dani Olmo saved Spain's blushes with a last-minute winner as Spain secured an eighth win in eight matches against Albania. "We knew it was going to be difficult. Albania are a team who defend very well," Olmo told Spanish public television. Top-ranked Belgium led twice in Dublin but were still held 2-2 by Ireland.

Belgium held

Playing without the influential Kevin de Bruyne, who has been rested for the international window, Belgium took the lead after 12 minutes through Michy Batshuayi who brushed past Seamus Coleman to beat Caoimhin Kelleher in the Irish goal. Ireland, who missed qualification for the World Cup after finishing third in their group behind Serbia and Portugal, levelled in the 36th minute through Chiedozie Ogbene. Belgium were back in front just before the hour mark thanks to a Hans Vanaken header.

However, substitute Alan Browne grabbed his side's second equalizer with a powerful 86th-minute header. In Doha, 2018 World Cup runners-up Croatia were held to



AMSTERDAM: Netherlands' midfielder Teun Koopmeiners (left) fights for the ball against Denmark's forward Andreas Skov Olsen during the friendly international football match between Netherlands and Denmark on March 26, 2022. —AFP

a 1-1 draw by Slovenia. Andrej Kramaric, who plays in Germany with Hoffenheim, gave Croatia the lead in the 39th minute but Jaka Bijol levelled in stoppage time for Slovenia. —AFP

Schools Association stun Juventus Academy 2-1

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Schools Association Football team beat Juventus Academy 2-1 on Saturday. This is Juventus Academy's first loss as they now have total point of 18, while the Schools Association have 16. The ninth round saw Fatyat Al-Oyoun defeating Tadhmon 1-0 which was scored by Amira Al-Umary. That moved them to third place with 14 points while Tadhmon remained at the bottom with six. The Gulf Academy defeated Salwa Al-Sabah Club 4-0 and remained in fourth place with 12 points while Salwa grabbed 9 points. The match of the Schools Associations and Juventus Academy was highly competitive until the final minutes when Juventus were surprised by the School Association.



Carlos scouts through VO for Kuwaiti players

KUWAIT: VO Kuwait, the first Kuwait-based integrated youth platform for incubating young talents, announced its agreement with the Genova International School of Soccer to host Kuwaiti talented amateur soccer players and be professionally trained at Rayo Vallecano De Madrid, Madrid's professional soccer team.

Through this initiative, VO Sports is providing the space for Kuwaiti talented teens aged 14 to 20 years to be scouted by prominent soccer trainers and athletes such as the Brazilian former professional footballer who now works as a football ambassador, Roberto Carlos. The scouts will select the best 2 Kuwaiti players after assessing their performance and athletic capacity through tryouts and other athletic assessments, which will be held on 28 and 29 March at Al Yarmouk Club.

"We are happy to be collaborating with an international soccer school such as Genova International. This collaboration came to empower and build the capacity of talented Kuwaiti soccer players. VO Kuwait was established to support Kuwaiti youth and place them on the forefront of global platforms and markets. Our collaboration with Genova International School happened to achieve just that," stated the CEO of VO Kuwait, Ms. Riham Al Ayyar.

She then explained that the establishment of VO sports came to support Kuwait's young talented players and provide capacity building and talent development programs that would lead their athletic journey to international standards of excellence. In addition, VO Sports is hosting the final match of the second season of its Furjan Championship today with the participation of 416 Kuwaiti soccer players and athletes at the Hassan Abul Center located in Dasma.

"We are very happy to have Roberto on board and we look forward to having him also attend VO Sport's Furjan Championship," added Al Ayyar. 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.

Kuwait's Kyokushin-Kan team wins several belts



Kuwait's Kyokushin-Kan team at the Fourth Saidia Fighting Championship (SFC)

BEIRUT: The Kuwaiti Kyokushin-Kan team performed tremendously well at the fourth Saidia Fighting Championship (SFC) late Sunday, winning several belts at the multi-nations competition. Karatekas Dhari Al-Enizi, Omar Saeed, and Hamza Al-Behbehani won each of their respective categories, topping the ranks in the open,

under 85 and 70 kg weight-classes, head of the Kuwaiti delegation Hassan Al-Kandari told KUNA. Al-Kandari added that nine-member Kuwaiti team participated in the tournament, which saw 24 professional bouts.

The fourth SFC saw some tough competition from fighters representing Kuwait, Senegal,



Spain, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, indicated Al-Kandari, affirming that the Kuwaiti fighters did well considering the number of participants, which amounted to 48. He vowed that the Kyokushin-Kan national team would continue to train hard and diligently to achieve more in the near future. —KUNA

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

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CHRISTCHURCH: South Africa's Mignon du Preez (right) and Shabnim Ismail celebrate the match winning run during the Women's Cricket World Cup match between South Africa and India at Hagley Oval in Christchurch on March 27, 2022. — AFP

Resurgent England book semis

India suffer last-ball exit • South Africa qualify

WELLINGTON: England snatched a late berth in the Women's World Cup semi-finals with a crushing 100-run victory over Bangladesh in their final group stage match in Wellington on Sunday. But India, who also started the day with a must-win opportunity to make the playoffs, were denied by South Africa in a last-ball thriller in Christchurch.

South Africa had already qualified for the final four along with unbeaten Australia and the West Indies, whose place was only confirmed when India lost. England's win sealed a dramatic resurgence for the defending champions, who had been on the brink of elimination after losing their first three matches in the 50-over competition.

They then won their remaining four games to secure a place in the top four. Captain Heather Knight said it showed the character of the side to

bounce back from their early losses when "obviously we didn't play particularly well" and then handle the pressure of a do-or-die clash with Bangladesh. She said she had "one eye on the net run rate and one eye looking after the bowlers and trying to freshen a few of them up for the semi-final... but the main thing was getting the win".

England lost wickets at regular intervals in the first half of their innings and were 96 for four before Sophia Dunkley, who scored 67, led a middle-order charge to get the score up to a defendable 234 for six. Bangladesh found it difficult to score against a tight England attack, averaging just 2.79 runs per over until they were all out for 134 with 12 balls remaining. Player-of-the-match Dunkley faced just 72 deliveries and featured in a 72-run partnership with Amy Jones (31) for the fifth wicket and then put

on 43 with Katherine Brunt (24 not out).

Salma Khatun, who took the prized England wickets of Knight for six and Nat Sciver for 40, finished with two for 46. Bangladesh never threatened to get near the English total despite a safe start by Shamima Sultana and Sharmin Akhter, who put on 42 for the opening wicket. They were tied down by a penetrating England bowling attack led by Sophie Ecclestone, who took three wickets in her 10 overs for a miserly 15 runs-while Brunt, although wicketless, conceded only seven runs from her five overs.

Last ball

India, needing to beat South Africa if they were to pip the West Indies for the fourth semi-final spot, posted 274 for seven with Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma and captain Mithali Raj all scoring half-cen-

turies. Mandhana (71) and Verma (53) put on 91 in their opening stand while Mandhana and Raj (68) added 80 for the third wicket with a score in excess of 300 on the cards until South Africa restricted India to just 51 runs in the final 10 overs.

South Africa, needing to produce their highest successful ODI chase to win, saw Laura Wolvaardt and Lara Goodall take the total to 139 for one by the 27th over. The chase lost steam when Goodall was out for 49, with Wolvaardt gone for 80 in the following over. But a late charge led by Mignon du Preez (52 not out) saw South Africa home, with du Preez scoring the winning run on the final ball of the match. "It will probably take some time to settle the emotions" said Raj. "It went to the last ball so I think it is good for the sport but definitely for the Indian team it ends our campaign." — AFP

Schumacher in horror crash as Perez claims 'unbelievable' pole

JEDDAH: Sergio Perez claimed his first ever Formula One pole at the 215th attempt when the Mexican upstaged Red Bull teammate and world champion Max Verstappen in qualifying for the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Saturday. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc joins Perez on the front row with Verstappen on the second row after qualifying in fourth behind the other Ferrari of Carlos Sainz. Saturday's qualifying was marred by a horror crash suffered by Mick Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton's shock elimination in the opening Q1 session for the first time since 2017.

It was a dramatic session coming just hours after it was confirmed the weekend action would go ahead following lengthy talks overnight about racing in the aftermath of Friday's missile strike by Yemen's Houthi rebels on the nearby Aramco fuel plant. "It took me a couple of races! But what a lap man, it was unbelievable!" said Perez, the first Mexican to head an F1 grid. "I could do 2,000 laps and I couldn't beat that one!" he added.

Verstappen described his first lap in Q3 as "terrible", adding: "I didn't really feel comfortable. Checo

did a great job today and I am very happy for him." Red Bull will now be hoping for better luck on Sunday than in the season-opener in Bahrain last week when both their cars failed to finish in a race won by Leclerc. Leclerc, who looked set to confirm his early season pace with pole before Perez produced a flying last lap, said: "I didn't expect Checo (Perez) to come with that lap time so congratulations to him."

Schumacher in hospital

In Q2, Schumacher was the victim of a high speed crash after his Haas car bounced off the Jeddah street circuit barrier at around 240kph after clipping a kerb. The 23-year-old son of German F1 legend Michael Schumacher was lifted out of the wreckage of his stricken car and into an ambulance by medics. Haas reported that Schumacher appeared "physically fine" and had spoken to his mother, Corrina. In a statement F1's governing body the FIA confirmed that an assessment at the medical centre "revealed no injuries". It added that Schumacher "has been transferred to King Fahad Armed Forces Hospital, Jeddah, for precautionary checks". The session was red-flagged after the accident in which the rear of the Haas car was split asunder from the main monocoque and body. It was the second red flag in the session following an earlier high-speed collision by Williams' Nicholas Latifi in Q1. The Canadian escaped unhurt. Q2 did not feature Hamilton for the first time in five years. — AFP

Nets cool sputtering Heat as Sixers seize NBA East lead

MIAMI: Slumping Miami surrendered the NBA Eastern Conference lead on Saturday after a weak performance in a 110-95 home loss to Kevin Durant and the suddenly sizzling Brooklyn Nets. Durant scored 23 points, Seth Curry added 17 and Andre Drummond had 13 points and 11 rebounds in Brooklyn's seventh victory over nine games.

The Heat suffered a season-high fourth consecutive loss and fell to 47-28, percentage points behind the Philadelphia 76ers 46-27 for the top spot in the East. "We're not concerned in the sense of panicking but yeah, we have to fix some stuff," Heat guard Kyle Lowry said. "This is one of those games where you really have to say, 'All right we need to figure some things out.' They took it to us tonight."

Bam Adebayo led Miami with 14 points while star forward Jimmy Butler had only seven points on 2-of-9 shooting. "We have to find ways to get more shots and less turnovers," Lowry said. "On the defensive end we need to figure out where we're going to be at all times. We still have some indecisiveness." The Nets forced 21 Heat turnovers in improving to 39-35, staying three games behind sixth-place Toronto and the last automatic East playoff spot.

"It's disappointing," Miami's Tyler Herro said. "At this point in the year we want to be playing our best... We'll continue to work and figure it out before the playoffs." Brooklyn guard Kyrie Irving had 11 points on 4-of-11 shooting. Irving makes his season home debut Sunday when the Nets entertain Charlotte. New York City Covid-19 safety rules kept the unvaccinated star from playing in home contests before a recent change exempted athletes from the protocol.

"I'm looking forward to the opportunity," Irving said. "We want to build something here, a legacy, something sustainable, not just put this together real quick and see what happens." Idle Philadelphia moved past Miami but reigning NBA champion Milwaukee missed a chance to leap ahead of both clubs with a 127-102 loss at Memphis.

Reserve guard DeAnthony Melton scored 24 points, Desmond Bane added 20 and Dillon Brooks had 19 to spark the Grizzlies, Memphis improving to



GREENSBORO: LiAngelo Ball #3 of the Greensboro Swarm drives to the basket during the game against Long Island Nets on March 26, 2022. — AFP

17-2 without injured guard Ja Morant and 52-23, the NBA's second-best record. Giannis Antetokounmpo had a game-high 30 points plus 11 rebounds and four blocked shots but Milwaukee fell to 48-28, the same record as Boston and a half-game behind Miami.

Denver's Nikola Jokic scored 35 points on 13-for-15 shooting and grabbed 12 rebounds for his 25th straight double-double as the host Nuggets beat Oklahoma City 113-107. "In the last quarter we were much better, getting stops when we needed to get them," the Serbian playmaker said. "I'm doing whatever I can do to win." Denver moved one game ahead of Minnesota for the sixth and final automatic playoff berth in the Western Conference. — AFP



JEDDAH: A helicopter carrying Haas' German driver Mick Schumacher to hospital after he crashed off from the circuit during the qualifying session on the eve of the 2022 Saudi Arabia Formula One Grand Prix at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit on March 26, 2022. — AFP