



3 Kuwait University not fit for int'l quality rankings



11 A poem to Arab beauty: Fashion designs of Sadiq



16 23.5 million tickets requested in latest World Cup sale: FIFA



Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	03:41
Shurooq	05:07
Dhuhr	11:45
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:24
Isha	19:44

VOLVO

Amir sends Eid greetings to citizens and residents

Eid on Monday; Kuwait leader prays for peace and security



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: The Kuwait legitimate crescent sighting authority declared on Saturday that Sunday would be the last day of the fasting month of Ramadan. This was declared by the head of the Supreme Judicial Council and head of the legitimate crescent sighting authority, Justice Ahmad Al-Ajeel, after a meeting of the authority. Al-Ajeel congratulated HH the Amir, HH the Crown Prince, HH the Prime Minister, citizens, residents of the country, Arab and Muslim nations on the occasion, hoping Kuwait would witness further progress and prosperity. Meanwhile, the Amiri Diwan has conveyed the congratulations of

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to citizens and residents on the blessed Eid Al-Fitr, wishing them all a happy occasion. The Amiri Diwan seizes this blessed occasion to voice congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister on this occasion. His Highness the Amir also wished it to be a happy festival for the nation and both Arab and Muslim worlds, and many happy returns of the occasion to the entire world in security and peace. In another development, His

Highness the Amir on Saturday received a phone call from Bahraini King Hamad Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, congratulating him on the advent of Eid Al-Fitr. In the phone conversation, the King of Bahrain wished His Highness the Amir good health and wellness and hoped happy returns of the occasion for the two countries, Arabs and Muslim worlds. In reply, His Highness the Amir thanked the King for this good gesture that reflects the deep relationship between both countries - wishing him well and further progress for Bahrain and its people under his wise leadership. **Continued on Page 6**

Ramadan Kareem

Balance between the body and soul

By Hassan T Bwambale

A human-being is made up of body and soul. After the soul is breathed into a fetus, then the eye acquires the ability to see and the ear to hear, and the heart becomes the center of judgment (i.e. consciousness.) With this consciousness, we attain spiritual enlightenment & find balance in our minds, bodies and souls.

When we think about health, diet and exercise are typically the first things that come to mind. However, good health isn't just about the physical body. Our mind and body are interconnected and affect each other. For example, a stressful situation causing negative thoughts can lead to physical pain or illness. It's important to maintain a healthy balance between our minds, bodies and souls by nurturing the whole self, including our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.

There are many things we can do in our daily lives to achieve overall wellness. In brief, one can achieve spiritual enlightenment by adhering to the following:

(A) Having a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves - Allah (SWT). Note that there is no way we can compare any creature with the Creator.

(B) Searching for the meaning of life and having a sense of purpose in whatever we do. For example, thinking of Prayer (Salah) as a physical and spiritual exercise.

(C) Following our religion (Islam) verbatim and feeling the spirit or moral of Allah's commands.

(D) Our actions should be the result of a deep and strong faith with deep feelings of the significance of that faith and acts that prove it.

(E) Practicing honestly & with integrity. Some additional ways to begin cultivating mind-body-soul balance include:

- Reading and learning often. Education shouldn't stop once we're out of school or when we have reached a particular age. We should open our minds to new possibilities, beliefs, and interests by activities like reading, taking online classes, watching documentaries, and attending workshops. Education does not end until we die.
- Trying our best to translate what we learn into action where necessary and possible.
- Meditating regularly. Meditation improves memory, attention, mood, immune system function, sleep, and creativity. All it takes is a few minutes a day to start reaping the benefits. Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) says what can be translated as: "Say, [O Muhammad], "Travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will bring forth the creation of the Hereafter (i.e. resurrection after death). Indeed Allah, over all things, is Omnipotent." (Al-Ankaboot 29: 20)

- Avoiding sitting for extended periods of time. We should try to stand or move around while we work, if possible. Too much sitting is linked to heart disease, diabetes, and a shortened lifespan.
- Getting at least 15 minutes of moderate to fast-paced exercise each day. Live close to work? Walk or ride a bike the short distance. Exercise is important for heart health, physical stamina, and maintaining a good mood.
- Adding more plant-based foods to our diet. Eating lots of vegetables and fruit can help prevent chronic disease. Shop your local farmer's market for fresh, in-season produce.

Continued on Page 6

Saudi, Turkey reset relations

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia's crown prince and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have vowed to reset relations, to end a conflict between the two regional heavyweights since the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Erdogan-in his first visit since the 2018 killing of Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate, which drove a wedge between the two countries-met with the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to "develop" relations.

Saudi state news agency SPA on

Thursday published images of the Turkish leader embracing Prince Mohammed. The pair "reviewed the Saudi-Turkish relations and ways to develop them in all fields", SPA reported. Pictures published by Turkish state media also showed a separate sit-down with King Salman, the crown prince's father.

On Friday, Erdogan visited the Muslim holy city of Makkah, where he performed a pilgrimage among thousands of worshippers amid a heavy security presence. The trip came as Turkey, facing an economic crisis fuelled by the collapse of its currency and soaring inflation, tries to draw financial support from energy-rich Gulf countries.

Continued on Page 6



JEDDAH: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan (left) hugs Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a meeting in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah. — AFP

Iran-Saudi Arabia tensions near end

BAGHDAD: An end to years of tension between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia is near, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi said in an interview published on Saturday. Iraq, a neighbor to both countries, has hosted five rounds of talks over the past year aimed at restoring ties between Sunni Muslim Saudi

Arabia, and Shiite-majority Iran. Following the latest round in Baghdad, Iraqi officials have sounded increasingly optimistic, talking of an imminent sixth session and even going so far as to raise the prospect of a resumption in diplomatic relations severed in 2016.

Iran and the Saudi kingdom support rival sides in several conflict zones across the region, including in Yemen where the Houthi rebels are backed by Tehran, and Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting the government. In 2016, Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran after the

kingdom executed Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr.

Riyadh responded by cutting ties with Tehran. "Our brothers in Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran approach the dialogue with a big responsibility as demanded by the current regional situation," Kadhemi said in his interview with the state-owned Al-Sabah newspaper. "We are convinced that reconciliation is near," which would benefit regional stability, said Kadhemi, who Iraqi diplomats say attended the most recent meeting. **Continued on Page 6**

Violence rocks Jerusalem and West Bank

JERUSALEM: A Palestinian man and a Zionist guard were killed in separate West Bank incidents following clashes

on Friday between Palestinians and Zionist police at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque. The guard was attacked at the entrance of the Ariel settlement, the army said, adding that they were pursuing the "terrorists".

The Islamist Hamas movement hailed the killing as a "heroic operation", with spokesman Hazem Qassem declaring it a response to the "attacks on Al-Aqsa," the mosque which has

been one of the focal points for weeks of violence. The Palestinian Red Crescent said 42 people had been hurt at the site, which is venerated by Muslims and Jews.

Meanwhile, Zionist forces killed a Palestinian man overnight Friday in the north of the occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian health ministry. The man, in his 20s, was shot in the chest during a Zionist

army operation in the town of Azzun, the ministry said in a statement.

Zionist police released footage that showed young men on the Al-Aqsa compound hurling stones and fireworks in Friday's early hours. Officers entered the site at dawn. A police statement said they went in to contain "rioters and lawbreakers", some of whom were trying to throw stones. **Continued on Page 6**

UAE to send astronaut on ISS mission

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates announced Friday it will send an astronaut on a six-month mission to space, as it seeks to become a major player in the industry. The wealthy Gulf country signed "a new agreement to send the first Arab astronaut on a long 180-day mission to the International Space Station", tweeted UAE's vice president, Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum. "Proud of the UAE's youth," he added.

According to the UAE's The National newspaper, the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) and Axiom Space signed a deal on Wednesday at the Emirati embassy in Washington. The astronaut will be part of the SpaceX Crew-6 mission, scheduled for launch in 2023, it added.

The UAE-made up of seven emirates including Abu Dhabi and Dubai is a newcomer to the world of space exploration but quickly making its mark. In September 2019, the oil-rich country sent a first Emirati into space as part of a three-member crew that blasted off on a Soyuz rocket from Kazakhstan for an eight-day mission. Then in July, it launched an unmanned spacecraft from Japan's Tanegashima Space Center bearing the "Hope" **Continued on Page 6**



KENNEDY SPACE CENTER: In this image released by NASA, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. — AFP

Local

News in brief

**Kuwait condemns
Kabul explosion**

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait expressed on Saturday its strong condemnation of the recent blast, which rocked a mosque in Kabul, Afghanistan, leading to several casualties. A statement by the Foreign Ministry reiterated Kuwait's strong stance against such cowardly terror attacks, which stood against all international laws and humanitarian as well as religious values. The State of Kuwait reaffirmed its calls to bolster global counterterrorism efforts to prevent such events from reoccurring. Kuwait expressed condolences to those who have passed as a result of the attack and wished for the swift recovery for those injured.

**GCC citizens can use
IDs to enter Kuwait**

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior reinstated the waiver of travel documents to citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries as from tomorrow, Friday. The Kuwaiti citizens and nationals of other GCC states are able to use only their national smart IDs to travel to and from Kuwait, said a statement by the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media. The decision revokes the travel restrictions imposed by the GCC member countries due to Coronavirus pandemic, according to the statement.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken on April 30, 2022 from Kuwait City shows a view of the sun and three sunspot regions, (from bottom to top) 3001, 2999 and 2995.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Food truck owners complain of bad govt procedures, space shortage

Fewer customers during Ramadan add to owners' woes

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The food trucks parked on the seaside near Green Island are facing a plethora of problems. Not only are customers significantly fewer during the holy month Ramadan, but they also face many obstacles.

Abdullah Al-Saadoun, owner of a food truck which serves different kinds of beverages, complained he had to unfairly pay fines. "To park my food truck here, I must pay rent to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry online. For three months, the same error occurred on their website, and a total of KD 120 was deducted from my bank account, yet my payment was not confirmed. During this period, the Municipality (which is in charge of inspecting the licenses), issued two fines to my truck, although I have the bank statement proving my payment and

deduction from my bank account," he told Kuwait Times. "I went personally to the ministry to clarify this failure on their official website, but I didn't resolve the problem or reach any result after meeting many officials in three locations including the Ministries Complex, Ishbiliya Center and South Surra Center. I even asked my friends who work at the ministry to pay on behalf of me. When I asked them to pay in person at the ministry, they said this option is not available, and I must only pay online. I wonder why, as the pandemic is over," Saadoun asked.

When he tried to complain, he was unsuccessful. "The number for complaints is never answered. The employee at the ministry advised me to send an email, but nobody answered to any of the tens of emails that I already sent. I spoke to other truck owners and most of them are facing the same problem," he concluded.

Space shortage

Mohammed Saad, owner of another truck, complained of a shortage of spaces by the seaside. "The ministry should set a limit for occupied spaces. It is not fair to let one user take three or four spaces, while there are only a total of nine or ten spots in each location on the seafront. These trucks' owners have wasta, so they get many spaces, while we only get one spot," he explained.

Jaafar Sadeq is the owner a food truck that is operating there since June 2021. He sells various kinds of foods, sweets and beverages. He powers his truck through solar panels. "During the day, I store energy from the sun, and when I shut down at night, I switch to this energy for the refrigerators inside the truck so the food will not get spoiled. Sometimes, I face problem with municipal inspectors who ask me to park the truck vertically to fit in one space, while I need it to be positioned horizontally to

provide space for the solar panels," he said. "I have chosen this location as I believe I can help people and not just sell my products. I have faced such a situation many times, when some people had low blood pressure or low sugar levels and collapsed. So I was near to help them," added Sadeq.

Cleanliness is another problem he faces. "Every day I have to pay street cleaners to clean the place around my truck as people always throw rubbish. Sometimes I don't find any worker, so I have to clean the area before I close the truck and before I open it the next day," stressed Sadeq. Ahmad, owner of a food truck operating in the area for about four months, said he faces problems with electricity and water. "I don't have power supply for my truck, so I use a generator for cooking, which is very expensive. Also, I bring water containers for washing fruit, vegetables and equipment," he noted.



KUWAIT: Food trucks lined up at a location in Kuwait. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



KUWAIT: This file photo shows food trucks parked on the seaside near Kuwait Towers.

Kuwait charity societies continue philanthropic activities

KUWAIT: Kuwait charity societies continued their philanthropic activities in the last days of holy month of Ramadan, helping the needy in and outside Kuwait. Charity societies distributed food baskets in Tunisia, Palestine and Yemen as well as clothes for families in Yemen. The international charitable society for development distributed 200 food baskets in two suburbs in Kairouan, Tunisia, while Al-Quraan and Al-Sunna society distributed food baskets for 94 families in the West Bank city of Qalqilia who were suffering from deteriorating living conditions. In Yemen, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) gave out 2,418 food parcels to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in four governorates in Yemen as part of "Kuwait by your side" campaign, which continues for eighth year running. "The relief effort targets needy families in the governorates of Aden, Taiz, Ma'rab and Hadhramaut," said KRCS Director General Abdulrahman Al-Aoun. "It aims to alleviate the suffering of IDPs in the holy month of Ramadan," he said, affirming KRCS' resolve to continue the aid campaign in collaboration with the Yemeni local authorities and partners. Tareq Luqman, director general of Estijabah Foundation, expressed gratitude to the Kuwaiti aid agencies for the limitless support to the Yemeni people. The Kuwaiti assistance will help improve living conditions of the Yemeni people who bore the brunt of the protracted conflict, he noted.

Kuwait Society for Relief (KSR) also gave out 4,832

food baskets to IDPs in four governorates in Yemen as part of the campaign "Kuwait by Your Side." The new relief effort was launched at a ceremony in Taiz in the presence of Nabil Jamel, director general of the Taiz office of the Yemeni Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and Deputy Director of KSR's office in Yemen Adel Ba'eshn. The Yemeni official expressed gratitude for Kuwait's assistance to the Yemenis displaced by the conflict. "The State of Kuwait continues contributing to the realization of food security for vulnerable people and alleviating their suffering over the past years," Jamel said in a statement during the ceremony. These assistance in

Yemen is only part of many humanitarian aid distributed to people in many areas in the conflict-ridden nation. A foundation stone was placed for a health center named after Adnan Al-Ojan to serve 15,000 people in area of Damoun, Hadhramawt. The center will include casualty, minor surgery section, vaccination room, a laboratory, pharmacy, X-ray, toilets and doctors' rooms.

Eid clothes

With advent of Eid Al-Fitr, KRCS distributed new clothes to 600 children in the Yemeni governorates of Hadhramawt, Aden, Taiz and Ma'rab. In New Delhi,

Kuwait embassy to India organized an Iftar meal by distributing more than 2,200 food baskets for Indian families. Kuwait Ambassador to India said the Iftar project this year was the largest compared with previous years, as the embassy supervised distribution of around 42 tons of food supplies even during the COVID-19.

Locally, KRCS announced distribution of 1,070 vouchers worth KD 50 per voucher to needy families on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. Director of KRCS' Public Relations and Media Department Khaled Al-Zaid told KUNA vouchers were distributed to needy families in Kuwait approved by KRCS, in order to help them. The recipients will buy clothes from shops designated to cover the needs of children, orphans and the elderly, he added. KRCS will not stop helping the poor and will provide health, relief along with educational support for them, as KRCS has been distributing humanitarian aid to needy families throughout the year, with the distribution of vouchers as part of the help provided by the association annually, he explained.

Meanwhile, KRCS signed an agreement to establish a disaster relief and response center in Antalya, Turkey, with a generous donation from Kuwait Finance House (KFH). On the sidelines of the agreement signing ceremony, KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi said the center would address emergencies such as the recent fires, which plagued Turkish forests. He expressed gratitude towards KFH for its donation, saying that it reflected the generous spirit of the Kuwaiti people. On his part, Head of the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) Yunus Sezer lauded the KRCS and KFH for their contributions, affirming that the State of Kuwait had a tremendous record of accomplishment when it came to humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributes clothes to 600 children in Yemen for Eid Al-Fitr.

Local

Kuwait University not fit for int'l quality rankings: Teaching society

KU working on improving image, global ranking, society's head says

By Islam Al-Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait University is not fit for any ranking on international education quality indicators, a senior educator argued, adding that the institution's teaching society is cooperating with the administration to help improve its academic image.

Relying on international education quality indicators in measuring the education level at the university is not possible, Head of the teaching faculty members' society at Kuwait University Dr Shamlan Al-Qinae said. This is due to several core reasons, most notably laws and rules imposed on the university, which cannot be ignored in education quality evaluations, such as percentage of university admissions, number of foreign students and scientific research budgets, which the university has been largely suffering from during the past years, he added.

Qinae said the university continues its development of its all teaching and academic programs to improve its academic image. Qinae told journalists the society is seeking to extend cooperation with new KU Rector Dr Yousuf Al-Roumi to improve the university's status, adding the appointment of Roumi brought new hope to improve KU's position on the QS World University Rankings and work on improving its academic image.

Among the best

Qinae said the university is considered among

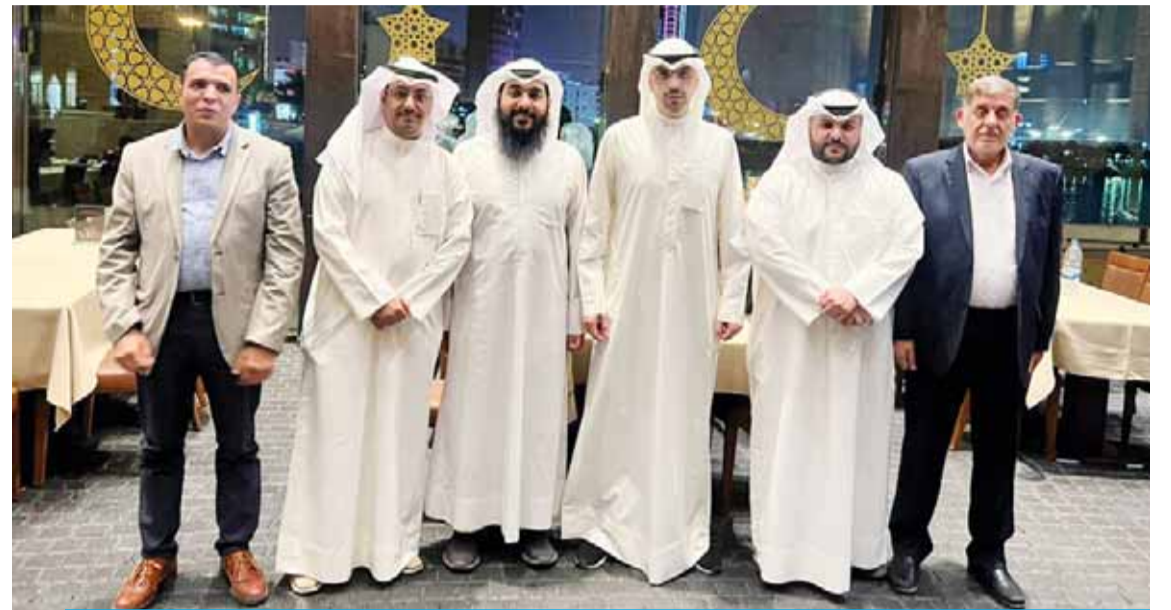
the best in the Gulf and Arab regions, as it has professors who are graduates from the top 100 universities worldwide, and others who have graduated from the top 20, in addition to having the most modern scholastic and academic program, similar to international universities and academies, which leaves no doubt that the university is one of the best in the region.

He said the university or its teaching level cannot be compared with any private university, as the university's history is much longer than "this unjust comparison", stressing KU is one of the largest as far as the number of students is concerned in its colleges, programs and specialties, despite shortages in the teaching faculty.

Qinae said the university will work on improving its academic image through publication of information and news that show the efforts of teachers to raise the level of education and take the university to the ranks of international universities, adding KU's new ranking in June 2022 will not drop again; rather the university will work on boosting its ranking to its previous level or even higher.

Summer term

Qinae asked the university administration to work on resolving the summer term problem and cancel the new rules because they underestimate teachers' efforts and rights, adding the university council will take the correct decision during its



KUWAIT: Head of the teaching faculty members' society at Kuwait University Dr Shamlan Al-Qinae poses in a group picture with journalists.

next meeting to safeguard the rights of teachers. Qinae asked the media and those interested in the university's affairs to support university teachers and the public in their scientific and academic achievements in all fields and sectors.

Qinae said university teachers are optimistic about the appointment of the new rector Dr Roumi for the improvement of the university's academic image and ranking, increasing research budgets and filling in vacancies as soon as possible.

Turkish president receives Kuwait's chief lawmaker in Makkah

JEDDAH: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan received Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem at his temporary residence in Saudi Arabia's city of Makkah on Friday. Erdogan conveyed to the National Assembly chief his greetings to His Highness the

Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan Saturday reiterated his country's support for the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. Erdogan was quoted by Anadolu news agency as telling journalists on the presidential plane returning from Saudi Arabia that Ankara attaches great importance to Saudi and Gulf security and stability. He added that Ankara and Riyadh had demonstrated a common will to develop bilateral relations at the highest level, and to continue

this effort for the common interests and stability of the region.

The Turkish president underlined the significance of promoting economic cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, noting that Ankara and Riyadh had agreed on the need to bring together the business people and investors of the two countries. Erdogan affirmed that his country would back Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Riyadh. On his two-day visit to Saudi Arabia, Erdogan met Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. —KUNA



MAKKAH: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meets Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. —KUNA

No acute hepatitis cases in Kuwait: MoH

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health has affirmed that its tasked teams have continued monitoring the local and international health conditions, indicating that there should be no confusion of COVID cases with other illnesses, namely acute hepatitis that has not been recorded in Kuwait. The

MoH said in a press statement that the acute viral hepatitis that infects children, is diagnosed with abdomen pain, jaundice, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, pain in muscles and other organs. The first case was recorded in Scotland in the end of March 2022. Up to 170 of the cases had been reported in 12 states across the world, namely in the United Kingdom, North Ireland, Spain, Denmark, Romania, Holland, the US, Belgium, Italy and France. All these cases were of children aged between a month and 16 years, the MoH said, noting that tracing origins of this epidemic was still underway. There is some preliminary linkage between some hepatitis cases to COVID cases and the virus, Adenovirus. —KUNA

PRCS, KRCS give out food packages to families in Gaza



GAZA: Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) announced Saturday that with the support of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and as part of an Iftar (fast-breaking) meal distribution campaign, food packages have been given out to more than over a thousand families in Gaza. Society official Abdulaziz Abu Aesha stated that they have distributed food packages to around 1,127 families in need, with total members of around 6,000. He clarified

that the packages are given out to those in dire need of help due to economic situations and recurring crises in Gaza Strip, and they are chosen according to Ministry of Social Affairs criteria. The packages include primary foodstuffs like sugar, oil, rice, lentils, salt and other items necessary for Iftar meals. Abu Aesha expressed gratitude to KRCS and the Kuwaiti people for their continuous support to the Palestinian people. —KUNA

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comKuwaiti official
hails US decision
on copyrights

KUWAIT: The acting director general of Kuwait National Library, Sheikha Rasha Al-Jaber Al-Sabah hailed a decision by a US copyright authority to remove Kuwait from the list of nations where intellectual rights' supervision is warranted. Sheikh Rasha said in a statement that the recent decision by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to remove Kuwait from the 'Watch List' for supervising protection of intellectual rights and its non-inclusion in the 301 report for 2022 constituted "a substantial harvest for the joint efforts by the Kuwaiti State ministries concerned with the file of the intellectual rights."

She expressed gratitude to personnel at the Kuwaiti Copyright Office for exerting noticeable efforts since establishing the division in 2001. The acting director general of the national library also thanked other state departments that contributed to making the positive record for Kuwait at the property rights' level, extending her thanks also to "our partners at the American Embassy," who had closely followed up on this file to pave the way of delisting Kuwait.

The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) recently released its 2022 Special 301 Report on the adequacy and effectiveness of US trading partners' protection and enforcement of intellectual property (IP) rights. The 2022 Special 301 Report noted that the State of Kuwait has been removed from the Watch List this year for making continued and significant progress on concerns that stakeholders identified with IP enforcement and transparency.

For example, the report of the US agency noted, that the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Copyright Office each created online portals for streamlining the submission of trademark and copyright violation reports, respectively. Kuwait also increased engagement and transparency through meetings of the United States-Kuwait Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Intellectual Property Working Group. —KUNA

Sheikha Rasha
Al-Jaber Al-SabahKuwait Times Ramadan Quiz
winners receive their prizes

KUWAIT: Aisha Shoaib's father receives the award from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



Hanifa Nishat poses with the award.



Hosam Hassan poses with the award.



Maria Mustali receives the award from Kuwait Times Deputy Managing Editor Islam Al-Sharaa.



Muhammad Safwan poses with the award.



Munira Shabbir receives the award from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



Pranav Ashok receives the award from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



Rijas Abdullah poses with the award.

KUWAIT: Aisha Shoaib, Hanifa Nishat, Hosam Hassan, Maria Mustali, Muhammad Safwan, Munira Shabbir, Pranav Ashok, and Rijas Abdullah received their 'Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz' awards at Kuwait Times head office. The winners received KD 50 in cash each and a one-

year newspaper subscription. Participation in the Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz is open for everyone living in Kuwait until the end of the holy month. To participate, follow Kuwait Times on Instagram (@kuwaittimes), answer the daily question posted on the account and mention

three people. The winner is announced the following day in the stories on Kuwait Times' Instagram account, with the winner's name tagged. The winner will be contacted via direct message and can collect the prize at Kuwait Times head office.

NBK concludes its
annual Ramadan
social program

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait concluded its Ramadan program "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan", carried out for over 30 consecutive years. The program included the distribution of Iftar meals, visiting various institutions and in addition to participating in numerous charitable and social events.

NBK Public Relations Assistant General Manager, Manal Al-Mattar, said that NBK is proud to be a leading pioneer in social development through its CSR programs. "This program aims to maintain deeper relationships with the communities we operate in, through the introduction of dozens of initiatives and projects that aim to nurture individuals and families and provide the necessary support to their goals of decent living," she added.

For almost three decades, the Ramadan program comprised a series of activities and initiatives aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity in Kuwait. "NBK targets a greater sense of responsibility during the holy month", Mattar noted.

Ramadan tours

Celebrating the return to normal life after the pandemic, NBK distributed thousands of iftar meals via special convoys that toured around different areas in the country including Sharq, Mubarkiya, Naif Palace, Kuwait Airport and Al Sabah Medical District during Ramadan.

Volunteers

As they do every year, NBK employees participated in "Do good Deeds in Ramadan" program by conducting visits to various areas, institutions, public facilities and hospitals to do good deeds. This comes in light of NBK's keenness to promote volunteerism among its employees by reinforcing participation in various humanitarian and social activities organized by the bank.

Traffic Awareness Campaign

NBK distributed fast breaking meals to drivers at traffic lights in strategic locations. This initiative is aimed at reducing traffic accidents during the holy month of Ramadan, especially around iftar time as drivers attempt to reach their destinations



before iftar time, resulting in speeding and traffic violations.

Iftar cannon program and Naif Palace

For the fourth consecutive year, NBK participated in providing Iftar meals to fasting people at Naif Palace, where it distributed meals to fasting guests attending that ancient heritage moment of firing the Iftar cannon. Also NBK participated in the "Iftar Cannon" program aired on Kuwait TV and celebrated Girgian with the children at the palace.

Fun activities and Girgian

NBK launched a group of fun activities every weekend throughout the holy month in cooperation with well-known chefs in Kuwait in addition to organizing Girgian events for children at Wahran Park in Al-Shamiya.

Promoting health and wellbeing

NBK Ramadan Social Program included daily awareness videos and health tips through the official social media channels of NBK in collaboration with the dietitian Luwla Al-Armali.

Two hurt
in Maqwa'a
road crash

KUWAIT: Two people were critically wounded in an accident reported on Al-Maqwa'a road on Friday. Firemen headed to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting an accident involving a pickup truck that crashed into a light post. The victims were evacuated from the vehicle and rushed to hospital in critical condition, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. An investigation was opened into the accident.



Taliban supreme leader urges world to recognise government

Iraqi Communists raise flag for women's rights

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CHANGSHA: This aerial photograph taken on April 29, 2022 shows rescuers working after a six-storey building collapsed in Changsha, in China's central Hunan province. —AFP

Dozens trapped in China building collapse

Situation of the missing persons is being further assessed

BEIJING, China: Dozens of people were trapped under a building which collapsed in central China, officials said Saturday, as rescuers clawed through the rubble and used buzzsaws to pull several survivors free. The building, which housed a hotel, apartments and cinema, caved in on Friday afternoon in Changsha city, Hunan province. At least 23 people remained trapped late Saturday, while 39 others were uncontactable after the incident, the mayor of Changsha told reporters.

"The situation of the missing persons is being further assessed," mayor Zheng Jianxin said, as rescue workers in orange hard hats swarmed the scene. No casualties have been reported so far and city authorities said five people were rescued from the collapsed structure overnight.

Officials also confirmed the building was eight storeys high, correcting earlier reports that it was six. State media showed firefighters cutting through

a morass of metal and concrete slabs, while rescuers shouted into the tower of debris to communicate with survivors.

Some of the injured were rushed on gurneys through a narrow alleyway, while sniffer dogs combed the area for further signs of life. There was no immediate cause for the disaster given by authorities, although speculation turned to possible overwork on the property. "Tenants had made structural changes to the premises to varying degrees," CCTV said, adding that the reason for the collapse was under investigation.

Search 'at all cost'

President Xi Jinping has called for a search for victims "at all cost," state media reported, adding he had ordered a thorough investigation into the cause of the collapse. A top Communist Party official was earlier dispatched to the scene—an indication of the

severity of the disaster.

State Councillor Wang Yong-appointed by the central government—was sent to lead a team to "guide the rescue and emergency response work", an official statement said Saturday. Building collapses are not uncommon in China, due to weak safety standards and corruption among officials tasked with enforcement of construction quality standards.

In January, an explosion triggered by a suspected gas leak brought down a building in the city of Chongqing, killing more than a dozen people. Twenty-five people also lost their lives in June 2021 when a gas blast hit a residential compound in the city of Shiyang.

The same month, 18 people were killed and more injured when a fire broke out at a martial arts school, with state media reporting that all the victims were boarding school pupils. — AFP

Los Angeles marks 30 years since Rodney King riots

LOS ANGELES: Black and Asian community leaders gathered in Los Angeles on Friday to mark 30 years since the US city was engulfed in violence in the wake of the acquittal of four police officers for the brutal beating of Rodney King.

Dozens died and a billion dollars of damage were wrought as anger flared across the multi-ethnic city following the verdicts, which came despite graphic footage of the assault on the Black motorist. "My late father, Rodney King, became synonymous with police brutality to some people. But our family remembers him as a human being—not a symbol," Lora King, CEO of the Rodney King Foundation told a crowd.

"He never advocated for hatred or violence and pleaded for peace as the city burned by asking, 'Can we all get along?' That's my father's legacy." Many of the businesses that were ransacked in the violence belonged to Korean-Americans.

Sprawling Los Angeles has long prided itself on being one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse cities on Earth. But racial groups have often clustered in divided communities, from wealthy white Bel-Air to

Black Baldwin Hills and Latino East Los Angeles—all just a few miles apart.

On April 29, 1992, the closely watched trial of the four cops charged with King's beating ended with verdicts of "not guilty." Hours later, violence broke out in then-predominantly Black South Los Angeles, where many mom-and-pop stores were run by Korean immigrants.

Koreatown itself was soon ablaze, with gun-wielding residents standing on shop roofs to defend their property in images beamed around the world.

'Trauma' in communities

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Friday the passage of three decades had not healed all wounds from the days-long rampage. "To the families that lost someone, to the children of business owners who still haven't slept a single good night since then, to the communities that have moved on without being moved up, the anger and the grief that exploded 30 years ago are still very real and present in trauma here today," he said.

The violence in 1992 was "both a trauma and a turning point for our city—a moment of pain and destruction from which we emerged stronger and more resilient." "On this 30th anniversary, let's remember the lessons from 1992 to forge a better and more prosperous Los Angeles for everyone who calls this city home," he added. The calls for unity came as an annual survey revealed two-thirds of respondents

toughened British rhetoric as she called on the West to "ramp up" military production including tanks and planes to help Ukraine. She also said that Russia must be pushed out of "the whole of Ukraine", implying that Britain backed Ukraine re-taking the province of Crimea which was annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Having been reluctant to deliver heavy weapons to Ukraine in the early stages of the conflict, Britain, France, the United States and even Germany are now delivering increasingly sophisticated firepower. US President Joe Biden announced a huge \$33 billion package on Thursday for arming and supporting Ukraine, with the equivalent of 10 anti-tank weapons being supplied for every Russian tank.

'Second phase'

"We've moved into a second phase of the war," said Florent Parmentier, an expert on international relations at Sciences-Po university in Paris. "There was a first stage where we simply wondered about the Ukrainians' capacity to resist Russia... (now) there's more and more talk of encouraging Ukraine

Tensions rise as West shifts decisively behind Ukraine

PARIS: Less cautious about its military support and more explicit in its war aims, the West shifted gears in its support for Ukraine this week despite the risk of a direct conflict with Russia. "We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine," US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Monday.

The remark underlined Washington's widening objectives in the conflict beyond simply enabling Ukraine to defend its territory from Russian attack. On Tuesday, the United States convened talks on increasing support for Kyiv with around 40 countries—including all NATO members—at the Ramstein military base used by US forces in Germany.

On Wednesday, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss



LOS ANGELES: Lora King, daughter of the late Rodney King, addresses the crowd gathered near the intersection of Florence and Normandie in Los Angeles, California, on April 29, 2022 to mark the 30th anniversary of the 1992 LA Riots. — AFP

thought it likely that similar riots could happen in the next five years. The proportion is the highest in the 25 years that Loyola Marymount University has been running the poll.

Karen Bass, a Black candidate for mayor, said she was shocked by the results. "We absolutely cannot allow things to get so bad for people to be so despondent and so desperate that they tear up the city. We can't have that happen again," she said. — AFP

on the road to victory," he added.

Marie Dumoulin, an expert at the European Council for Foreign Relations, believes "the West has come to terms with the idea that the war is going to last." Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier, from the Franco-Belgian think-tank Thomas More, says the new stance is a result of shifting understanding of Russian President Vladimir Putin's objectives.

The West "appears to have understood that the future of the continent ... will play out in the Donbas" region of eastern Ukraine, he said, with Russia hoping to regain influence lost after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The danger is that the more the West steps up its backing, the closer it becomes to being considered as a "co-belligerent" in the conflict, rather than a simple ally of Ukraine. Russia "considers that as soon as you start delivering heavier and heavier arms, the difference between being a belligerent and not intervening becomes smaller and smaller," said Parmentier. Biden stressed on Thursday that "we're not attacking Russia. We are helping Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression." — AFP

'Beatle' Kotey sentenced to life in jail by US court

WASHINGTON: Alexandra Kotey, part of the Islamic State kidnap-and-murder cell known as the "Beatles," was sentenced to life in prison Friday, with relatives of victims addressing him and another member directly in the US court.

Kotey, a 38-year-old former British national, pleaded guilty in September, admitting his role in the deaths of four American hostages in Syria as well as the kidnapping and torture of other journalists and relief workers.

He was captured along with another former "Beatle," El Shafee Elsheikh, by a Kurdish militia in Syria in January 2018 and handed over to US forces in Iraq before being flown to the United States in 2020 to face trial. Elsheikh was found guilty of all charges earlier this month, and will be sentenced on August 19.

Both men on Friday appeared in the court in Alexandria, near Washington, where the relatives of their victims were given an opportunity to speak.

"You abducted, tortured, and even participated in the murder of good and innocent people and now you have to live with that for the rest of your lives," Bethany Haines, daughter of one of the victims, told the men.

"You both have lost," added the young British woman, whose father David Haines, a relief worker, was beheaded by the third "Beatle," Mohammed Emwazi, who was killed in a 2015 drone strike. The nickname was given to the hostage-takers—who grew up and were radicalized in London—by their captives because of their British accents.

Active in Syria from 2012 to 2015, the "Beatles" are accused of abducting at least 27 other journalists and relief workers from the United States, Britain, Europe, New Zealand, Russia and Japan. Some were executed, their deaths filmed for Islamic State (IS) propaganda videos that shocked the world, while others were released for ransoms.

Among the victims was American journalist Steven Sotloff, whose mother Shirley on Friday repeatedly urged the two men to "open your eyes please and look at me." "How do you begin to describe the unimaginable impact of the loss of a child, taken in the prime of his young adult life, and how it affects you as a parent, sibling, nephew, cousin, friend, lover?" she said.

"Steven's death was like a global worldwide horror movie that was witnessed live and continues to be replayed with the click of a button for millions to see." The mother of aid worker Kayla Mueller, who was initially held by the "Beatles" but was later turned over to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who reportedly raped her repeatedly, also spoke in court. — AFP



Alexandra Kotey

International

Taleban supreme leader urges world to recognise government

Blasts cut power to millions in Afghanistan ahead of Eid

KABUL: Afghanistan's supreme leader called again Friday for the international community to recognise the Taleban government, saying the world had become a "small village" and proper diplomatic relations would help solve the country's problems. No nation has formally recognised the regime installed by the Taleban after they seized power in August and reintroduced the hardline Islamist rule that is increasingly excluding women from public life. In a written message ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada did not mention international sticking points-including reopening secondary schools for girls.

Instead, he said recognition should come first "so that we may address our problems formally and within diplomatic norms and principles". "Undoubtedly, the world has transformed into a small village," said Akhundzada, who has not been seen in public for years and lives reclusively in Kandahar, the Taliban's spiritual heartland.

"Afghanistan has its role in world peace and stability. According to this need, the world should recognise the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." His Eid message comes as the country has been rocked by a series of bomb blasts-some claimed by the jihadist Islamic State group and targeting the minority Shiite Hazara community. Akhundzada made no mention of insecurity, but said the country had been able to build "a strong Islamic and national army", as well as "a strong intelligence organisation".

Link aid to rights

Many in the international community want humanitarian aid and recognition to be linked to

the restoration of women's rights. Tens of thousands of women lost their government jobs after the Taleban takeover, and they have also been barred from leaving the country-or even travelling between cities-unless accompanied by a male relative. In March, the Taleban prompted global outrage by shutting all secondary schools for girls just hours after allowing them to reopen for the first time since they seized power.

Several Taleban officials said the ban was personally ordered by Akhundzada. Akhundzada's Eid message didn't touch on girls' schools, but he did say authorities were opening new centres and madrassas for both "religious and modern education". "We respect and are committed to all the sharia rights of men and women in Afghanistan... do not use this humanitarian and emotional issue as a tool for political ends," he said.

But he said people should willingly embrace the Taleban ideals, and not be forced. "The relevant authorities should invite people towards sharia with wisdom and avoid extremism in this regard," he added.

He said also the government was committed to freedom of speech according to "Islamic values", although hundreds of news outlets have closed, public broadcasts of music banned, and movies and TV dramas featuring women taken off air. Akhundzada, believed to be in his 70s, has been the

spiritual leader of the hardline Islamist movement since 2016, but has remained in the shadows despite the Taleban enjoying largely uncontested power.

His absence from public life has fed speculation he may be dead and his edicts the product of a committee. Still, in October the Taleban released an audio recording they said was him addressing a madrassa in Kandahar.

Meanwhile, millions of people across 11 provinces in Afghanistan faced blackouts on Saturday after two power transmission towers were blown up just west of the capital Kabul, authorities said. The outages come ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Two pylons in the province of Parwan were bombed late on Friday, cutting off electricity to the capital and neighbouring provinces. "The enemies... have blown up two electricity pylons with bombs," Hekmatullah Maiwandi, a spokesman for the state-run DABS electricity company, said in a video statement.

Five teams from the firm have been deployed to carry out repairs, he added. "The pylons are installed on top of mountains and our teams are trying to fix them," Maiwandi said. Temporary repairs would be performed to partially restore power by Saturday night before a full restoration of the towers can be completed in two weeks, he added.



Hibatullah Akhundzada

Police said two suspects have been arrested over the explosions. Many residential buildings and businesses in Kabul, a city of about five million people, booted up private generators Saturday to ensure electricity supply ahead of Eid celebrations. Afghanistan is largely reliant on electricity imported from northern neighbours Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, making cross-country power lines a prime target for insurgents. During the Taleban's 20-year war with Afghanistan's former US-backed government the authorities in Kabul regularly accused the hardline Islamists of targeting transmission towers. —AFP

China-Solomons deal upends Australia election

SYDNEY: Beijing's security deal with the Solomon Islands has transformed Australia's closely-fought election campaign into a foreign policy battle over Canberra's complicated relationship with the Pacific. Australia's Liberal government lobbied hard against the Solomons signing the pact, alongside ally the United States, but neither was successful in dissuading Honiara.

The final text is not public but a leaked draft sent shockwaves across the region last month, particularly sections that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomons-less than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) from Australia. On the campaign trail ahead of the May 21 polls, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has faced intense questioning about his handling of the pact and his government's "Pacific Step-Up" strategy to improve ties with the region.

The issue flared up again on Friday when Solomons Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare lambasted Australia over its AUKUS security deal with the United States and Britain, saying he only learned of the agreement through media reports.

He said the Pacific "should have been consulted to ensure this AUKUS treaty is transparent, since it will affect the Pacific family by allowing

nuclear submarines in Pacific waters".

Banquets vs barbecues

Pacific expert Tess Newton Cain of Griffith University told AFP that Australia's leaders need to improve their understanding of the region's culture and customs. While Beijing tends to fete Pacific leaders with formal diplomacy and lush banquets, "the [Australian] prime minister invites the Pacific family round for a barbecue".

"I think the perception is that plays well to an Australian domestic audience. But in the Pacific, it can look a little disrespectful," she said. In 2019, Newton Cain led a research group who spoke to people across the Solomons, Vanuatu and Fiji where they found many wanted their relationship with Australia-still considered their most important-to be better.

"Some people said to us they felt the way Pacific Islanders were treated by Australians could be condescending, that they felt they weren't given sufficient agency," she said. Others expressed frustration over difficulties obtaining visas for Australia to visit family and friends.

Unlike travellers from many countries, Pacific Islanders are asked for "huge amounts of personal information" including a guarantee they will not overstay. "It's a really intrusive



HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Photo taken on April 22, 2022 shows China's ambassador to the Solomon Islands Li Ming (centre L) and Solomons prime minister Manasseh Sogavare (centre R) posing with other officials during the opening ceremony of a China-funded national stadium complex in Honiara. —AFP

process," Newton Cain said.

'Pacific stuff-up'

Australia's Labor opposition party has seized on the Solomons-China deal to argue the government's Pacific Step-Up-launched soon after its 2019 election win-has failed. "This is a massive foreign policy failure... This is a Pacific stuff-up," opposition leader Anthony Albanese said.

Labor announced a suite of Pacific-focused policies after the China pact was revealed, including an annual visa lottery offering permanent residency to 3,000 Pacific Islanders. For his part, Morrison has defended Pacific Step-Up, noting that "after the last election, the first place I went as prime minister was to the Solomon Islands".

He has said a Chinese military base in the Solomons is a "red line", while

acknowledging assurances from Sogavare that this will not happen. Asked Saturday about claims by Beijing that Australia's response to the deal "amounts to disinformation, defamation, coercion and intimidation and exposes a colonial mentality", Morrison was blunt.

"Well, the Chinese government would say that, wouldn't they?" he said. Newton Cain believes much can be done to improve Australia's ties with the Pacific. Deploying more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander emissaries across the region would be welcomed, she said.

But she added that Australian diplomats need to shift away from thinking about the Pacific as their "training ground". "This is where Australia lives... We need to be thinking about these relationships all the time, on an ongoing basis." —AFP

Sharif scion takes charge of Pakistan's most powerful province

ISLAMABAD: The son of Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif took charge of Punjab province Saturday, the country's most politically important region, further bolstering the dynasty's grip on power. Nepotism and cronyism are deeply entrenched in the Muslim-majority nation of more than 220 million people, with power mostly shared between two families-the Sharifs and the Bhuttos-for much of Pakistan's history.

It comes weeks after cricket superstar turned politician Imran Khan was ousted from power in a no-confidence vote when the usually feuding families formed an opposition coalition. Hamza Shehbaz Sharif took over as chief minister of Punjab-the country's richest, most populous and politically influential province-after weeks of deadlock.

The region's governor and a Khan loyalist

refused to swear in the new chief, elected by the provincial assembly, forcing Lahore High Court to step in. "Today a month-long political crisis in Punjab has come to an end," the 47-year-old Sharif told reporters after he was sworn in.

"I will seek guidance from the prime minister Shehbaz Sharif and will take coalition partners into confidence." The Sharif family, including three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, the brother of the new prime minister, have been embroiled in countless corruption and money laundering allegations-and Hamza Sharif is no exception. The family deny the accusations and argue they are politically motivated. The younger Sharif's appointment as Punjab province's chief minister comes days after Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, was appointed as one of world's youngest foreign ministers at the age of 33.

Khan was voted in by an electorate weary of two-party dynasties in 2018 on a promise of sweeping away decades of entrenched corruption and cronyism. But he struggled to maintain support with soaring inflation, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Since his ouster Khan has taken to the streets



LAHORE: Photograph released by Punjab Press Information Department on April 30, 2022 shows Ashraf (L) administering the oath to Hamza Shehbaz Sharif (C), son of Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as the chief minister of Punjab province in Lahore. —AFP

and held massive rallies that attract thousands in the hope of forcing an early election before the next October 2023 poll. —AFP

N Korea warns of 'preemptive' use of nuclear force

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has repeated his warning that Pyongyang could "preemptively" use its nuclear weaponry to counter hostile forces, state media reported Saturday.

Kim told top military officers that to "maintain the absolute superiority" of North Korea's armed forces, the country should be able to "preemptively and thoroughly contain and frustrate all dangerous attempts and threatening moves... if necessary," the official KCNA news agency reported.

Pyongyang should continue to build up its arsenal so that it can have the "overwhelming military muscle that no force in the world can provoke," Kim said, calling it the "lifeline guaranteeing the security of our country".

The leader's comments followed similar remarks at a

military parade on Monday, when he said he could use his atomic arsenal if North Korea's "fundamental interests" were threatened. Kim made his latest comments at a meeting with top brass to praise their work on Monday's parade, which commemorated the 90th anniversary of the country's armed forces and showcased its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Despite biting sanctions, North Korea has doubled down on Kim's military modernisation drive, test-firing a slew of banned weapons this year while ignoring US offers of talks. Last month Pyongyang test-fired an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017, and

Power cuts, forest fires in South Asia heatwave

LAHORE: Power outages compounded the misery of millions of people wilting in a heatwave across India and Pakistan on Friday, with experts blaming climate change for an early onset of roasting summer temperatures.

In the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh hundreds of forest fires have broken out in recent weeks, eating up tinder-dry pine forests including around Dharamsala, home of the Dalai Lama. Himachal Pradesh normally sees rain, hail and even snow in higher areas at this time of year but many parts have seen no precipitation in two months, sparking more and bigger blazes than normal. "Teams of firefighters are working hard to put out these fires and also to save wild animals," state forest chief Ajay Srivastava told AFP. Power cuts in both India and Pakistan were partly blamed on shortages of coal after an unusually hot March and April pushed up power demand and ate up stockpiles.

Over the past week, Pakistani cities have been cut off for up to eight hours a day, while in some rural areas people have power for only half of the day. "There is a power crisis and load shedding taking place across the country," said Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan, blaming fuel shortages and "technical faults".

Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority warned of the potential for flash floods in northern areas, with the soaring temperatures likely to accelerate snow and ice melt. In Lahore, Pakistan's second city, families flocked to the canals to cool off. "This is the only way to beat the heat, what else is there to do? It's already so warm... what will happen later in summer?" said Abbas Ali, who was with his young son.

One day of coal

In the teeming Indian megacity of New Delhi, which hit 43 degrees Celsius (110 Fahrenheit) on Friday, authorities said many power stations had "less than a day's coal left". "The situation in entire India is dire," said Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's chief minister, warning of potential power cuts to hospitals and the city's metro.

A fire at a landfill 60 metres (almost 200 feet) high in Delhi was still smouldering on Friday for a fourth day. Indian states including Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh have cut back power supply to industrial areas because of coal shortages at power stations. India also cancelled some passenger trains to allow for faster movement of coal at power plants in a bid to avoid a full-blown crisis, Bloomberg News reported. In Kolkata, drooping public transport passengers were being given glucose water after a spate of cases of heatstroke in recent days. —AFP

satellite imagery has shown signs of activity at a nuclear testing site. The string of weapons tests comes as South Korea prepares for an incoming president, Yoon Suk-yeol, who takes a more hawkish approach to Pyongyang and has not ruled out a preemptive strike if necessary. Analysts say Kim's warning shows he is not open to dialogue with Seoul's new government.

"Kim's remarks demonstrate no interest in engaging with the incoming Yoon administration in South Korea or restarting denuclearisation talks with the United States," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul. —AFP

SUNDAY, MAY 1, 2022

Business

Indonesia's palm oil export ban heats up vegetable oil market

Experts see need for public policy on food crisis amid shortages

JAKARTA: Indonesia's decision to suspend palm oil exports in the face of domestic shortages has pushed vegetable oil prices to new highs, further tightening a market already on edge due to the war in Ukraine and global warming. The prices of palm, soybean, European rapeseed and even its Canadian GMO counterpart, canola oil, have reached historic highs following Indonesia's announcement on Wednesday.

"We already had problems with soybeans in South America, with canola in Canada," said Philippe Chalmin, an economics professor at Paris-Dauphine University in France, stating that both crops had been severely affected by extended droughts. Then came devastation for the "sunflowers in Ukraine" due to Russia's destructive invasion, he added. Palm oil is the most consumed vegetable oil in the world, and Indonesia accounts for 35 percent of global exports, according to James Fry, chairman of LMC consulting firm. Indonesia's export ban is designed to bring down prices in the country and limit shortages, according to authorities. But Chalmin said the move "comes at the worst time."

"The rise in prices dates back to last year already and it is exacerbated by the Ukrainian conflict," he explained. Rich Nelson of the agricultural market research and trading firm Allendale said "the industry believes it'll last maybe for one month, perhaps two."

But in the meantime, prices are skyrocketing in a market that was "already accelerated," he said. Unlike other oilseeds, palm fruit does not keep once picked and has to be processed immediately, Fry said. Indonesia's palm oil storage system, which was already holding substantial reserves, is now under further stress, Fry said.

Vicious cycle

Even though the price of vegetable oil, in addition to multiple other agricultural commodities, has been rising for months, demand has yet to slow. "It's difficult to ration demand for food commodities with higher prices," said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist at StoneX Financial. Palm oil, which is used heavily in processed food such as instant noodles and baked goods, is also present in other consumer products, such as personal care items and cosmetics. "Eventually it will trickle down," said Paul Desert-Cazenave of consulting firm Grainbow, "but it's still too early to measure price increases to consumers."



MEDAN: A vendor packs vegetable oil at a traditional market in Medan. — AFP

In the short term, the only oilseed that might be able to provide some relief on the vegetable oil market is the soybean. The United States and Brazil, the world's two top soybean exporters, still have available stock, even though more shipments from the countries would only have a marginal impact on edible oil prices. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced last month that it expects soybean acreage to increase more than 4 percent from last year, while corn would shrink by a comparable amount. The world's top rapeseed exporter, Canada, meanwhile said Tuesday that it expected a seven percent decline in acreage devoted to the GMO rapeseeds used in canola oil. Analysts and economists say they see a need for public policy concerning the food crisis, since in addition to food, vegetable oils are also widely used in biofuels.

Based on the current crisis "we're going to see more pressure on countries to reduce their biodiesel blending mandates, and renewable diesel mandates," Suderman said. "That's going to take time," he warned, "but that's

ultimately where you're going to get your biggest demand destruction." Europe passed a directive in 2018 excluding palm oil from renewable energy targets by 2030. Some of the bloc's countries, including France, have already stopped using it. Despite the current turmoil, Indonesia and Malaysia, the world's second-largest exporter, have maintained their respective programs blending palm oil in their biofuels. To make matters worse, many of the major palm oil importers, mainly Egypt, Bangladesh and Pakistan, have seen their currencies depreciate significantly in recent months, said Michael Zuzolo, president of Global Commodity Analytics and Consulting.

Some major oilseed exporters such as the United States and Brazil have, meanwhile, experienced the opposite, with the dollar reaching multi-year highs. "This is kind of the worst-case scenario starting to develop," said Zuzolo. Putting importers in a "negative feedback loop where they're going to have more and more difficulty keeping supplies ample, that's the potential tragedy we're walking ourselves into." — AFP

Wall Street ends ugly April with more losses

NEW DELHI: Wall Street stocks concluded a bruising April on an ugly note Friday following disappointing results from Amazon, while European and Asian markets forged higher. Amazon plunged 14.1 percent after offering a disappointing forecast as it battles rising costs amid slowing growth compared with earlier in the pandemic. The company reported its first loss since 2015. The results were the latest in a mixed bag of earnings from large tech stocks, which are widely held and play an important role in major indices. "Amazon was the latest to catch Wall Street off guard, reporting its first loss since 2015 amid a multitude of challenges facing the company," said Craig Erlam, analyst at forex platform OANDA.

"Like many others, the company is struggling to adjust to post-pandemic life, having scaled up massively over the last couple of years," Erlam said. The company's downcast outlook "reminded investors about the slowing growth prospects in an inflationary environment," Briefing.com said. Declines by Amazon and other tech giants Apple and Intel contributed to a 4.2 percent drop in the Nasdaq. The tech-rich index has fallen 13 percent in April.

For equity markets, "an abundance of headwinds remained, most notably expectations of an aggressive Fed tightening cycle, lockdowns in China, persisting inflation concerns, rising interest rates and the recent jump in the US dollar," Charles Schwab investment bank said. Earlier, European stock markets finished higher as investors shrugged off data showing that the eurozone's economy had slowed to 0.2 percent in the first quarter while inflation stayed at record levels. There was also some much-needed good news for China's embattled tech sector.

The official Xinhua news agency reported that a meeting of the government's decision-making body ended with officials saying it was "necessary to promote the healthy development of the platform economy" and "complete its rectification." — AFP



NEW YORK: An Amazon Go store signage is seen in the Financial District on April 29, 2022 in New York City. — AFP

India seizes \$725m from China's Xiaomi over 'illegal' remittances

NEW DELHI: India seized \$725 million from the local bank accounts of Xiaomi after a probe found the Chinese smartphone giant unlawfully sent money abroad in the guise of royalty payments, authorities said Saturday. India's financial crime investigations agency began investigating the company in February and said it seized the money from the firm's local arm after discovering it had made remittances to three foreign-based entities.

"Such huge amounts in the name of royalties were remitted on the instructions of their Chinese parent group entities," the Enforcement Directorate said in a statement. Xiaomi did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. The firm's India office was raided in December in a separate investigation over alleged income tax evasion.

Other Chinese smartphone makers including Huawei also had their Indian offices searched at the time. Relations between New Delhi and Beijing have been at a low ebb since a deadly Himalayan border clash between soldiers from both countries in 2020. In the aftermath, India's home ministry banned hundreds of mobile applications of Chinese origin, including the popular social media platform Tiktok. The government justified the bans on the apps as safeguarding against threats to India's sovereignty.

Anti-China sentiment has grown in India since the fatal 2020 troop clash, sparking calls for consumer boycotts of Chinese goods. China continues to be a key economic partner for India, with more than \$125 billion in bilateral trade last year according to media reports. — AFP

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka says IMF bailout 3 months away

COLOMBO: An International Monetary Fund bailout package for crisis-hit Sri Lanka could take up to three months to arrive, the country's central bank chief said on Friday, as anti-government protests over the economic crisis continue to escalate. The island nation of 22 million people has been rocked by months of acute food, fuel and medicine shortages, prompting widespread protests calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign. Central bank chief Nanadala Weerasinghe said he was hopeful of a staff-level agreement with the IMF within two months, but a final deal would take another three weeks.

"The key objective is to achieve debt sustainability before an IMF program," Weerasinghe said, adding that experts will be named shortly to renegotiate Sri Lanka's external debt estimated at \$51 billion.

Two weeks ago, Sri Lanka announced it was defaulting on its foreign debt after running out of foreign exchange to import even the most essential supplies. Weerasinghe told reporters in Colombo that he expected about \$3.0 billion from an eventual International Monetary Fund program, but the country would first have to carry out painful reforms.

"The current tax structure is not sustainable. We must go back at least to the level of taxation we had before 2019," he said, referring to a series of tax breaks implemented by Rajapaksa in an election pledge that propelled him to power in November 2019, but devastated state revenue.

Official data released Friday showed year-on-year inflation at 29.8 percent in April, a seventh consecutive record-high-five times above the 5.7 percent in September. Weerasinghe warned inflation could jump even more as fuel and food prices increased sharply with the local currency losing over 40 percent of its value in a month. Census and statistics department figures showed food inflation in April was also a record 46.6 percent higher, up from 30.2 percent in March and 9.0 percent a year ago.

Under pressure, the president has reportedly told dissidents within his coalition government that he is willing to consider forming a unity government but the opposition has refused to join an administration with the powerful Rajapaksa family still in power. The President has meanwhile told legislators that neither he nor his elder brother Mahinda, the prime minister, will step down as demanded by anti-government demonstrators across the country. — AFP



QINGZHOU, China: In this file photo taken on March 15, 2021, employees work on a truck assembly line at a factory for the vehicle manufacturing company Jianghuai Automobile Group Corp. — AFP

China's factory activity dips to lowest in 2 years

BEIJING: China's manufacturing activity slumped to its lowest level since February 2020, official data showed Saturday, the latest sign of economic pain as Beijing doggedly pursues its zero-COVID response. The official Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a key gauge of manufacturing activity, clocked 47.4 in April—below the 50-point mark separating growth from contraction—as authorities said that a "decline in production and demand" has deepened.

The figures come as Beijing's policy of swiftly stamping out infections with lockdowns and mass testing has been severely challenged by an Omicron-fueled pandemic resurgence. Dozens of cities, including economic powerhouses like Shenzhen and Shanghai, have been either fully or partially sealed off in recent months. The inflexible approach—even as most of the world learns to live with the virus—has inflicted mounting economic pain, with the curbs snarling supply chains and leaving goods piling up at the world's busiest container port.

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) senior statistician Zhao Qinghe acknowledged that some enterprises have had to reduce or stop production, while many firms have reported an increase in transportation difficulties. "The production and operation of... enterprises have been greatly affected," Zhao said, according to an NBS statement that also noted the price indexes for raw materials remain "relatively high".

The official non-manufacturing PMI plummeted to its lowest level since early 2020 as well, NBS figures showed, as the country braces for a muted Labor Day holiday. On Saturday, Chinese media group Caixin released its own manufacturing purchasing managers' index, showing a second straight month of deterioration, with the figure dropping from 48.1 to 46.0.

The Caixin survey, which covers small and medium-sized enterprises, is seen by some as a more accurate reflection of China's economic situation than the official government figures, which more closely track the condition of large state groups. "COVID control measures have done a number on logistics," said Caixin Insight Group senior economist Wang Zhe in a statement.

Caixin also noted that firms expressed concerns over how long COVID restrictions would remain in place. On Thursday, tech giant Apple warned that China's COVID lockdowns were among the factors that would dent its June quarter results by \$4-8 billion. — AFP

Business

Boosted by oil prices, ExxonMobil, Chevron throw cash at investors

Oil giants implementing 2022 capital spending increases

LOS ANGELES: ExxonMobil and Chevron reported soaring profits Friday despite lower oil and natural gas volumes as the petroleum giants return billions of dollars to shareholders in the wake of lofty crude prices and refining margins. Both US oil giants scored huge profit increases propelled by crude prices that rose after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. But both companies have thus far avoided additional capital spending increases to fund drilling and development in spite of a tightening global energy outlook.

"We continue to invest prudently," said Kathy Mikells, chief financial officer of ExxonMobil, which increased spending on share buybacks by \$20 billion. "We're going to stay disciplined on capital. We've given you a range, we've stuck within the that range ever since we started putting it out there," said Mike Wirth, chief executive of Chevron, which raised its plans for share buybacks to \$10 billion per year after previously targeting \$5 to \$10 billion per year.

Both oil giants are implementing planned 2022 capital spending increases, but ruled out additional investment. Part of the reticence to spend more to drill comes as the oil giants ramp up investment in hydrogen, carbon capture and storage and other low-carbon ventures amid pressure from environmental, social and governance (ESG) investors.

Russia hit

After a dreadful 2020 amid COVID-19 lockdowns that devastated petroleum demand, oil companies returned to profitability in 2021 and have continued to see earnings soar this year.

ExxonMobil's first-quarter profits more than doubled to \$5.5 billion, as a strong market for energy commodities more than offset \$3.4 billion in one-time costs connected to its withdrawal from the vast Sakhalin offshore oil field following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Revenues rose 52.4 percent to \$87.7 billion. At Chevron, profits came in at \$6.3 billion, more than four times the year-ago level on a 70 percent rise in revenues to \$54.4 billion.

Friday's eye-popping profits could add to cries of oil industry "profiteering" from congressional Democrats, who plan legislation in the wake of painful gasoline price hikes. Petroleum industry officials have dismissed the effort as "political posturing." Oil prices have generally lingered above \$100 a barrel after spiking to around \$130 a barrel in early March shortly after Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Natural gas prices have also been elevated amid worries over the reliability of Russian supplies to Europe, while refining profit margins are "above the 10-year range, with the tight supply/demand balance expected to persist," as ExxonMobil put it.

Wirth said there are few signs of immediate relief in the tight oil market, given rising demand as more economies ease COVID-19 restrictions, moves by some oil majors to cut petroleum investment in favor of low-carbon energy and other factors.

"Inventories are quite low, demand is still strong and economies at this point seem to be handling it," Wirth said on a conference call with analysts. "At some point, particularly if prices were to move higher, I do think it starts to be a bigger drag on the economy." But the oil market remains cyclical and



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo taken, gas prices are posted at a Mobil petrol station in Los Angeles.—AFP

"the supply response is coming," he said.

Although both companies have announced plans to lift production later this decade, output dipped in the first quarter of 2022. ExxonMobil's oil and gas output declined three percent from the 2021 period, with the company pointing to severe cold weather

that cramped output in Canada, as well as scheduled maintenance activity in Qatar and Guyana. While Chevron touted a 10 percent jump in US oil and gas production following an aggressive ramp-up in the Permian Basin in Texas, overall oil and natural gas volumes fell two percent from last year's level.—AFP

IKEA presents 'Us & Our Planet: This is How We Live'

KUWAIT: IKEA proudly presents 'Us & Our Planet: This is How We Live,' a book produced in collaboration between Phaidon and IKEA. Together they have teamed up to explore one of the biggest challenges of our generation: sustainable living. 'Us & Our Planet' looks at the life at home of twelve everyday people including activists, artists, athletes and gardeners as well as young families across the globe. From Mexico to Moscow, Bali to Beirut, the book shines a light on the small things one can do to make our world a little better.

"This is an inspirational study of the home, as the most important place on earth, and how we all, with small steps, can make the world a better place", Tina Petersson-Lind, Communication Manager, Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

Since the 1950s IKEA has conducted home visits all over the world to find out more about the

way people live and investigate how daily life at home can be improved. This feedback informs product development and is mirrored in new generations of the IKEA range. Inspired by the IKEA's life at home visits, Us & Our Planet presents case studies of twelve diverse individuals and families around the world. The book also highlights some of the IKEA's most iconic products born from this approach over the past 70 years. On the occasion of launching "Us & Our Planet" book in Kuwait, IKEA organized a post-lunch walk in The Assima Mall Track, by inviting a variety of the media, non-governmental organizations' representatives and environmental activists. The event took place at a new IKEA lounging area in The Assima Mall, titled "When Change Happens". This campaign is part of the bigger movement within IKEA where we are shedding light on the IKEA sustainability agenda and work around enabling a healthier and more sustainable living.

"We want to build trust for how IKEA is approaching sustainability. Both the book, 'Us and Our Planet' and this campaign "When Change Happens" show that by working together - many small changes will result in big impact. Living a healthier and more sustainable life remains a top priority to people. We want to bring closer strong



aspirations of people, such as going on a short daily walk, and making significant changes," said Tarek Al-Anazi, IKEA Assima Mall store manager.

The overall IKEA ambition is to become people and planet positive, and to inspire and enable the many people to live a better everyday life within the boundaries of the planet by 2030. "The IKEA People & Planet Positive 2030 strategy" describes the sustainability agenda and ambition for all of us in IKEA.

Apple reports solid Q2, warns of \$4-\$8bn hit from COVID

WASHINGTON: Apple reported better-than-expected profits Thursday amid continued robust consumer demand, but warned that the China Covid-19 lockdown and ongoing supply chain woes would dent June quarter results by \$4 to \$8 billion.

The iPhone maker enjoyed another solid performance for the period ending March 26, registering record revenues for the quarter. But executives said the difficulties of the pandemic have returned with a vengeance since the reporting period ended.

"Supply constraints caused by COVID-related disruptions and industry-wide silicon shortages are impacting our ability to meet customer demand for our products," Chief Financial Officer Luca Maestri said on a conference call with analysts. "We expect

these constraints to be in the range of \$4 to \$8 billion, which is substantially larger than what we experienced during the March quarter."

The impact will depend on the speed of the ramp-up of production in the Shanghai area, where factories have recently begun to reopen after a COVID-19 lockdown, said chief executive Tim Cook, who said Apple was not "immune" to the inflation challenges roiling the economy.

Maestri declined to offer an overall revenue forecast for the June quarter. Executives also avoided giving an outlook on semiconductor supplies. In the March quarter, the technology giant reported earnings of \$25 billion, up 5.8 percent from the year-ago period as revenues rose nine percent to \$97.3 billion. The results looked good following stumbles by some Big Tech peers as growth from the stay-at-home demand amid the pandemic slows and companies confront rising operating and labor costs.

The company scored revenue increases in most of its categories, including iPhone and Services. But sales fell for the iPad, with Maestri pointing to supply chain



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, the Apple logo is seen at the entrance of an Apple store in Washington, DC.—AFP

constraints during a conference call with analysts. The strongest growth by region was the Americas, with the company also reporting moderate revenue increases in Europe and Greater China. Revenues fell in Japan and other Asian markets.—AFP

IMF chief tests positive for COVID-19

WASHINGTON: IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has tested positive for COVID-19, a spokesman said Thursday, stressing she had only "mild symptoms." "IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has tested positive

for Covid-19. She is experiencing mild symptoms and is working remotely while isolating at home," the Washington-based crisis lender's spokesman Gerry Rice said in a statement.

"She is fully vaccinated and boosted," he added. Georgieva joins the ranks of Washington elites who have tested positive lately amid a new rise in daily coronavirus infections.

This group includes multiple members of Congress and Vice President Kamala Harris, who tested positive on Tuesday. At the time, she said she was not considered to have been in close contact with President Joe Biden.—AFP



Kristalina Georgieva

Thai, Malaysian firms pull out of Myanmar projects

BANGKOK: Thailand's oil and gas conglomerate PTTEP and Malaysia's Petronas announced Friday they would withdraw from the Yetagan gas project in coup-hit Myanmar. There has been an exodus of global energy companies from Myanmar including Chevron and TotalEnergies following last year's military takeover and subsequent allegations of human rights abuses.

More than 1,800 civilians have died during a military crackdown and more than 13,000 have been

arrested, according to a local monitoring group. Petronas subsidiary Carigali holds a roughly 41 percent stake in the Yetagan project while PTTEP has a 19.31 share.

"The withdrawal is part of the company's portfolio management to refocus on projects that support the energy security for the country," PTTEP chief executive Montri Rawanchaikul said in a statement Friday. PTTEP said its stake will be reallocated proportionately to the remaining shareholders with no commercial value, effective upon regulatory approval.

Petronas, which has operated the project since 2003, said in a statement the decision followed a review and was part of an "asset rationalization strategy" to adapt to "the changing industry environment and accelerated energy transition."

The 24,130 square kilometer field in the Gulf of

Moattama produces natural gas and condensate.

Japan's Nippon Oil and Gas Exploration and Myanmar's junta-linked Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise have the remaining stakes in the project. PTTEP's decision is not the end of its involvement with Myanmar. In March, PTTEP said it will take over the running of Myanmar's vital Yadana gasfield following the withdrawal of Chevron and TotalEnergies in January.

The American and French firms said they would pull out of Myanmar following growing international pressure from human rights groups to cut financial ties with the junta. The Yadana gas field in the Andaman Sea provides electricity to Myanmar and Thailand, one of a number of gas projects that Human Rights Watch says make up Naypyidaw's largest source of foreign currency revenue, generating more than \$1 billion annually.—AFP

News in brief

Tesla recalls 14,600 cars in China

BEIJING: US car giant Tesla has recalled more than 14,600 cars in China over a software fault that could lead to safety risks, the country's market regulator said Friday, the firm's second recall in a month. The American brand is hugely popular in the world's second-biggest economy but has faced complaints over quality and service. It recently had to halt work at its multibillion-dollar Shanghai "gigafactory" for more than 20 days due to a COVID outbreak in the city. On Friday, regulators said Tesla had filed a recall plan for 14,684 Model 3 vehicles, most of them made in China. The cars were manufactured between January 2019 and March this year, the announcement said. Vehicles being recalled display incomplete speed information when in "Track Mode", said the notice by the State Administration for Market Regulation.—AFP

Georgia water firm halts production

TBILISI: Georgia's Borjomi mineral water, partly owned by a Kremlin-friendly Russian billionaire, said Friday it was suspending production because of "financial problems" linked to the Ukraine war. The bottled water brand, one of Georgia's top exports, is produced by IDS Borjomi Georgia. The Alfa Group, owned by Kremlin-friendly Russian billionaire Mikhail Fridman, owns a controlling stake in the firm. The European Union slapped sanctions on Fridman in late February over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, describing the London-based businessman as "a top Russian financier". It also said he was an "enabler" of Russian President Vladimir Putin's "inner circle". The UK followed suit with sanctions, though the US has not. The sanctions appear to have affected Georgia's production of Borjomi water.

Italy's Eni profits quadruple

ROME: Italian energy giant Eni more than quadrupled its first-quarter net profit to 3.6 billion euros (\$3.8 billion), boosted by soaring oil and gas prices, company results showed Friday. The adjusted net profit, which excludes exceptional items, rose 12-fold to reach almost 3.3 billion euros. Eni Chief Executive Claudio Descalzi said the results showed the company's "strength and resilience against a backdrop of high market volatility and uncertainty linked to the ongoing war (in Ukraine) and international tensions". The Italian group has benefited alongside the rest of the sector from increasing oil and gas prices in recent months, linked to the post-pandemic recovery and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.—AFP

Brazil unemployment dips

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's unemployment rate fell slightly in the three months to March, but average income was the lowest on record for the first quarter of the year, the government said Friday. The January-March unemployment rate was 11.1 percent, down 0.1 point from the December-February period, with 11.9 million people unemployed, said national statistics institute IBGE. That was better than the 11.4 percent forecast by analysts. But in a sign of the sluggish recovery in Latin America's biggest economy, average real monthly income was down 8.7 percent from the same period in 2021, at 2,548 reais (\$520) — the lowest for the first quarter since records began in 2012. It was a slight improvement, however, from the all-time low of 2,510 reais in the fourth quarter of 2021.—AFP

Business

Eurozone economy hit by Ukraine war fallout as production declines

Inflation stays at record levels imperiling Europe's recovery efforts

KUWAIT: The eurozone economy felt the fallout from the Ukraine war as output slowed and inflation stayed at record levels, official data showed Friday, imperiling Europe's recovery from the pandemic.

The EU statistics agency said growth in the 19 countries that use the euro crawled along at 0.2 percent between January and March, down from 0.3 percent in the final quarter of 2021. For the European Union as a whole, gross domestic product grew by 0.4 percent in the first quarter, after 0.5 percent in the last three months of 2021.

Among major economies, Spain and Germany saw growth of 0.3 percent and 0.2 percent respectively in the first three months of the year. France was flat and Italy down, minus 0.2 percent. The small increase in eurozone growth "means that the region will avoid a technical recession in the first half of the year at least," said Andrew Kenningham, Chief Europe Economist at Capital Economics. "But rising inflation and the fallout from the Ukraine war mean that GDP is likely to contract in the next quarter," he said.

Price shock

Compared to a year ago, the growth level in Europe still remains high, coming off the big crashes in GDP because of the coronavirus pandemic that put the global economy on its knees. This meant that the growth rate year-on-year was up a

solid five percent for the eurozone, and 5.2 percent for the wider EU, compared to the first quarter of 2021. The big shock remains consumer prices, with the economy handicapped by the rise in consumer prices, especially in the energy sector because of the war in Ukraine.

Consumer prices in the eurozone soared by a record 7.5 percent in April, up from a revised 7.4 percent the month before, Eurostat said. These figures are the highest recorded by the European statistics office since the publication of this indicator began in January 1997. Inflation has broken a new record each month since November, though the leap in April was more moderate than previous months. In April, the highest rate of increase was recorded for energy prices, which was up by 38 percent. This increase was slightly slower compared to March when it reached 44 percent.

Rate hikes?

The European Central Bank believes that inflation will gradually diminish from the current eye-watering levels, but remain well higher than its target two percent for the rest of 2022 at least. The ECB has faced pressure to increase rates and rein back stimulus that critics say stokes inflation, but Christine Lagarde, the central bank's president, has said cutting off the taps abruptly would achieve little. "If I raise interest rates today, it is not going

to bring the price of energy down," Lagarde told US network CBS this week. But ING economist Bert Colijn said that Friday's continued growth figures, even if feeble, meant the ECB was "likely to act sooner rather than later" on rate hikes.

"While the economy remains weak... don't expect the ECB to wait much longer," he said. Analysts agreed that given the unknowns on the war in Ukraine, the outlook for the European economy over the coming months remained highly uncertain.

French growth crashes

The French economy flatlined in the first quarter as households reduced their consumption due to rising inflation and the war in Ukraine, the national statistics agency said Friday.

The zero-growth result was weaker than the INSEE agency's pre-war forecast of a 0.3 percent expansion, underlying the economic difficulties faced across Europe. The French annual inflation rate also accelerated to 4.8 percent in April, up from 4.5 percent the month before, INSEE said in a separate statement. "Gross domestic product is at a standstill... it bears the mark of the two combined external shocks (COVID and the Omicron variant in January, then the war in Ukraine that strengthened inflation)," INSEE economist Julien Pouget wrote on Twitter.

The figure puts an end to France's strong eco-



nomical rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic and poses a challenge to President Emmanuel Macron, who was re-elected last weekend.

Economic growth had been clocked at 0.8 percent in the last quarter of 2021 and 3.0 percent in the third. European economies have been badly affected this year by supply problems linked first to the pandemic, then the war in Ukraine as well as sanctions imposed on Russia following its February 24 invasion of its neighbor.

Figures also released Friday showed that the eurozone's GDP growth slowed to 0.2 percent in the first quarter, with a Germany eking out a similar gain as it avoided a second consecutive quarterly contraction. —AFP

Al Mulla Motors signs dealership for CMC vehicles in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Motors launched the new generation of D260 and D270 CMC vehicles to offer companies in the commercial sector the preferred choice for carriage of goods and employees.

The new generation of CMC transport vehicles is distinguished by a Mitsubishi 2.4-liter 4-cylinder engine, and a modern and advanced exterior design. The CMC commercial vehicles have the highest security and safety systems, starting with a dual front airbags, anti-roll system, traction control system, hydraulic brakes, emergency stop system, hill-start assist system, anti-lock brake system, and air control system, including other systems that ensure the driver and passengers the highest standards of safety and security.

A variety of D260 and D270 vehicles are available, including:

Cargo panel van

It features a spacious storage, with a length of 2,720 mm, width: 1,530 mm, height: 1,380 mm and a payload of 980 kg and a 6-speed manual transmission.

Cargo window van

It has seats for five passengers and ample storage space for loading goods with a load capacity of up to 838 kg with a 6-speed manual transmission. It also features air condition-

ing vents for the rear seats.

Mini bus

Which comes with seats that can accommodate eight passengers, and the second-row seats feature a foldable 60:40 ratio and can be folded completely flat. The third-row seats can also be controlled and folded forward, which helps in obtaining more storage space. The loading capacity of the transport bus reaches 860 kg, and it is characterized by a 5-speed automatic transmission and the presence of air conditioning vents for the rear seats.

D270 freezer

As for the D270, it is a portable storage freezer with a temperature between -20 and 30 degrees Celsius, and it comes with a wide storage area with a length of 2670 mm, a width of 1485 mm and a height of 1440 mm, which can accommodate the transportation of your goods in comfort and safety. It features a Japanese-made compressor for the best performance.

CMC commercial vehicles are available at Al Mulla Motors at reasonable and exclusive prices.

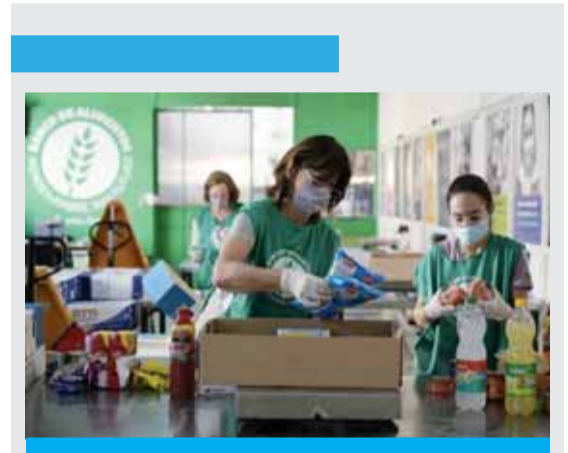
During the holy month of Ramadan, Al Mulla Motors presents our esteemed customers with an exclusive offer which includes free vehicle registration and free maintenance for a



year or 20,000 km whichever comes first when purchasing a D270 or D260. In addition to a warranty of three years or 100,000 km, whichever comes first.

Al Mulla Group started the automotive business in the early 1940's with several brands. In 1972, the Automotive Group was the first to

introduce Mitsubishi cars to the Kuwaiti market as well as the Middle East. Today, with 2500+ strong workforce, the Automotive Group has a presence in Kuwait, Iraq, Egypt and UAE, operating several divisions and facilities, including new and used car showrooms, spare parts and service centers.



MUNRO, Argentina: Volunteers select donated food at the Food Bank warehouse in Munro, Buenos Aires province, Argentina. —AFP

With inflation rising, millions in Argentina rely on food aid

BELEN DE ESCOBAR, Argentina: Elena Gonzalez's backyard soup kitchen is a hive of activity, with busy hands chopping and stirring as a cauldron with a bit of chicken and much rice boils over a wood fire in a poor Argentina neighborhood. Gonzalez's soup kitchen in Belen de Escobar, some 55 kilometers (34 miles) from Buenos Aires, is one of more than 1,500 in the country of 45 million.

Argentina has a long history of high inflation but is going through a particularly rough patch, worsened by the global repercussions of the war in Ukraine. With food prices in the country rising 20 percent in just three months, a complex network of public and private organizations is required to feed millions of increasingly hungry mouths.

"The situation is getting more and more complicated," said Gonzalez, whose soup kitchen is eight years old. From a combination of state aid, private donations, contributions from local residents, a communal vegetable garden and a few chickens, she manages to put food on the table.

Gonzalez says she cannot afford to miss a day of cooking. "The local children would come to my door to demand their plate," she told AFP.

Her soup kitchen receives help from the network Barrios de Pie (Neighborhoods on their Feet), a social movement born from the economic crisis 20 years ago, and for which the need has never abated. It is an essential cog in the wheel of citizen mobilization topping up the public aid on which more than four million people depend, according to official figures.

Recently, the government has had to increase by 50 percent—to between \$78 and \$156 per month—the food stamps that some 2.4 million households rely on. Another 300,000 mouths are fed at school canteens, while yet more get their daily meal from religious organizations and NGOs.

Local shops fill in some of the remaining gap, delivering unsold food to soup kitchens or sometimes directly to households in need.

"Argentina has a much larger social assistance network than other Latin American countries," sociologist Ricardo Rouvier of the University of San Andres told AFP. —AFP

Huawei to highlight new opportunities at SAMENA summit

DUBAI: SAMENA Telecommunications Council has partnered with Huawei to host this year's SAMENA Council Leaders' Summit 2022 for the ninth consecutive year. The annual gathering of Telecoms multi-industry leaders will take place on May 9th, 2022, under the chairmanship of SAMENA, and with the patronage of the UAE's Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority.

Held under the theme of "Thriving with Resilience & Integration in the New Opportunity Realm", the Leader's Summit will welcome Chairmen and CEOs from the private sector and top decision-makers from regional regulatory authorities, global bodies and institutions, as well as the participation of global leaders and entities focused on institutionalizing and fostering cross-sector digitization and collaboration.

The summit will focus on the business opportunities availed through the integration of technologies, infrastructure investments, connectivity, and spectrum availability to benefit vertical industries and economic sectors, in alignment with the region's government visions.

More specifically, Huawei will highlight the role of 5G, cloud and digital power in tackling the sustainability needs of the telecom industry and how an integrated

intelligent ICT architecture will light up the future. Huawei will further delve into cloud's integral role in enabling the digital economy and data sovereignty through its 'Everything as a Service' model.

Experts will also address how network technology is changing industries and the society, in turn, changing the demands of data in the network, as well as explore connectivity requirements for the 5G era and explore new trends and innovations that will drive new advanced networks. Operators can improve networks capabilities and performance by taking advantage of new technologies and larger bandwidth spectrum such as 6GHz frequency band and the introduction of intelligent capabilities into industrial mobile networks. As networks evolve given the increased demand for reliable connectivity, ultra-low latency, and the need for speed, coverage, and capacity, security will be a key discussion point during the Summit. Huawei will highlight how security needs to be fully considered before commercial use, and the importance of aligning with global network standards set by bodies such as 3GPP and the GSMA. These bodies have formulated the NESAS/SCAS global security standard certification system for network equipment that many Middle Eastern countries already include in their national network security policy.

Steven Yi, President of Huawei Middle East, said, "Digital transformation has pivoted to new heights, with 5G era infrastructure and communications technologies taking center stage. Through the Leaders' Summit 2022, Huawei will fulfill its commitment to bringing technological advances to even more indus-

tries and create new value by helping governments and enterprises go digital while operating more intelligently."

Bocar BA, CEO & Board Member, said: "The Leaders' Summit 2022 aims to signal normalcy in business and to help open doors for leadership discourse on critical industry, policy, business, and societal matters as digital transformation accelerates. We look forward to connecting with industry leaders and experts after a hiatus of two years for the physical edition of the Leaders' Summit 2022, and anticipate that we may productively address technology, sustainability, and cooperation-building challenges on multiple fronts."

During the Summit, UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE) and Huawei, will announce the launch of a new joint insight report on ICT in higher education and technical and vocational education (TVET) in the Middle East and Pakistan called "Talent Ecosystem for Digital Transformation". The report's findings have revealed the importance of developing ICT talents and creating relevant ecosystems to enhance ICT skills in the region and expand access to career opportunities in the digital world.

To foster an industry-wide culture of inclusion and inclusiveness, Huawei is committed to creating value for telecom carriers and helping enterprises accelerate their digital transformation. The company places great importance on continuous R&D investments. The company's R&D expenditure reached about \$22.38 billion in 2021, representing 22.4 percent of Huawei's total revenue.

Americans' spending grew in March amid high prices

WASHINGTON: As their wages rose last month, Americans channeled more dollars towards services even as prices continued ticking higher, government data released Friday said.

The Commerce Department reported personal consumption expenditures (PCE) climbed 1.1 percent in March, almost twice what analysts expected, while incomes saw a forecast-beating 0.5 percent increase, both signs of continued resilience in the economy. The data also confirmed the potency of the continued inflation wave hitting the world's largest economy, as prices rose 0.9 percent in the month, much more than the increase seen in February.

Compared to a year ago, they were up 6.6 percent, with energy prices shooting up 33.9 percent after Russia invaded Ukraine in February. Food prices

jumped 9.2 percent. PCE is the Federal Reserve's preferred price gauge and the strong demand coupled with high inflation will likely bolster the case for the central bank to raise rates by a half-percentage point when they meet next week, with more hikes to come in future months.

Most of March's spending went to services, which grew \$114.6 billion, as consumers paid for international travel, accommodation and food services, among a wide range of business, the report said. Goods outlays rose \$70.4 billion, according to the data, as Americans spent more for gasoline but cut spending on durable

goods, such as motor vehicles and parts, where prices have risen dramatically amid a global shortage of semiconductors.

Income rose due to a combination of increases in wages, farm revenues caused by higher food prices and a rise in interest payments. While prices accelerated overall last month, "core" prices, which exclude volatile food and energy costs, showed signs of easing.

They were 5.2 percent higher compared to March 2021, slightly less than the annual increase seen in February. On a month-to-month basis, they rose 0.3 percent, the same as the month prior. —AFP



Photo shows pieces of a jewelry collection by Franco-Iraqi fashion designer residing in Jordan Hana Sadiq at her store in the capital Amman. With verses from love poems and flowing calligraphy, Jordan-based fashion designer Hana Sadiq stitches a testament to the beauty of Arab women. — AFP photos



Franco-Iraqi fashion designer Sadiq speaks of one of her designs incorporating Arabic calligraphy in the 'Thuluth' script, at her store in the capital Amman.

A POEM TO ARAB BEAUTY: THE FASHION DESIGNS OF HANA SADIQ



With verses from love poems and flowing calligraphy, Jordan-based fashion designer Hana Sadiq stitches a testament to the beauty of Arab women. In a career spanning decades, Iraqi-born Sadiq has shown her creations worldwide and dressed the stars, but she remains rooted in the traditions of her homeland. The artistic handwriting of Arabic script dominates her embroidered modern designs, with poetry or letters scattered in bright colors.

She uses various calligraphic styles, from the elaborate Diwani to the curving Thuluth, and features on some of her outfits the lines of renowned Arab poets including Mahmoud Darwish and Nizar Qabbani. "Arabic calligraphy is the most beautiful," says Sadiq, 72, showing off her love of jewellery as strings of beads around her neck, dangling earrings, and unusual stone rings.

At her home workshop in downtown

Amman, Sadiq notes that the earliest writing was born several millennia before Christ in what is now Iraq, arguing that it was a place "without which all the other civilizations would not have existed". Sadiq has split her time between Amman and Paris since 1982, having both French and Jordanian nationality as well as Iraqi citizenship.

'How beautiful she is'

She has exhibited from Europe to the United States as well as the Middle East, returning home with an extensive collection of antique silver ornaments, along with thousands of pieces of Arab textiles and costumes. Her kaftans, traditional robes, feature bright and stunning colours. They reflect the influence of her grandmother who wore a traditional Iraqi "Hashemite dress" and walked "elegantly like a peacock".

The folk outfit is made of very thin fabric

with wide sleeves and transparent sides, decorated with beautiful floral ornaments, golden or silver, on a black base. It was the favourite of Iraqi women in the 1950s and 60s. Sadiq traces her interest in fashion to her childhood, when she would visit her grandfather's textile shop in Baghdad.

She went on to design for celebrities and royals, including Jordan's Queen Rania and Queen Noor. But whoever the client, her work has been guided by pride in the Arab woman's femininity. Unlike more revealing Western fashion, her designs envelope the woman's body, "but it shows high femininity," says Sadiq, who is also the author of a book, "Arab

Costumes and Jewelry, a Legacy without Borders".

She argues that Western clothes are not the best fit for the bodies of Arab women but have spread to the region anyway. "Unfortunately this is the result of globalisation," she says. "What matters to me, in all my work, is that the woman remains female and that a man is attracted to her as a female," she adds. "Which means when a woman passes in front of him, he must notice and see how beautiful she is." — AFP



A model presents a piece by Franco-Iraqi fashion designer, incorporating Arabic calligraphy in the 'Diwani' script, at her store in the capital Amman.



A model presents a piece by Franco-Iraqi fashion designer at her store in the capital Amman.



Franco-Iraqi fashion designer residing in Jordan Hana Sadiq speaks during an interview at her store in the capital Amman.

Gunmen steal hundreds of holiday outfits from tailor

Gunmen have robbed a Pakistani tailor of more than 200 outfits made for customers ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of

Ramadan, tying up and beating his staff. Muhammad Razaq told AFP Friday that two armed men barged into his Islamabad store before making off with 240 completed or near-finished shalwar kameez outfits - Pakistan's national dress. "The police have not been able to find any clue to the ruthless guys who turned this Eid for me into a nightmare," said Razaq.

The haul was worth more than 720,000 rupees (nearly \$4,000), he added. Pakistanis, and Muslims around the world, usually celebrate the Eid al-Fitr holiday with new outfits and jewelry - with the rich splashing out thousands on glitzy ensembles. But even poor people try to buy something new for the holiday, and tailor-made outfits are frequently cheaper than store-bought clothes. The Eid festival

is expected to begin either Monday or Tuesday, depending on sighting of the new moon.

Most of the shelves in Razaq's shop were empty Friday and he sat disconsolately behind a sewing machine. "I have been working in the area for the last 20 years and have customers who come to me from posh areas of Islamabad and Rawalpindi with branded and expensive fabrics," he said. Salman Ashraf, one of the tailors tied up during the raid, said the robbers were very aggressive. "The gunmen thrashed us, tied us with ropes and asked us to remain silent," he said. Police confirmed the incident and said they were investigating. — AFP



Tailor Muhammad Razaq (left) opens his shop in Islamabad after gunmen robbed him of more than 200 outfits made for customers ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday.



Tailor Muhammad Razaq stitches a fabric at his shop in Islamabad, after gunmen robbed him of more than 200 outfits made for customers ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. — AFP photos

Tom Cruise unveils 'Top Gun' sequel with mid-air stunt

Tom Cruise unveiled the world-first screening of "Top Gun: Maverick" at CinemaCon in Las Vegas Thursday introducing the long-awaited sequel while balanced atop a flying bi-plane. The new "Top Gun," which picks up the story of Maverick and his fighter pilot buddies some three decades after the blockbuster original, was scheduled to open in 2020 but was repeatedly delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cruise, famous for doing many of his own stunts, introduced the screening to the movie theater industry convention with a video message recorded in typically hair-raising style, perched on the moving plane's fuselage from the skies above South Africa.

"Hey everyone. Wish I could be there with you. I'm sorry for the extra noise," yelled 59-year-old Cruise over a roaring plane engine and high winds. "As you can see, we are filming the latest installment of Mission: Impossible." "Tom does everything at full speed all the time... and you can't stop him. He's going to do it no matter what," joked producer Jerry Bruckheimer, who also returns from the first movie, at the CinemaCon event.

While plot details and reviews are embargoed before the film officially premieres at the Cannes festival next month, "Top Gun: Maverick" drew immediate glowing praise on social media from journalists attending Paramount's CinemaCon presentation. It combines adrenalin-packed action sequences largely shot on real US Navy fighter jets with emotional references to the original. Bruckheimer said it had taken so long before making

the follow-up because "all our careers kind of took off from that point" and Cruise "had a lot of stories he wanted to tell."

Tony Scott, who directed the original, died in 2012, but new director Joseph Kosinski "came up with a way to make it that excited Tom." Kosinski said he had been inspired by stunning footage on YouTube recorded by US Navy pilots filming with GoPro cameras during their training. "I showed that to Tom and I said 'this is available on the internet for free-if we can't beat this, there's no point in making this film.'" So he agreed. With the assistance of Navy engineers, the filmmakers found ways to insert six cameras into the jet cockpits.



US actor Tom Cruise and British-US actress Hayley Atwell are pictured during the filming of 'Mission Impossible: Lybra' in Rome. — AFP

The blockbuster original was based on a real training program that was known as Topgun and based at San Diego's former Naval Air Station Miramar. Navy recruiting officials reportedly saw a dramatic uptick in inquiries from would-be flyboys following the film's release, with military recruiters in some cities setting up tables outside cinemas. Filmmakers "did not get a lot of support from the Navy" to make the original "Top Gun," said Kosinski. "This movie on the other hand, when we approached the Navy to make it, it was like throwing open the doors. You know, 'come on in, tell us what you need.'" — AFP

Spectacular glass-bottomed bridge opens in Vietnam

Don't look down! Vietnam launched a new attraction for tourists with a head for heights on Friday, with the opening of a glass-bottomed bridge suspended 150 meters above a lush jungle. The Bach Long pedestrian bridge - whose name translates to "white dragon" - in northwest Son La province snakes around dizzying cliff faces before spanning a dramatic valley between two peaks, hitting a total length of 632 meters. The floor of the bridge is made from French-produced tempered glass, making it strong enough to support up to 450 people at a time, while giving them a

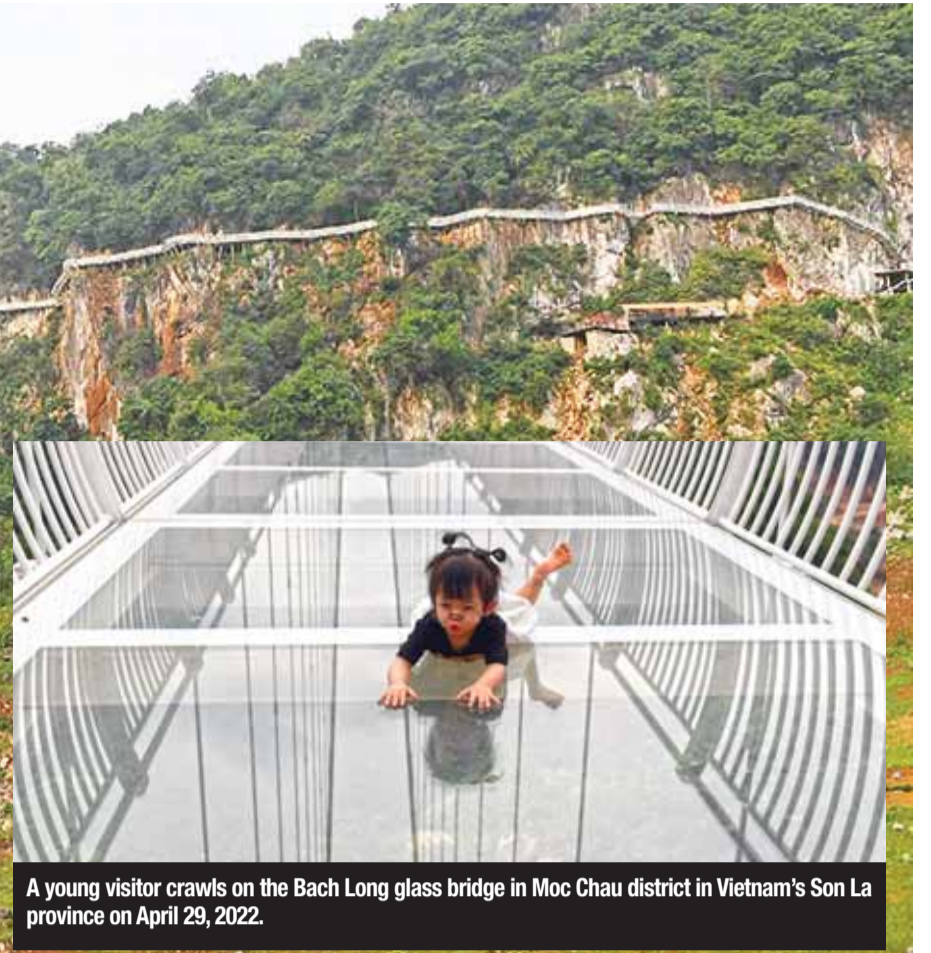
spectacular view of the greenery in the gorge far below.

"When standing on the bridge, travelers will be able to admire the beauty of nature," Hoang Manh Duy, a representative of the bridge's operator said. The company says it is the world's longest glass-bottomed bridge, surpassing a 526-metre structure in Guangdong, China. Officials from Guinness World Records are expected to verify the claim next month. Vietnamese tourism chiefs are seeking to lure visitors back after two years of COVID-19 shutdowns that kept out virtually all foreign travelers.

In mid-March, the country ended quarantine for international visitors and resumed 15 days of visa-free travel for citizens from 13 countries. Vietnam is set to host the Southeast Asian Games in two weeks - with more than 10,000 athletes and sports staff from countries in the region en route. Bach Long is Vietnam's third glass bridge. "I hope the bridge will lure more domestic and international tourists to our area," local resident Bui Van Thach said after walking across it. — AFP



Visitors walk on the Bach Long glass bridge in Moc Chau district in Vietnam's Son La province on April 29, 2022.



A young visitor crawls on the Bach Long glass bridge in Moc Chau district in Vietnam's Son La province on April 29, 2022.



Visitors stand on the walkway section of the Bach Long glass bridge in Moc Chau district in Vietnam's Son La province on April 29, 2022. — AFP photos



This aerial photo taken shows the newly constructed Bach Long glass bridge in Moc Chau district in Vietnam's Son La province.

Health woes force Celine Dion to postpone tour

Canadian superstar Celine Dion announced Friday the postponement until 2023 of European concert dates for her "Courage World Tour," citing a persistent health issue. "I feel a little better... but I still have spasms," Dion explained in a news release, updating fans on severe involuntary muscle contractions that she began experiencing late last year. "I'm so sorry to have to change the dates of the European tour again; the first time it was because of the pandemic, now it's because of my health," said the 54-year-old singer. "To be on stage, I have to

be on top of my game. To be honest, I can't wait, but I'm not quite ready yet... I'm trying my best to come back at 100 percent to get on stage, because that's what you deserve." The Grammy Award-winner's tour is her first without her husband-manager Rene Angelil, who died from cancer in 2016.

Dion had given the first 52 shows of the global itinerary before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, at the beginning of 2020. She announced in January that she was cancelling the North American leg because of health problems. Speaking directly to fans in an online video, she thanked them for their understanding and support, her voice trembling with emotion. "The good news is that I am doing a little bit better, but it (her recovery) is going very slow and it is very frustrating for me," she said with a sigh, her eyes tearing up. "I appreciate your loyalty," she added. — AFP



In this file photo, Canadian singer Celine Dion performs on the stage of the AccorHotels Arena in Paris. Celine Dion announced on April 29, 2022 that she postponed to 2023 all the concerts of her 'Courage World Tour' scheduled in Europe this year, due to a health problem. — AFP

Fear on the dance floor: Disco needle attacks baffle France

Alarm is spreading on dance floors in France following needle attacks on dozens of young people in nightclubs, with police in the dark as to the assailants' identity or motives. The victims, who are mostly women, report the sudden onset of identical symptoms - nausea, dizziness and sharp pain - while out partying, and only later detect a needle prick on their skin, a red dot surrounded by a blue circular bruise. Returning home from a night of dancing in April in Nantes, western France, 21-year-old Eloise Cornut had a sudden onset of "cold sweat, nausea, shivering and dizziness".

The beauty parlor apprentice felt better the next day, but a colleague noticed a needle prick in the back of her arm. "It was a red dot with half an inch of blue bruising around," she told AFP. Cornut, who doesn't drink or take drugs and only goes out at weekends, said she quickly realized that needle attack must have happened during her Saturday dance outing. Her colleagues urged her to file a police report and get a blood test.

'Totally stresses me out'

"I now have to wait five weeks before I can get an HIV test," she said. "That totally stresses me out." Since early April, police have been dealing with around 60 such cases reported in nightclubs, a police source said, with the true number likely much higher. The gendarmerie, France's

paramilitary police force mostly active outside of large cities, said it was not able to give any nationwide figures yet, as the data had not been sufficiently evaluated.

Some 45 cases have been reported in Nantes since mid-February, according to prosecutors. Complaints were also filed in the western city of Rennes and in areas of France's south, the southwest, the French Alps and the Atlantic coast. Blood tests have not revealed the presence of GHB, known as "liquid ecstasy" or "date rape drug", a substance that potential sex assailants sometimes mix into the drink of their victims, prosecutor Renaud Gaudeul said.

Lab tests had also failed to establish the presence of any other toxic substance, and nobody had been arrested, he told AFP. Experts caution, however, that GHB disappears from the bloodstream without trace within hours after being administered. One police source said the needle attacks were sometimes followed by a sexual assault, and sometimes not.

'Big bruise, red dot'

In Roanne, a picturesque town in the Loire valley, an 18-year-old woman who asked not to be named was celebrating a friend's birthday in a disco. When she accompanied a friend to the toilet, a man groped her bottom. "When I got home I checked in the mirror and there was a big bruise with a red dot on my right buttock," she told AFP. Her friends later told her that they had noticed a man staring at her in the disco "as if he was waiting for something to happen to me".

Doctors immediately gave her preventative treatment for HIV and hepatitis. Roanne police are investigating the incident for "pre-meditated violence and the pre-meditated administration of a harmful substance". A similar probe was launched following a complaint by a young man in his 20s, who reported a needle stab in his

shoulder in the same disco on the same night.

The phenomenon has been spreading to music festivals, such as the Printemps de Bourges in central France, one of the country's biggest music gatherings. After nine complaints from festival goers, police there also launched an investigation into "administration of harmful substances", without having been able so far to find any culprits or determine exactly what devices were being used.

"We don't know whether we're looking for syringes or whether they're using simple pins," said Agnes Bonjean, chief of staff to the prefect of the Cher region where Bourges is located. "It really hurt," said Noemie, 23, who was stabbed "in the thigh, right up to the sciatic nerve" during a night out in Beziers, southwestern France, and immediately rushed to hospital by friends after nearly losing consciousness.

'Sick and perverse'

The public prosecutor in Beziers, Raphael Baland, told AFP that 15 complaints had been filed there, of which 14 followed attacks that happened over a single night, from April 17 to 18. Contacted by AFP, prosecutors in Paris said that six investigations had been launched since last week in the capital.

Meanwhile nightclub owners are beginning to feel the impact of the attacks on their earnings. Saying the "sick and perverse" attacks were sparking "hysteria" among young people, Thierry Fontaine, at the UMIH hospitality association, said they were also creating a fresh problem for nightclub owners who were still reeling from the impact of COVID restrictions. One nightclub owner in southwestern France reported a revenue drop of 50 percent last weekend as people stayed away following two needle attack cases, Fontaine said. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Children play in a tent set up by the UN children's agency UNICEF in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced at least two thirds of the country's 7.5 million children to flee their homes, Save the Children says. — AFP photos

In western Ukraine, displaced children play to forget war

Inside a play tent for displaced children in western Ukraine, 12-year-old Natan said his cat Marquisa was not acting normally, sleeping all day and staying awake all night. Maybe it was because she was so stressed after all the Russian bombs on his home city of Mariupol, he said, as his fluffy white pet snoozed curled up in her carrier box. Leaving her to rest, he joined other children playing, some stacking cubes under dangling origami, others coloring cartoon characters with crayons. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced at least two thirds of the country's 7.5 million children to flee their homes, Save the Children says.

As the war grinds on into its 10th week, organizations working with children are increasingly concerned about the mental toll it is taking on younger Ukrainians and their parents. Outside a municipal building in the western city of Lviv, Natan waited in

the tent set up by the UN children's agency for his parents to finish government paperwork. Under the canvas, a mother steadied her wobbly toddler in an avocado-themed jumpsuit. Natan crawled around the play mat, giving a younger child a ride on his back.

"He's always been sociable," said his mother Olena, returning hours later to retrieve him from the caregivers. But that evening Natan and his parents were catching the train eastwards to start a new life in the capital Kyiv, and she believed that below his smiley demeanour her third-born was a little worried. "He's afraid to go there. He survived the bombardment (in Mariupol), he knows what it's like," the 51-year-old medical assistant said.

'Find my mother and son'

The family arrived in Lviv in early April

after escaping the besieged port city of Mariupol, braving Russian shelling to run back from a shelter into their burning flat to rescue Marquisa the cat. But sleeping on a schoolroom floor in Lviv has been far from ideal, and it was time to try their luck in Kyiv after the Russians withdrew from its devastated suburbs. Since escaping Mariupol, Olena accompanied her 16-year-old daughter all the way to a youth hostel in Germany, she said. But the mother-of-three said she had to remain in Ukraine. The Russians had taken her 28-year-old son prisoner, she said.

And she had lost all contact with her mother in Mariupol, a city now almost entirely under Russian control after weeks of brutal siege. "I can't just leave with my children. I need to find my mother and my son," she said. As Natan and his parents walked off with Marquisa in

her box, the young boy in a stripey jumper turned around and waved goodbye. Just hours later, a Russian missile hurtled down onto the capital even as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited, killing one person.

Photos left behind

Child psychologist Natalia Tybura said she had seen many parents and children in the UNICEF tent since the conflict started. Several came asking for advice about a son being more aggressive than usual, and she advised them to allow their child to vent through sport. But many more parents, especially those who had escaped Mariupol, just wanted to confide in someone.

They often felt wracked with guilt at having been forced to leave a loved one behind, or desperately wished they had brought along more images of their family.

"What people regret the most, more than property, are the photos they could not take with them," Tybura said. "Many people talk about family albums, and some were even forced to delete the images on their phones" to be able to cross Russian checkpoints out of the city.

Tybura said that among the worst hit, she had seen children who had fled Mariupol on foot with their families after weeks of being trapped inside the city. "Their minds had switched to survival mode," she said. But she warned trauma could well manifest itself at a later stage, and the country should brace itself for a mental health landslide when the war ended. "There will need to be a lot of support," especially for families with members returning from the front, Tybura said. — AFP



Dutch singer and rapper \$10 left the Schiphol Airport for Turin to attend the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song Contest on behalf of the Netherlands. — AFP

Geopolitics and glitz as Ukraine tipped to win Eurovision

Kitsch, glitz and geopolitics - the Eurovision Song Contest is back in two weeks' time, with Russia excluded and conflict-ravaged Ukraine the hot favorite to take the crown. "Stefania", by Ukrainian folk-rap group Kalush Orchestra, has been tipped by bookmakers to win the cult competition, this year being held in the northern Italian city of Turin on May 14. Russia was barred by organizers the day after it invaded its neighbor in late February.

And with lyrics such as "I'll always find my way back home, even if all the roads have been destroyed", the bookies expect Ukraine to benefit from an outpouring of public support. A collation of leading bookmakers on fan site Eurovisionworld has put Kalush Orchestra as the runaway favorite, with hosts Italy in second place. Mahmood and Blanco's "Brividi" hopes to repeat the success of their country last year, when lederhosen-clad rockers Måneskin triumphed with "Zitti e Buoni" and went onto global fame.

But with Eurovision, whose riot of pop, outrageous outfits and international relations drew 180 million viewers across Europe last year, anything is possible. "The public show strong support for Ukraine but I would not assume Ukraine is going to win," said Dean Vuletic, a historian and expert on the geopolitics of Eurovision. "In 1993, Bosnia and Croatia did not finish highly," despite being under attack, he told AFP, adding: "While the Ukrainian entry is strong, there are other entries of high quality."

Roars of war

It is not the first time the roars of war have made themselves heard in the competition, begun by the European Broadcasting Union in 1956 with just seven countries. Greece boycotted Eurovision after Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, and tensions in the Balkans have often spilled on stage.

In 2019, Ukraine withdrew from Eurovision after its singer dropped out in

protest at rules against touring in Russia, while last year Moscow ally Belarus, targeted by EU sanctions, was excluded in a move it slammed as politically motivated. Benoit Blaszczyk, secretary of France-Eurofans, the French branch of the OGAE international fan association, said Ukraine will get the "sympathy vote" but not just that. "They have a good song," he told AFP, adding that Ukraine - which consistently makes it through to the grand final - gets attention every year, they are often ahead of their time."

Voting blocs

Votes are cast by music industry professionals and the public from each country - and out of fairness, nobody can vote for their own nation. Blocs of nations have in the past often voted together, from the francophone countries France, Belgium, Switzerland and Luxembourg, to the Nordic and more recent central or eastern European blocs. But "when you look at studies, voting blocs do not determine the winners", said Vuletic. Almost 4,400 Eurovision fans affiliated to OGAE have already cast their ballots for their favourite songs in Turin - and Ukraine came in 11th, with repeat winner Sweden on top, followed by Italy and Spain.

The Ukrainian OGAE fans crowned Poland - a country that has taken in millions of Ukrainian refugees since Russia's invasion - followed by Spain, France, Norway and Sweden. Meanwhile, Russian fans gave the top score - 12 points - to pro-Moscow Serbia, followed by Lithuania, Spain and Latvia. In Serbia, Slobodan Todorovic, editor-in-chief of fan site Evrovizija.rs, insisted each act should be judged on its merits.

"A potential Ukraine victory (for political reasons) would cast a dark shadow on Eurovision and the values it upholds - neutrality, independence from politics and respecting and celebrating diversity," he told AFP. But even if they are not formally crowned Eurovision champions, there are many who believe Kalush Orchestra - who needed special permission to leave Ukraine - have won just by being there. "The fact they will be able to show on stage, that they were able to leave the country and receive these messages of support is already a success," said Vuletic. — AFP

Sole searching: Rare sneakers on show in Melbourne

The "Mona Lisa of sneakers" went on display in Melbourne on Friday, with Michael Jordan's old high-tops and around 100 other rare shoes offering a glimpse into a lucrative market driven by die-hard "sneakerheads" and eager investors. Online auction giant eBay opened the three-day Museum of Authenticity in an apparent bid for a bigger slice of the sneaker resales market, which has boomed during the pandemic. "We're essentially showcasing and displaying some of the rarest, most iconic sneakers in the world," eBay sneaker expert Alaister Low told AFP ahead of the opening in the city's trendy suburb Brunswick.



Photo shows eBay sneaker expert Alaister Low holding a pair of signed Shaquille O'Neil's Reebok Pump Shaq Attaq size 22 sneakers which will go on display during the three-day Museum of Authenticity by online auction giant eBay. — AFP photos



Photo shows sneakers which will go on display during the three-day Museum of Authenticity by online auction giant eBay.

Kenya's e-waste recyclers battle to contain scourge

In an industrial Nairobi neighborhood, impoverished slum-dwellers scour piles of garbage to collect damaged and discarded gadgets, part of an initiative to recycle old electronics and transform trash into treasure. Wearing T-shirts and flip flops and earning as little as 500 Kenyan shillings (\$4) a day, the unlikely warriors are at the frontlines of a battle against a rapidly-growing environmental menace.

Obsolete, broken and unwanted, these discarded items reflect a global scourge, with the electronics industry now generating trash at a faster pace than any other sector, including textiles and plastics, according to the United Nations. Although Africa has traditionally been a dumping ground for e-waste shipped from Europe and Asia, the continent is also increasingly dealing with huge volumes generated locally, driven by an insatiable appetite for smartphones, computers and household appliances.

But a handful of firms such as Sintmud

Group, WEEE Centre and Electronic Waste Initiative Kenya (E-WIK) are fighting back against the swelling tide, looking for ways to repurpose electronic trash. "We call it urban mining and do it for our environment," said E-WIK chairman George Kimani.

'End up in a river'

It is painstaking work. At E-WIK's facility in the Kenyan capital, dozens of employees carefully take apart motherboards, batteries, screens and cables, creating the building blocks for refurbished laptops that can then be sold to new customers. "When you get a working computer motherboard, you look for a power supply, and from there you start attaching other components including a nice casing," Kimani, a former car mechanic, told AFP.

In addition to buying trash from scavengers, E-WIK also collects discarded electronics from homes and businesses eager to dispose of them. At a wildlife conservation area outside Nairobi, a decades-old Macintosh computer jostles for space with vintage typewriters and landline telephones, waiting for E-WIK employees to show up. "I am so happy that they are taking it," said Liesl Smit, a ranch office manager at the conservancy, as workers in green overalls loaded the "junk" into a truck.

"We are a conservancy. It is important for me and all of us here to know that the waste is disposed of responsibly... that it is not

going to end up in some river or pollute wild spaces," she told AFP. The refurbished appliances-sold at bargain prices-have a huge market in Kenya-a country where 36 percent of the population lived in poverty in 2020 according to a government report - , with customers lining up to buy power inverters, televisions, refrigerators and much more.

"It is cheaper and often in your budget. There is nothing else," said Nicole Awuor, a 28-year-old baker, who owns a recycled microwave and mobile phone. E-WIK's most expensive laptop costs just 15,000 Kenyan shillings (\$131, 118 euros), a fraction of the price charged for a new model with similar specs. "There is a ready market. We give them a guarantee that if it doesn't work properly, they can always come back to us," said Kimani.

But environmentalists caution that such efforts are no match for the scale of the spiralling crisis. With only four recycling firms licensed in the country of nearly 50 million people, most of Kenya's waste still ends up in junkyards where it releases lead, mercury and other deadly compounds that pollute the environment. The total e-waste collected or recycled "is not documented and most of it" ends up in Nairobi's Dandora dumping ground-a garbage heap the size of nearly 20 football fields-the ministry of environment conceded in 2020. — AFP

Sports

Retired sumo wrestlers fight for new careers

KYOTO: When Japanese sumo wrestler Takuya Saito retired from the sport at 32 and began job-hunting, he had no professional experience and didn't even know how to use a computer. Athletes in many sports can struggle to reinvent themselves after retirement, but the challenge is particularly acute for those in the ancient world of sumo. Wrestlers are often recruited early, sometimes as young as 15, and their formal education ends when they move into the communal stables where they live and train.

That can leave them in for a rude awakening when their topknots are shorn in the ritual that marks their retirement. When Saito left sumo, he considered becoming a baker, inspired by one of his favourite cartoons. "But when I tried it out, they told me I was too big" for the kitchen space, said the 40-year-old, who weighed in at 165 kg during his career. "I had several job interviews, but I didn't have any experience... They rejected me everywhere," he told AFP.

Professional sumo wrestlers or "rikishi" who rise to the top of the sport can open their own stables, but that's not an option for most. Last year, of 89 professional wrestlers who retired, just seven remained in the sumo world. For the others, the restaurant industry sometimes appeals, offering a chance to use the experience gained cooking large meals for their stablemates. Others become masseurs after years of dealing with aching muscles, or leverage their heft to become security guards.

'Inferiority complex'

But trying to start over when non-sumo peers can be a decade or more into a career track is often demoralizing. Saito said he developed an "inferiority complex" and found the experience of jobhunting

far harsher than the tough discipline of his life as a rikishi. "In sumo, the stable master was always there to protect us," he said, adding that his former stable master offered him a place to stay, meals and clothes until he found his feet.

Many wrestlers leave the sport with little or no savings, because salaries are only paid to the 10 percent of rikishi in the sport's two top divisions. Lower-ranking wrestlers get nothing but room, board and tournament expenses. Saito wanted to be his own boss and decided to become an administrative scrivener, a legal professional who can prepare official documents and provide legal advice.

The qualifying exam is notoriously tough, and when Saito passed he opted to specialize in procedures related to restaurants, hoping to help other former wrestlers. His first client was Tomohiko Yamaguchi, a friend in the restaurant industry with an amateur sumo background. "The sumo world is very unique and I think that outsiders can't understand it," Yamaguchi told AFP, suggesting society can sometimes prejudge rikishi.

Wrestlers who go from being stopped for photos and showered with gifts can also struggle with fading into obscurity. A rare few may end up with television gigs that keep them in the public eye, but for most, the limelight moves on.

'Very strong, very reassuring'

Keisuke Kamikawa joined the sumo world at 15, "before even graduating high school, without any experience of adult life in the outside world," he told AFP. Today, the 44-year-old heads SumoPro, a talent agency for former wrestlers that helps with casting and other appearances, but also runs two day centers for the elderly, staffed in part by retired rikishi. "It's a completely different world from sumo,



TOKYO: This picture taken on April 6, 2022 shows retired Japanese sumo wrestler and owner of the Hanasaki day-care center, Keisuke Kamikawa, who competed under the name Wakatenro, eating lunch with his family and elderly women at the center. — AFP

but rikishi are used to being considerate and caring" because lower-ranked wrestlers serve those in the upper echelons, explained Kamikawa.

Shuji Nakaita, a former wrestler now working at one of Kamikawa's care centers, spent years helping famed sumo champion Terunofuji. "I prepared his meals, I scrubbed his back in the bath... there are similarities with care of the elderly," he said after a game of cards with two visitors to the center. And while the sight of hulking former rikishi around diminutive elderly men and women might appear incongruous, the retired wrestlers are popular.

"They are very strong, very reassuring and gentle," smiled Mitsutoshi Ito, a 70-year-old who says he enjoys the chance to chat about sumo with former wrestlers. Kamikawa has also set up a group that provides advice on post-sumo careers to wrestlers and families worried their sons are not planning for their future. "Sumo is a world where you have to be ready to put your life in danger to win a fight," said Hideo Ito, an acupuncturist who has worked with rikishi for over two decades. "For these wrestlers who are giving it their all, thinking about the future can seem like a weakness in their armor." — AFP



GREENSBORO, North Carolina: Lilly King reacts after winning the Women's 100m Breaststroke Final on Day Four of the Phillips 66 International Team Trials at the Greensboro Aquatic Center on April 29, 2022. — AFP

King completes breaststroke sweep at trials

WASHINGTON: World record-holder Lilly King clocked 1min 05.67sec to win the 100m breaststroke on Friday and complete a sweep at USA Swimming's World Championship trials in North Carolina. King claimed a third individual berth for the World Championships in Budapest on June 18-July 3. Annie Lazor was second in 1:06.12 while Lydia Jacoby, who stunned King to claim Olympic gold in Tokyo last year, finished fourth to miss out on a Worlds berth.

Freestyle superstar Katie Ledecky nabbed her third individual victory of the week, winning the 400m freestyle in 3:59.52. Ledecky, who won the 800m and 200m freestyles earlier in the meet, will be aiming to reclaim the 400m free world title she surrendered to Ariarne Titmus in 2019, a task that looks easier since the Australian star - who also beat Ledecky to Olympic 400m gold in Tokyo last year - indicated she will not compete in Budapest.

In other events on Friday, Hunter Armstrong followed up his world record-setting win in the 50m backstroke with a 100m backstroke win in a world-leading 52.20sec. World record-holder Ryan Murphy was second in 52.46 - second-fastest in the world this season. Regan Smith won the women's 100m back in 57.75 with teenager Claire Curzan second in 58.39. Veteran Nic Fink won the men's 100m breaststroke in 58.37 with Michael Andrew second in 58.51 — the top two times in the world this year. — AFP

Nagelsmann wants clarity over future of Lewandowski

BERLIN: With a tenth straight Bundesliga title secured, Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann wants to settle the future of star striker Robert Lewandowski so he can plan for next season. As the title celebrations raged last Saturday after a home win over Dortmund that meant Bayern cannot be caught, Lewandowski was reluctant to discuss his plans.

The Pole's contract expires in 2023, but while Bayern bosses insist he will stay next season, persistent rumors link the 33-year-old to Barcelona. Lewandowski's agent Pini Zahavi met Bayern's senior bosses in a Munich restaurant on Thursday, but no progress was made towards signing a contract extension. "Basically, it's always good to have planning security - in all areas of life, including the strikers," Nagelsmann said Friday. "That's why I would also like us to reach an agreement."

Nagelsmann is irritated by the constant speculation, adding: "I must have said 50 times that I would

MLB suspends Dodgers' Bauer for two seasons

LOS ANGELES: Major League Baseball suspended Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer for two seasons on Friday over sexual assault allegations for which he was never criminally charged. Commissioner Rob Manfred announced the ban in a statement, saying an "extensive investigation" by MLB found Bauer violated MLB's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy.

Bauer's career had been in limbo since last July 2, when he was placed on leave in the wake of a California woman's claim that two sexual encounters with Bauer in April and May of 2021 turned violent without her consent. Bauer immediately said in a Twitter post that he would appeal the suspension. "In the strongest possible terms, I deny committing any violation of the league's domestic violence & sexual assault policy," Bauer wrote. "I am appealing this action and expect to prevail. As we have throughout this process, my representatives & I respect the confidentiality of the proceedings."

Manfred's statement said Bauer was suspended, without pay, effective Friday, for 324 championship season games or two full seasons. "In accordance with the terms of the Policy, the Commissioner's Office will not issue any further statements at this point in time," the statement said. All 15 of the those previously suspended under MLB's domestic violence policy have accepted or negotiated suspensions ranging from 15 to 162 games.

Lucknow beat Punjab by 20 runs in IPL

PUNE: Lucknow Super Giants won by 20 runs against Punjab Kings after a powerful bowling performance by Dushmantha Chameera, Moshin Khan and Krunal Pandya in the Indian Premier League on Friday. Lucknow were defending a tricky 153-run target against a power-packed Punjab batting attack but Sri Lankan speedsters Chameera, Khan and Pandya ripped through the batting order, claiming seven wickets between them as Punjab slumped to 133 for eight in 20

overs at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune.

Punjab skipper Mayank Agarwal got off to a fiery start but fell to Chameera for 25 followed by dismissal of Shikhar Dhawan at five. Jonny Bairstow and Liam Livingstone tried to cobble the innings but could not withstand the Lucknow bowling attack. Bairstow struck five fours in his 32-run innings but was caught off Chameera before Livingstone fell to Khan at 18 off 16 balls. Rishi Dhawan (21) not out continued to fightback but could not get support from the other end.

Spinner Pandya bowled a disciplined spell claiming two crucial wickets of Jitesh Sharma and Bhanuka Rajapaksa for 11 runs while Ravi Bishnoi claimed one wicket. Avesh Khan returned with figures of 26 runs in three overs, including the last over that just went for 10 runs. Batting first,

she alleged he choked her to unconsciousness and then punched her repeatedly in the head. Bauer denied any wrongdoing, with his attorney and representatives saying all the encounters were entirely consensual. The temporary restraining order has since been lifted and Los Angeles County prosecutors finally announced in February they would not press charges against Bauer, citing insufficient evidence. Earlier this month, Bauer filed a defamation lawsuit against the woman and against two media outlets over their coverage of the accusations.

'Categorically false'

Bauer has also denied as "categorically false" another woman's claim, reported last August by the Washington Post, of a similar incident in 2017, when he played for Cleveland. The Dodgers signed Bauer in 2021 on a three-year deal worth \$102 million following his departure from the Cincinnati Reds, where he became the club's first Cy Young Award winner. The Dodgers paid Bauer \$38 million last year, and he was due to make \$32 million this season and next season.

The Dodgers said in a statement they cooperated with the probe and were informed of its conclusion. "Today, we were informed that MLB has concluded its investigation into allegations that have been made against Trevor Bauer and the commis-



Trevor Bauer

sioner has issued his decision regarding discipline," the team statement said. "The Dodgers organization takes all allegations of this nature very seriously and does not condone or excuse any acts of domestic violence or sexual assault. We've cooperated fully with MLB's investigation since it began and we fully support MLB's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Child Abuse Policy, and the commissioner's enforcement of the policy."

The team said it would have no other comment pending Bauer's appeal to an independent arbitrator. The arbitrator can uphold, overturn or reduce the suspension. In 2014, Alex Rodriguez's 211-game suspension for use and possession of performance-enhancing substances was reduced to 162 games. And in 2012 Ryan Braun's 50-game suspension after a positive dope test was thrown out because the arbitrator found testing protocols were not followed. — AFP

Lucknow opens Quinton de Kock and Deepak Hooda stitched an 85-run knock after they lost skipper K L Rahul (6) in the third over.

De Kock scored 46 off 37, hitting four 4s and two sixes while Hooda made (34) before South African Kagiso Rabada tore into the batting line up and returned with figures of 4 for 38. Rahul Chahar picked up two wickets as Punjab restricted Lucknow to 153 for eight. Chameera, Khan and Jason Holder played cameos to help the team cross the 150 mark.

"The crucial runs at the back end and then the execution with the ball helped us win. The way we responded with the ball was phenomenal. Krunal has been brilliant throughout the tournament," Lucknow skipper K L Rahul said. Pandya was declared player of the match for his brilliant bowling spell. — AFP

John Coates ends 32 years as Aussie Olympic boss

SYDNEY: Australian sport ushered in a new era Saturday when powerbroker John Coates stood down as president of the country's Olympic Committee after 32 years at the helm. Coates, 71, rose to prominence when he helped Sydney win its 2000 Games bid and is credited with shaping the Olympic movement globally in the decades since. He told the Australian Olympic Committee's annual meeting in Sydney those Games were among his career highlights, along with creating financial security for the AOC.

"In my 32 years as president, we've followed what has become known as the Bach mantra: 'Change or be changed'," he said. An emotional Coates said the Olympic committee's role was to help Australians chase their dreams. "Today, with a full heart, I thank you for giving me the chance to live mine."

Ian Chesterman, Chef de Mission for Australia's 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games team, was elected as Coates' successor. A congenital hip dislocation meant

Coates was unlikely to become an elite sportsman - although he was a capable schoolboy rowing cox - but his love of sport saw him excel as an administrator.

He twice masterminded successful Olympic bids - Sydney 2000 and Brisbane 2032 - and was known to be as competitive as the athletes he represented. He courted scandal by revealing the Ugandan and Kenyan Olympic committees were offered A\$48,000 (\$33,900) before the 2000 Olympics host-city vote - but only if Sydney won. When the ballot was counted, Sydney beat Beijing by two votes, 45 to 43.

Coates has not always had harmonious relationships with sports bodies and politicians. A tense 2021 press conference with Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk - during which he ordered her to attend the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics - saw him labelled a "mansplaining dinosaur" on social media. On the whole, though, the Olympics boss was widely respected for what he achieved for Australia.

"He has made an enormous contribution to Australian sport over decades," said John Wylie, who as chairman of the Australian Sports Commission clashed publicly with Coates in 2017. IOC President Thomas Bach, who travelled to Sydney for Coates' farewell celebration, praised his long-time colleague for his contribution to sport. "You are a champion, mate," Bach told Coates. — AFP

Sports

Grizzlies clinch playoff victory after Wolves collapse again

LOS ANGELES: Desmond Bane scored 23 points as the Memphis Grizzlies stunned the Minnesota Timberwolves with another late fourth-quarter rally to score a series-clinching 114-106 victory in the NBA playoffs on Friday. Bane made nine of 15 shots from the field including a crucial go-ahead three-pointer late in the fourth quarter as the second seeds completed a 4-2 series win to silence Minnesota's Target Center crowd in Minneapolis.

It was another shattering loss for Minnesota, who for the third time in the series were unable to close out a victory after building a double-digit lead in the fourth quarter. Minnesota had pulled into an 84-74 lead at the end of the third quarter but were blown away down the stretch by the Grizzlies, who outscored the Timberwolves 40-22 in the final period to snatch a dramatic win.

Bane nailed a three-pointer to give Memphis their first lead of the second half while Jaren Jackson Jr. added 12 points in the fourth to help the Grizzlies get over the line. Memphis star Ja Morant had been effectively bottled up by the Minnesota defense in the first half with just four points, but ultimately finished with 17 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds. The Grizzlies now face a mouthwatering Western Conference semi-final series against the resurgent Golden State Warriors starting on Sunday.

"It's big-time for us man, super excited," Morant said afterwards. "We got it done. It was ugly but we battled through, battled back and got the win. We

got the four wins, but we've got to be better in the next round—we can't come out again like we did in this series." Morant said the Grizzlies' ability to overturn a hefty fourth-quarter deficit once again was testimony to the resilience of his team.

"We've got a lot of dogs on this team, guys who want to prove stuff, and have got a chip on their shoulder," Morant said. "We've got that never-satisfied mindset and we know that the game's not over until the clock is showing all zeroes at the end of the fourth. We just stick together, battle back and we were able to come out with some big-time wins. We'll enjoy this moment in the locker room tonight and then we'll flip the page and start getting ready for Golden State."

Bane said the latest in a series of Memphis Houdini acts was too close for comfort. "I don't want to be in that hole, I promise you," Bane said. "We don't mind it but we'd like to start games a little bit better." Our resiliency really showed in this series. I think pretty much every game we won we were trailing at some point. It's a gritty group."

Bane's 23-point haul was matched by 23 from Dillon Brooks, while Jackson Jr. finished with 18. Morant and Brandon Clarke finished with 17 points apiece, Tyus Jones chipping in with 10 points off the bench. Anthony Edwards led the Minnesota scorers with 30 points while Karl-Anthony Towns had 18 with 10 rebounds and four assists. Jaden McDaniels added 24 off the bench. — AFP



MINNEAPOLIS: Brandon Clarke #15 of the Memphis Grizzlies goes up for a shot while Karl-Anthony Towns #32 of the Minnesota Timberwolves defends in the third quarter during Game Six of the Western Conference First Round at Target Center on April 29, 2022. — AFP

Ramadan bowling tourneys a success



KUWAIT: Winners of the bowling tournament are awarded.

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: As part of its plans to popularize bowling and improve the technical and physical level of players, Kuwait Bowling Club organized three Ramadan tournaments, from the start of the holy month until the end.

KBC President Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Secretary Mohammad Al-Farsi attended the closing ceremony and rewarded the winners. Tournament Director Khalid Habeeb lauded the support of the board of directors headed by Sheikh Talal, adding that such tournaments help in the development of

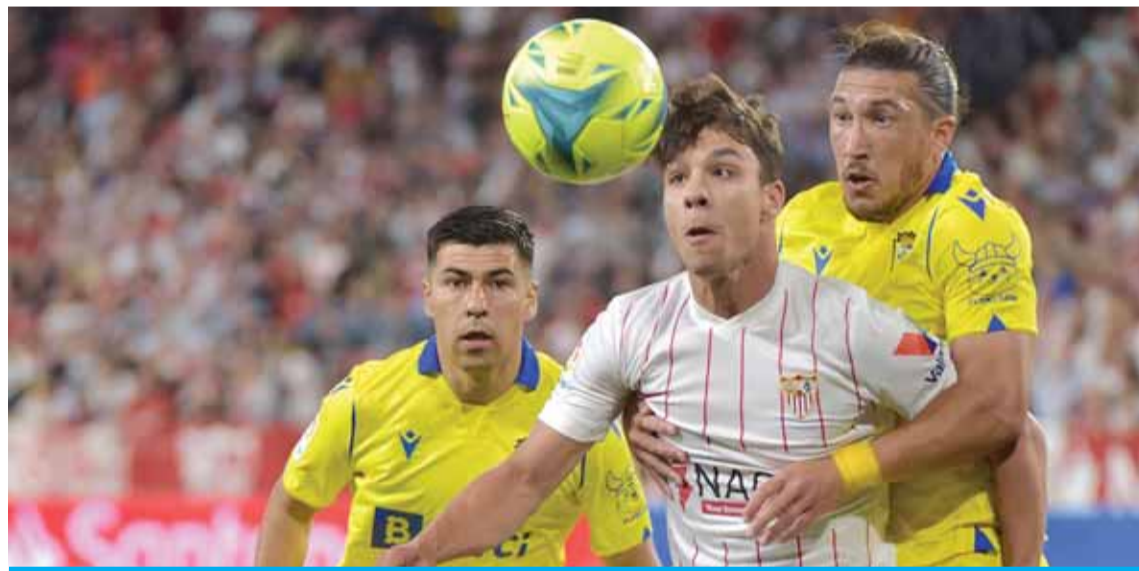
the game and discovery of new talents.

He said that 120 players of both genders from all age groups participated in singles and doubles. Habeeb was pleased with the attendance of fans, along with players' parents, to encourage the players to go further in the future.

Sevilla up to second despite Perez strike

MADRID: Sevilla moved up to second in the table after Friday's 1-1 draw at home with Cadiz despite Lucas Perez' sublime second half free-kick for the La Liga strugglers. Julen Lopetegui's men go a point above Barcelona, who host Mallorca on Sunday, thanks to Youssef En Nesyri's early effort. The point gained by the visitors doubled their advantage over Granada, who are in the final relegation spot.

Morocco attacker En Nesyri scored his first goal of the campaign since September as he headed home from Ivan Rakitic's seventh minute corner. A victory would have sent Sevilla three points clear of Barca but Perez's equalizer put those hopes to bed. The home side's midfielder Joan Jordan was penalized for a clumsy tackle before 33-year-old Perez whipped in his third goal in as many games after a drought stretching back six months.



SEVILLE: Sevilla's Spanish midfielder Oliver Torres is challenged by Cadiz's Uruguayan defender Pacha Espino during their Spanish League match at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan stadium on April 29, 2022. — AFP

Cadiz host Elche next weekend in their attempt to stay in the top-flight after promotion in 2020. Sevilla head to Champions League semifinals

Villarreal on May 8 and also have a tricky trip to Atletico Madrid during their final four games of the season. — AFP

Resurgent Monaco back in Champions League reckoning

PARIS: That Paris Saint-Germain would win the Ligue 1 title this season was never really in doubt at any point, but behind them the battle for European places remains open with a resurgent Monaco now hoping to snatch Champions League qualification. PSG clinched their eighth title in 10 years, and a record 10th French championship altogether, with four games to spare last weekend thanks to a 1-1 draw against Lens.

Their season effectively over, the capital club are now fully focused on trying to persuade Kylian Mbappe to sign a new contract and stay, while the superstar striker's former side motor towards a return to Europe's elite club competition. Monaco, the club owned by Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev and where Mbappe broke through and won the title in 2017, were eighth in the table in mid-March, nine points adrift of the top three.

The decision to sack coach Niko Kovac midway through the season and replace him with the Belgian Philippe Clement appeared to have backfired, but then they beat PSG 3-0 and everything changed. That was the start of a winning run which stretched to six matches when the principality side beat struggling Saint-Etienne 4-1 last week.

With only the top three going into the



STRASBOURG: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe fights for the ball with Strasbourg's French defender Lucas Perrin during their French L1 match at La Meinau stadium on April 29, 2022. — AFP

Champions League, Monaco are now fourth but sit behind Rennes only on goal difference. They have the momentum and should be too strong for struggling Angers this weekend. "We are reaping the

benefits of all the hard work we have been putting in but there is still lots to do and we have four finals still to come," said Aurelien Tchouameni, the France midfielder. — AFP

IBAK Masters Cup 2022 from May 5

KUWAIT: The 9th Indian Badminton Association- Kuwait (IBAK) Masters Cup 2022 will kick start on May 5 (Thursday) at the IBAK Gym, Salwa. The championship will feature over 250 players contesting in the following categories:

- Men's singles
- Flight 1 - professional men's doubles
- Flight 2 - advance men's doubles
- Flight 3 - intermediate doubles (open for all)
- Flight 4 - lower intermediate doubles (for Ibakians only)
- Above 50 men's doubles
- Above 40 men's doubles (non-professional)
- Ladies doubles

The IBAK was founded in April 2010 as a non-profit organization committed to the popularization and development of the game of badminton in Kuwait. In the short span of 12 years, IBAK has grown to over 1,500 registered members, where more than 300 active regular members are using this facility. IBAK offers its members regular playing sessions in the evenings between 5.30 pm to 10.30 pm every day at the IBAK Salwa gym.

Can Nicola pull off another great escape?

MILAN: Davide Nicola is in sight of pulling off the second miraculous escape act of his coaching career as his buoyant Salernitana side travel to Atalanta on Monday believing they can defy the odds and retain their place in Serie A. Three straight wins in the space of a week have catapulted Salernitana to within three points of safety with a game in hand, bringing back memories of Nicola's first famous escape act with another unfashionable southern club five years ago.

With 29 matches played of the 2016/17 season, Nicola's Crotona had picked up just 14 points but an incredible run in their final nine, of which they won six and lost just one, allowed them to climb out of the drop zone on the final day of the campaign. Nicola had promised he would cycle the length of Italy to his hometown of Turin should his team stay up and he was as good as his word, making the 1,300 km trip from the deep southern region of Calabria to Piedmont in the far northwest.

Now Nicola has five matches to save Salernitana from a fate which looked sealed just over a fortnight ago, when they were nine points from safety, albeit with two games in hand, after losing 2-1 at Roma. It was their third loss in as many games - extending their run without a win to 11 matches - and came following two goals in the final 10 minutes for the hosts which turned what would have been a stunning victory into Salernitana's 20th defeat of a bruising season.

"Winning three matches in a row doesn't mean everything suddenly gets easier, now comes the really tricky stuff," Nicola said after last weekend's enthralling 2-1 win over Fiorentina, during which he got so emotional with his players he whipped off a shoe and threw it to the ground in fury. "It's hard to make yourself heard in the stadium because our fans are so passionate, so I needed to come up with other ways to communicate with my players."

In the top flight for the first time in over two decades, Salernitana have had a bumpy ride pretty much from the get go. In June Salernitana were placed in trust as Lazio president Claudio Lotito owned the club and Italian FA rules banned ownership of two teams in the same division. Given a New Year's Eve deadline to find a new owner or be kicked out of the league, Salernitana were saved at the last minute when Danilo Iervolino's bid to buy the club was accepted.

New sporting director Walter Sabatini then brought in 11 players in the January transfer window before sacking Stefano Colantuono and hiring Nicola in February with the team on 13 points. In the meantime a spike in coronavirus cases during the winter led to them not playing two matches, one of which, against Udinese, was originally given as a 3-0 defeat which also came with a one-point penalization. — AFP



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's Paraguayan midfielder Miguel Almiron controls the ball past Liverpool's Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson Becker and scores, but the goal was cancelled due to an offside position, during their English Premier League match at St James' Park on April 30, 2022. —AFP

Keita takes Liverpool top with win

NEWCASTLE: Liverpool forged back ahead of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League as Naby Keita's solitary goal beat Newcastle 1-0 at St. James' Park. With the game sandwiched between two legs of a Champions League semi-final against Villarreal, Jurgen Klopp made five changes.

The Reds could have made life easier for themselves had Sadio Mane and Diogo Jota not missed big chances to extend Liverpool's lead. However, Keita's controversial goal on 19 minutes was enough to move two points ahead of City, who can retake top spot when they travel to Leeds later on Saturday.

Any slip by Pep Guardiola's men and an unprecedented quadruple of Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup would be just seven games away for the Reds. Klopp gave Liverpool fans even more cause for celebration by extending his contract at Anfield by two years to 2026 on Thursday.

The German was brave with his team selection as he left Mohammed Salah, Thiago Alcantara, Fabinho and Trent Alexander-Arnold on the bench from the side that beat Villarreal 2-0 on Wednesday to put one foot in the Champions League final.

Only Klopp's men have won more Premier League points in 2022 than Newcastle since the Magpies were able to begin splashing the cash of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund. Eddie Howe's men had won their last six home games, but Liverpool showed their strength in depth as even a much-changed team controlled the game.

Three of those brought back into the team had a major role to play in the only goal as James Milner snapped into a tackle on Fabian Schar. Newcastle were furious no free-kick was given, but as Liverpool played on, Jota found Keita, who kept his cool to round Martin Dubravka and fire into the unguarded net.

Dubravka went on to keep Newcastle in the game as

the visitors should have avoided a nervy finale. Mane fired straight at the Slovakian from Luis Diaz's unselfish pass before Dubravka tipped over Jota's towering header. The Senegalese then side-footed wide a glorious chance from Joe Gomez's cross after the break much to Klopp's dismay.

The German used his considerable quality off the bench sending on Salah, Fabinho and Thiago were introduced in the final quarter in a bid to seal the points. Chances continued to come and go as Dubravka twice repelled powerful efforts from Jota and flew off his line to smother from Salah.

On the only occasions Newcastle threatened, the offside flag would have come to Liverpool's rescue in any case. Miguel Almiron had strayed well beyond the last defender when he found the net in the first-half, while Chris Wood was also offside when he failed to beat Alisson Becker one-on-one. —AFP

23.5 million tickets sought in latest World Cup sale

DOHA: FIFA said Friday that 23.5 million World Cup tickets were requested in the latest round of sales for the tournament that starts in Qatar in less than seven months. Applications from Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Mexico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United States dominated, the world body said highlighting the "enormous demand".

The most popular games are the final on Dec 18 alongside some of the group games which are already known: Argentina v Mexico, Argentina v Saudi Arabia, England v United States and Poland v Argentina, FIFA said in a statement. For matches where demand exceeds the number of tickets available, the requests will go into a random lottery. All the successful applicants will be told from May 31. Any remaining tickets will then go on general sale on a first-come first-served basis. Ticket prices are on average about 30 percent higher than for the Russia World Cup in 2018. The cheapest tickets are for Qataris and the army of migrant workers in the state who will pay as little as \$10 to watch a first round group match. But for the final, the most expensive tickets cost more than \$1,600 - a 45 percent hike on 2018. Some 804,186 tickets were snapped up in the first round of sales in January-February.

Demand in this 23-day window for applications was higher, as it followed the World Cup draw on April 1 which revealed when and where each team will play. About two million tickets are available to the general public, with 1.2 million others going to sponsors and other backers. The first match between Senegal and Netherlands is on Nov 21 and the final on Dec 18 at the 80,000 capacity Lusail stadium.

Qatar is predicting that up to 1.4 million people will visit the wealthy Gulf state for the first World Cup in an Arab country. Qatar has spent billions of dollars building seven new stadiums and refurbishing an eighth for the tournament. FIFA president Gianni Infantino has promised it will be the "best-ever" World Cup and the global body is looking to the healthy ticket sales to back its case.

Qatari organizers have highlighted progress on rights since the World Cup was awarded in 2010, and said critics were trying to undermine the Arab region's right to hold the event. Organizers have said special measures will be arranged for drinking in fan zones and other designated areas, and that leniency will be applied on social laws. They insist all fans will be "welcomed" at the World Cup. —AFP

Boris Becker jailed in Britain over bankruptcy

LONDON: Former tennis star Boris Becker was on Friday jailed for two and a half years after being found guilty by a British court of charges relating to his 2017 bankruptcy. The six-time Grand Slam champion, 54, will serve half of the term having been convicted at Southwark Crown Court in London over his transfer of huge amounts of money from his business account.

He also failed to declare a property in Germany and concealed €825,000 (\$866,500) of debt and shares in a tech firm. He was acquitted earlier this month of a further 20 charges, including nine counts of failing to hand over trophies and medals he won during his glittering tennis career. Becker told jurors he did not know the whereabouts of the memorabilia, including two of his three Wimbledon men's singles trophies. Judge Deborah Taylor had released Becker - who won Wimbledon as an unseeded teenager - on conditional bail ahead of her sentencing decision on Friday. Passing sentence, she told him: "You have not shown remorse, acceptance of your guilt and have sought to distance yourself from your offending and your bankruptcy. "While I accept your humiliation as part of the proceedings, there has been no humility."

Taylor said Becker's previous conviction in Germany for tax offences was "a significant aggravating factor". Becker arrived early for the hearing, wearing a striped purple and green tie in the

Wimbledon colors, a white shirt and a charcoal grey suit. He held hands with his partner Lilian de Carvalho Monteiro as he walked into court past a bank of waiting reporters and cameras.

The star showed no emotion as he was sentenced, picking up his bag before being taken down to the cells. There was no immediate word that Becker would appeal and he will lodge any legal challenge from behind bars. US women's tennis great Chris Evert responded to Becker's imprisonment by tweeting: "Sorry to hear about @TheBorisBecker... fun to work with on @eurosport and always a gentleman."

'Vast amount'

Former world number one Becker told the jury how his \$50 million (£40 million) career earnings were swallowed up by a costly divorce from his first wife Barbara Becker, child maintenance payments and "expensive lifestyle commitments". Becker said he was "shocked" and "embarrassed" when he was declared bankrupt in June 2017 over an unpaid loan of more than £3 million on his estate in Mallorca, Spain.

The German, who has lived in Britain since 2012, said he had cooperated with trustees trying to secure his assets, even offering his wedding ring, and relied on the advisers who managed his life away from tennis. But the former player, who was supported in court by his partner and eldest son Noah, was found guilty of four charges.

Giving evidence, Becker said he earned a "vast amount" of money during his career, paying cash for several properties. But the German, who went on to coach current world number one tennis player Novak Djokovic, work as a TV sports commentator and act as a brand ambassador for firms including Puma, said

his income "reduced dramatically" following his retirement in 1999.

Commitments

Becker, who was resident in Monte Carlo and Switzerland before moving to the UK, said his financial commitments included his £22,000-a-month rented house in Wimbledon, southwest London. He also owed the Swiss authorities five million francs (about \$5.1 million) and separately just under one million euros in liabilities over a conviction for tax evasion and attempted tax evasion in Germany in 2002. He said bad publicity had damaged "brand Becker", meaning he struggled to make enough money to pay off his debts. His lawyer Jonathan Laidlaw said at the time of his bankruptcy that Becker was too "trusting and reliant" on his advisers. Becker, with a shock of strawberry-blond hair, shook up the tennis world in 1985 when he became Wimbledon's youngest men's singles champion at 17 and repeated the feat the following year.

Nicknamed "Boom Boom" Becker for his ferocious serve, he won Wimbledon for a third time in 1989. He also won the Australian Open twice and the US Open during his glittering career, becoming the top-ranked player in the world in 1991. Becker turned to commentary after his retirement, landing a high-profile role on the BBC, but he returned to the court in 2013 to guide Djokovic, helping the Serb win six more Grand Slam trophies before the pair parted ways in 2016. —AFP



Boris Becker

Top seed Yamaguchi beats Sindhu to reach Asia final

MANILA: Top seed Akane Yamaguchi battled back to reach the Badminton Asia Championships final with a controversial win over Indian rival P V Sindhu on Saturday. Japan's Yamaguchi will be favorite to retain her women's singles crown when she faces China's unseeded Wang Zhiyi in the title-decider on Sunday in Manila.

Fourth-seeded Sindhu claimed the first game of her semi-final against the reigning world champion 21-13 and was leading 14-11 in the second when the umpire ruled that the Indian player was taking too long to serve. A clearly unhappy Sindhu, an Olympic silver and bronze medalist, argued her case with the officials but to no avail and she conceded a point penalty to her opponent.

She appeared to lose her focus and rhythm after that, allowing Yamaguchi to come back to claim the second game 21-19 and the deciding third 21-16. "That was one of the reasons I lost, that's my feeling. At that point it was 14-11 and you never know, it would have been 15-11," Sindhu said of the umpiring decision which proved to be a turning

point in the match. "It was very unfair, maybe I would have won the match and I would have played in the final."

Wang, the world number 16, booked her place in the final with a shock 10-21, 21-12, 21-16 victory over South Korea's second seed An Se-young. The men's final will be between Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia and Jonatan Christie of Indonesia. Third-seeded Lee swatted aside China's unseeded Weng Hongyang in ruthless fashion with a 21-11, 21-19 win in 39 minutes. In contrast, fourth seed Christie was pushed to three games by his fellow Indonesian Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo before prevailing 21-9, 18-21, 21-16 in just under an hour. —AFP



Akane Yamaguchi