



2 US First Lady guest of honor at Kuwait Embassy gala dinner



5 Ex-security chief John Lee anointed Hong Kong leader



13 Pandemic, Ukraine war hurt Thailand orchid industry



15 COVID curbs push China off global sporting map



Domestic workers get more rights after law amended

KD 100 minimum salary for domestic helpers: Indian envoy

News in brief

NBK to charge transfer fees

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait announced on Sunday it will charge a fee of KD 1 for transfers to corporate accounts and 500 fils for transfers to personal accounts from June 1, 2022. This fee will be applied only to bank transfers, including salary transfers, but not to payments through online links, which are very popular among online businesses and individuals.

King Salman undergoes tests

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's King Salman will remain in hospital after undergoing tests including a colonoscopy, state media reported Sunday. The monarch entered King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Jeddah on Saturday "to conduct some medical examinations", according to an official report. On Sunday afternoon, doctors performed a colonoscopy "and the result was sound", the Saudi Press Agency later said. "The medical team decided to keep him in the hospital for some time to rest," the report said. — AFP



King Salman



TEHRAN: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad meets Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on May 8, 2022. — AFP

Assad meets Iran leaders

TEHRAN: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad met with Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi during a brief visit to Tehran on Sunday, Iranian state television said. The relationship between Tehran and Damascus are "vital for both countries and we should not let it weaken," Khamenei said. "We should strengthen it as much as possible." Iran's supreme leader also hit out at Arab nations that normalized relations with Tehran's arch-enemy, the Zionist entity. — AFP

Egypt releases satirists

CAIRO: Egypt has released three social media users who were detained after posting a satirical song on TikTok about rampant inflation in the country, rights groups said Sunday. In March, the group posted a satirical video on TikTok. The band mimed instruments with household items and parodied a romantic song, substituting the lyrics to bemoan soaring food prices. The three comedians were summoned by state security in Assiut on March 31. They appeared before the Cairo prosecutor on April 18-19 and were accused of belonging to a terrorist organization and spreading false news. — AFP

Family visit visas to reopen this week

KUWAIT: An informed source told Kuwait Times issuance of family visit visas will resume this week after more than two years of suspension due to the coronavirus pandemic. This comes after the Cabinet scrapped almost all health restrictions before the Eid break.

According to a report, visas are not being issued to nationals of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen. People of some other nationalities also cannot obtain commercial, work or dependent visas without approval from the interior minister.

Ukraine battles to hold bastion as allies visit

SEVERODONETSK, Ukraine: Ukrainian forces braced Sunday to defend their final bastion in the devastated port city of Mariupol, desperate to deny Russia a symbolic win on the eve of Moscow's Victory Day celebrations. Kyiv's allies lent their support, with US First Lady Jill Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau making unannounced visits to Ukraine, and G7 leaders due to join President Volodymyr Zelensky on a video call.

But fierce fighting continued on the ground. Shelling and missile strikes have intensified in the build-up to the World War II anniversary, and rescuers are searching for 60 Ukrainian civilians feared killed in the bombing of a village school. Zelensky marked a day commemorating the end of the 1939-1945 war by comparing Ukraine's battle for national survival to the region's war of resistance against its former Nazi occupiers.

Continued on Page 6

KUWAIT: Justice Minister Jamal Al-Jalawi has issued a ministerial decision amending some regulations in the domestic help law, stipulating that sponsors are required to bear the cost of feeding the domestic helper, as well as providing them with clothing and medical care.

Al-Qabas daily reported on Sunday that the new regulations, approved by the Public Authority for Manpower, set the conditions under which a domestic helper's sponsorship can be transferred from one employer to another in certain cases, including the sponsor or anyone living in the same house being convicted of sexual harassment of a domestic helper through verbal or physical acts. Other circumstances include death of the sponsor, divorce, marriage of the helper in the country, and the sponsor's loss of qualification.

Meanwhile, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi

George told Al-Qabas the monthly salary for domestic workers in Kuwait has been set to range between KD 100 and KD 120 per month, considering this amount as fair for both workers and Kuwaiti families. George said the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) defines the rights of workers as it seeks to regulate the recruitment of domestic workers to Kuwait. He added negotiations with PAM are continuing to bring down the costs of recruiting domestic helpers to the country for Kuwaiti families.

India and Kuwait had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on labor in June 2021, leveraging cooperation between the countries on recruitment of domestic workers. The MoU brings Indian domestic workers in Kuwait within the ambit of a legal framework, streamlines their recruitment and provides them with protection of law. (See Page 3)



IRPIN, Ukraine: Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visits this town near Kyiv on May 8, 2022 amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Jabeur seeks to inspire more Arab women

PARIS: Ons Jabeur's long-stated goal is that her historic exploits on court lead to more Arab women taking up tennis - becoming the first Arab player to win a Grand Slam in next month's French Open final would do wonders to achieve that. The 27-year-old Tunisian became a front-rank contender for tennis's

greatest prize on clay with her gutsy three-set victory over American Jessica Pegula in the Madrid on Saturday.

In doing so the engaging and highly expressive Jabeur wrote another piece of tennis history. Her 7-5, 0-6, 6-2 victory made her the first Arab or African woman to win a WTA 1000 title. Her title in Birmingham last year was the first for an Arab woman player on the circuit and she is the first Arab player - man or woman - to crack the top 10. Indeed she will return to her previous highest ranking of seven on Monday.

Continued on Page 6



MADRID: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur kisses the trophy after winning the Madrid Open at the Caja Magica on May 7, 2022. — AFP (See Page 16)

Flying over traffic jams envisioned

SAN FRANCISCO: As urban traffic gets more miserable, entrepreneurs are looking to a future in which commuters hop into "air taxis" that whisk them over clogged roads. Companies such as Archer, Joby and Wisk are working on electric-powered aircraft that take off and land vertically like helicopters

then propel forward like planes. Neighborhood parking garage rooftops or shopping mall lots could serve as departure or arrival pads for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft. Commuters would make it the rest of the way however they wish, even synching trips with car rideshare services such as Uber which owns a stake in Santa Cruz, California-based Joby. Joby executives said on a recent earnings call that its first production model aircraft should be in the skies later this year. — AFP (See Page 8)



This undated and unlocated image released by Archer Aviation Inc shows the company's Maker eVTOL aircraft. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir condoles with Egypt's President over terrorist attack victims

Kuwait parliament chief condoles with Egypt over Sinai terror act

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Saturday a cable of condolences to Egypt's President Abdelفتاح Al-Sisi on the terrorist act which targeted a water plant, east of Suez Canal, that killed and wounded some military personnel. In the cable, His Highness the Amir stressed Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of this heinous terrorist act, and its support to Egypt in all measures it takes to face such terror acts. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy upon victims' souls, wishing a rapid recovery to those injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent two similar cables.

Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem Saturday sent two cables of condolences to his Egyptian counterpart Dr Hanafi Al-Jebali and President of Senate Abdulwahab Abdelrazeq. In the cables, Ghanem expressed sincere sympathy over the terrorist attack on a water-lifting plant in the Sinai Peninsula. Ghanem condemned strongly all terrorist attacks, stressing Kuwaiti people's full solidarity with the brotherly Egyptian people against all acts that threaten the country's security and stability. He also prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow His mercy upon the victims' souls, wishing a speedy recovery to those injured.

Earlier, the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry voiced the country's condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist assault. The ministry stressed Kuwait's solidarity with, and support to, Egypt in all meas-



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



Egypt's President Abdelفتاح Al-Sisi

ures it takes to maintain its security and stability, and to confront terrorism and extremism, said a statement made by the

ministry. The ministry also expressed its sincere condolences to the relatives of those killed, and to Egypt's leadership,

government and people, wishing a rapid recovery to those injured.

The Gulf Cooperation Council Chief Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf on Saturday condemned an armed attack on a water-lifting station in the Sinai Peninsula that killed 11 soldiers and hurt five others as a "cowardly terrorist" attack. Gulf states stand in solidarity with Egypt in confronting violence, extremism and terrorism, the secretary-general of the six-nation bloc said in a statement. He underlined the bloc's "total rejection" of the attack, saying these acts "contradict religious and humanitarian principles and moral values." On behalf of the GCC, he also expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims, to Egypt's government and its people, wishing those injured a swift recovery. —KUNA

US First Lady guest of honor at Kuwaiti Embassy gala dinner

WASHINGTON: US First Lady Dr Jill Biden attended on May 4, 2022 the Kuwait-America Foundation gala dinner as guest of honor, which was held at the Kuwait Embassy in the nation's capital in support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) impactful work worldwide.

Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and his wife Sheikh Rima Al-Sabah hosted this year's gala dinner. The event recognized the longstanding commitment to promoting and securing peace on the global stage of CIA Director William Burns, the Public Service Award Recipient and Hollywood actor Ben Stiller, the Private Citizen Award Recipient, whose unwavering dedication and tireless work on behalf of refugees and displaced people around the world is inspiring. In her remarks, the First Lady, addressing Sheikh Salem and Sheikh Rima, said "you and Rima have been such good friends to us over the years, as well as being humanitarian leaders," noting that she's "so grateful." She shed light on the "responsibility to not just support refugees, but end the tragedies that forced them from their homes."

"I'm grateful for the work of organizations like Kuwait-America Foundation that have taken up this cause as well. There is so much work to do," she remarked. In his speech, Kuwait's Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah said that the refugee crisis "only continues to grow more dire by the day. That today we are still seeing an increase in human suffering because of displacement is heartbreaking."

"The number of people forced to leave their

homes, fleeing violence and destruction, rises daily - particularly as the horrible war in Ukraine rages on," he added. He continued, "We are honored to not only recognize UNHCR's vital work this evening, but to also join with them in a call to action." He affirmed that Kuwait was "proud to be a longstanding supporter of the UNHCR," indicating that "over the last 10 years alone, Kuwait's contributions to the agency have amounted to more than \$432 million, establishing Kuwait as the top donor to UNHCR in the region over the last decade." "As a result of our initiatives and generous support, and in recognition of our leading regional and international philanthropic role, Kuwait has been designated as a 'humanitarian hub,'" he remarked.

\$1 million for UNHCR

Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah, also UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, announced that "this year alone we have, once again, raised over \$1 million for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees." "Together, we are helping to save lives and build better futures for the millions of people around the globe forced from home," she said. "We are all bearing witness to an unprecedented level of displacement... And tragically, the numbers only continue to rise. It is a humanitarian crisis without comparison, but UNHCR is at its forefront." She continued that "the determined support of everyone in this room is helping the UN Refugee Agency and its nearly 18,000 people on the ground in 132 countries to protect some of the world's most vulnerable people, providing them with shelter, medical care, education, healthcare - and the hope - they so desperately need."

Meanwhile, CIA chief Burns said he is "honored and humbled" for receiving the Public Service Award. "I have the privilege of serving as director of the CIA, leading exceptional women and men who as we sit here this evening, are doing hard jobs and hard places around the world," Burns

added. "In honoring me, you really are honoring all of them." He also expressed "particular appreciation for the work UNHCR... UNHCR is truly indispensable."

Actor Ben Stiller — also a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador — said "to receive this private citizen award, it is just an honor. I received a few awards in my life, a few. This one feels very different." "While this honor is in my name, it's really a recognition of the efforts of the UN refugee agency and all the people who work there," he added.

Meanwhile, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi thanked in his remarks Sheikh Salem and his wife, saying "what you have been doing for many, many years now, assemble people here... talking about important causes, making people aware of difficult problems and challenges around the world and asking for their support has been invaluable." He re-emphasized that Sheikh Salem is the ambassador of a country that "has been recognized as a champion of humanitarianism," and that Sheikh Rima, who he has asked to remain as UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, "is the ambassador of an organization that tries to help as much as it can."

"So really to you, to the State of Kuwait... thank you very much," he remarked. Among the attendees at the gala dinner were First Lady Jill Biden, CIA Director William Burns, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Actor Ben Stiller, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas. Also attending were Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Senator Bob Menendez, Senators Jim Risch and Roy Blunt, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, and Counsellor to the President Michael Donilon.

Deputy Chief of Staff of the President Bruce Reed, CBS news Margaret Brennan who served as



WASHINGTON: This photo released by the Kuwaiti Embassy in the US shows Sheikh Rima Al-Sabah, the wife of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah (left), with US First Lady Dr Jill Biden during the Kuwait-America Foundation gala dinner.

master of ceremonies, as well as the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Jordan, Ukraine, and Germany. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was scheduled to attend and deliver keynote remarks but he had tested positive for COVID-19. Over the past 21 years, Sheikh Salem and his wife Sheikh Rima have hosted at the Kuwait Embassy residence three US Presidents (George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Donald Trump), three Vice Presidents (Dick Cheney, Mike Pence and Joe Biden), First Ladies (Laura Bush, Melania Trump and Jill Biden), as well as every US Secretary of State (Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Rex Tillerson and Mike Pompeo), among countless other US dignitaries. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Public sector employees are seen at the Ministries' Complex on Sunday on the first day back to work after the long Eid Al-Fitr holiday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



ICSK Amman conducts investiture ceremony for 2022-2023

KUWAIT: The Indian Community School Kuwait, Amman Branch conducted its investiture ceremony for the academic year 2022-2023, on April 28, 2022. It is an occasion where the young students are prepared to don the mantle of leadership and discharge the responsibilities entrusted to them by the school. After a gap of two years and following the necessary guidelines, the ceremony was held on campus with great enthusiasm and vivaciousness. The newly elected members were duly sworn in during the solemn occasion.

Earlier, the students were allotted four houses: Victors, Leaders, Achievers and Winners. The nominations to contest in the senate election were filed by the selected candidates on 12th April, 2022. 72 contestants competed for various positions. Subsequently, two days of colorful campaigning and 'Meet the candidate' program were held on campus wherein the contestants introduced themselves and sincerely expressed their visions to the voters. The online election was conducted on 18th April, 2022 with students from classes VIII to X casting their votes. The result of the election was declared by Principal Rajesh Nair on April 19, 2022.

The Chief Guest of the ceremony was Deepak Bindal, Vice-President - Investments, Gulf Investments Corporation and Chairman, ICAI Kuwait Chapter. The ceremony commenced with the handing over of the school and house flags to the Senate elects by the Chief Guest, Deepak.

Principal, Rajesh Nair delivered the welcome

speech and extended a warm welcome to the Chief Guest Deepak Bindal and felicitated him by presenting a memento. Principal congratulated the newly elected Senate Members and wished them well. He also reminded them to proudly execute the new duties and responsibilities vested on them.

The Senate Advisor Sumitra Nandakumar presented the entire electoral process and congratulated the winners. In his address, the Chief Guest Deepak Bindal congratulated the newly elected members. In his motivating and thought-provoking speech, he urged the elected members to take up the responsibilities, use opportunities and balance them well with academics.

The highlight of the program was the investiture of the Senate. The senate advisor and house mentors received their badges. The chief guest Deepak Bindal pinned the badges to the newly elected school senate. Principal Rajesh Nair administered the Oath to the newly elected senate members. The President of the Student Senate, Rebecca Maryam Chibu conveyed her gratitude and delivered the acceptance speech on behalf of all the senate members followed by a video presentation on 'Our gratitude and promises' by senate.

The 6th edition of online annual School magazine 'Darpan 2022' was released by the Chief Guest while the Chief Staff editor Rohini Rajsekhar expressed her gratitude to the editorial board and all those who contributed articles to the magazine.

The vote of thanks was rendered by the Vice Principal Dr Mary Isaac wherein she thanked the guests, parents and all those who took part and supported the program. She also reminded the newly sworn in senate to carry out their responsibilities with confidence and commitment. The program was concluded with the senate marching off the venue escorting the guests.

Local

Domestic helper salary could range between KD 100-120: Indian envoy

Sponsor must provide for helper under new regulations

KUWAIT: The monthly salary for domestic workers in Kuwait has been set to range between KD 100 and KD 120 per month, considering that this amount is equitable to both workers and the Kuwaiti families, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George told local daily Al-Qabas on Saturday.

In a statement on the sidelines of the celebration of the birth anniversary of renowned Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore at the Indian Embassy, George said the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) defines the rights of workers as it seeks to regulate the recruitment of domestic workers to Kuwait. He explained that negotiations with PAM are continuing on bringing down the costs of recruiting domestic helpers to the country for Kuwaiti families.

India and Kuwait had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on labor in June 2021, leveraging cooperation between the countries on recruitment of domestic workers. The MoU brings Indian domestic workers in Kuwait within the ambit of a legal framework, streamlines their recruitment and provides them with protection of law.

Answering another question, George

said the Indian Embassy in Kuwait has recommenced issuance of tourist visas, including multiple-entry visas, to Kuwaitis, adding obtaining an entry visa to India takes only a few hours. He explained India has lifted all restrictions related to the coronavirus and is ready to receive Kuwaiti tourists. He called on Kuwaitis to visit his country this summer, noting that



Sponsorship can be terminated if convicted of sexual harassment

the number of visa applications is expected to rise this year.

New decisions

In other news, Al-Qabas daily also reported on Sunday that Justice Minister Jamal Al-Jalawi issued a ministerial decision amending some regula-

tions in the domestic help law, stipulating that sponsors are required to bear the cost of feeding the domestic helper, as well as providing them with clothing and medical care.

The new regulations, approved by the Public Authority for Manpower, set the conditions under which a domestic helper's sponsorship can be transferred from one employer to another in certain cases, including the sponsor or anyone living in the same house being convicted of sexual harassment of a domestic helper through verbal or physical acts. Other conditions include death of the sponsor, divorce, marriage of the helper in the country, and the sponsor's loss of qualification.

The helper's rights

The new regulations prevent any deduction of financial dues owed to the helper. Furthermore, the regulations ban employers from reporting domestic helpers for absence from work after the worker files a complaint at relevant departments. Instead, the worker must be registered as a resident of the expatriate labor shelter. This ban can be lifted two months after the



complaint is settled or the case is referred to the judiciary. This can help guarantee extra protection to the helpers.

Article 31 fines a sponsor who is late in paying the wages of their domestic helper past the seventh day of the due date KD 10 for each month. The helper is entitled to a paid annual leave of at least 30 days after spending 11 months at work, a weekly paid rest day (24 continu-

ous hours) following six working days, while extra working hours should not exceed two, according to the regulations.

The regulations also set a new condition to issuing licenses for domestic help offices, which is submitting an unconditional and un-revokable financial guarantee letter from a local bank of a value of KD 40,000 for offices and establishments and KD 100,000 for companies.

Kuwait opens recruitment for Palestinian, Jordanian teachers

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Education announced job opportunities in public schools for teachers of various subjects from Palestine and Jordan. Prior experience is required for application, it said in the announcement.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Education Minister Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf said on Sunday he was eager for a closer rapport with his counterparts across the wider Gulf Arab region, in a bid to set in motion a raft of

education reforms. "I am here to get acquainted with some success stories seen in the Gulf Arab region's education sector," the Kuwaiti minister said on the sidelines of a global education conference in the Saudi capital, saying the gathering is crucial towards plans to further develop the education sector as a whole.

Echoing the minister's sentiments, Dr Jassem Al-Ostath, the Kuwait-based Public Authority for Applied Education and Training's deputy chief for academic services, highlighted the event as a chance to achieve common goals. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which left education systems across the world in tatters, he said it was imperative to keep education reforms rolling again for the sake of students whose academic careers had been upended by the outbreak. More than 200 global education bodies have come together for the talks in Riyadh, which sheds light on some of the most perennial challenges encumbering educational development.



Earlier, the minister stressed Kuwait's keenness on attending such conferences to benefit from these experiences. He pointed out that the conference

contains many important axes of discussion through the many sessions and workshops, as well as the accompanying exhibition. —KUNA



KRCS praises Kuwait's humanitarian efforts

KUWAIT: General Secretary of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Maha Al-Barjas praised on Sunday Kuwait's humanitarian efforts worldwide. Barjas stated on the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, that Kuwait was always keen to attend the various activities that supported global humanitarian action. Barjas added that KRCS plays a huge role in the International Red Cross and

Red Crescent Movement by adapting various initiatives that support volunteers by training them to develop their skill in humanitarian work.

Barjas also stated that KRCS would keep providing services for families inside and outside of Kuwait, adding that they were committed to that now and the future. She affirmed that this day represents an occasion that supports the efforts and the role of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement on the international humanitarian work field. She added that the movement gained a lot of experience and knowledge in intervening during crises and various situations. World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is celebrated on the eighth of May by all associations of the Red Crescent and the Red Cross. —KUNA

Kuwait donates \$2 million to UNRWA

AMMAN: Kuwait donated on Sunday \$2 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as part of its annual financial aid to support the UN organization. Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan Abdulaziz Al-Daihani handed the donation to the UNRWA's representative in Jordan, where he said that the financial aid represented an earnest desire

to help around 5 million Palestinian people who live in misery. Meanwhile, UNRWA's Director of Strategic Communications Tamara Al-Rifai expressed her appreciation to the Kuwaiti leadership and government for this donation, the long-lasting partnership and the continuous support for the Palestinian cause. She also stressed the importance of Kuwait's annual contribution to UNRWA's budget and its role in supporting the agency's operations in the sectors of health, education, and relief. UNRWA was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 and provides aid to around 5 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. —KUNA

Kuwait lawmaker welcomes talks on youth scout efforts

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti lawmaker welcomed on Sunday his country's hosting of pan-Arab talks to bolster youth scout efforts across the wider Arab region, hailing the initiative as a viable chance for more cooperation on the matter. The talks, which bring together representatives of Arab countries

including host nation Kuwait, Qatar and Algeria, amongst others, aim to prop up scout programs and endeavors geared towards youngsters in the region, the Kuwaiti lawmaker, MP Dr Abdullah Al-Turaiji, said. His remarks came during the inauguration of the general assembly of the Arab Parliamentarians Scouting Union, sponsored by the honorary chairman and Speaker of the Kuwaiti parliament, Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. Up to 170 scouting personalities are taking part in the gathering, "Kuwait capital of Arab scouting," due until Wednesday. Turaiji thanked union member states that approved transfer of the headquarters from Lebanon to Kuwait. — KUNA

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KUWAIT: Bader Al-Kharafi with Zain staff during the padel tournament.



Zain offered hospitality services to worshippers during Qiyam prayers.

Zain concludes the biggest annual Ramadan campaign

Company presented comprehensive program of social initiatives

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the successful conclusion of its biggest annual campaign for the holy month of Ramadan under the theme '30 Days of Blessings'. Through this campaign, the company presented a comprehensive program of social, humanitarian, and recreational initiatives throughout the holy month.

Zain's social campaign this year successfully achieved its main goal of making a strong comeback with a comprehensive set of social contributions and initiatives all month long, after the pandemic limited the company's programs during the holy month of Ramadan for the past two years.

Zain was committed to make a great return this Ramadan, especially after the return to normal life and the gradual reopening of activities all around Kuwait. The company was eager to share the joys of the holy month with the community as it used to do before the days of the pandemic. The company's initiatives adhered to health measures to protect the health and safety of everyone involved.

Zain's campaign came in line with the company's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy that closely focuses on giving back to the community. The company carefully selected the activities and programs that most presented an added value to all segments. In this report, Zain showcases the initiatives and programs it presented during Ramadan this year:

Ramadan supplies

Zain kicked-off its Ramadan campaign before the beginning of the holy month by delivering 'Ramadan Machla' (food supplies) in collaboration with four of its non-profit strategic partners: the Kuwait Food Bank, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Social Care Centers, and the Patients Support Fund Society.

Zain's Machla was offered via vouchers to give each family the opportunity to choose specific supplies as per their different personal needs. The initiative aimed at catering to underprivileged families' needs before the arrival of the holy month.

Iftar meals

This year, Zain's Iftar initiative came back for its 15th year after a halt of two years due to the pandemic. To commit to health measures and social distancing, Zain offered the Iftar meals this year in partnership with the Kuwait Food Bank via special trucks that delivered the meals daily across the country, offering over 30,000 meals throughout the holy month. The trucks visit the most populated areas to secure the daily Iftar meal of workers, underprivileged individuals and families, and others who are in most need during Ramadan.

Celebrating Girgian

Zain shared the joys of Girgian with special needs children by sponsoring the event hosted by Al-Kharafi Activity Kids Center for Children with Special Needs and taking part in the event held by the Kuwait Ambition Sports Club for Mental Disabilities, celebrating the special occasion with them and their families in an atmosphere filled with happiness and joy. During both events, Zain's team delighted the children and their families by distributing Girgian and gifts while also organizing many other fun activities.

Zain also shared the joys of Girgian with the public by giving away Zain's Girgian to crowds at Muroj and Shaheed Park. Zain utilized an innovative way to distribute Girgian to children by installing a unique smart device that delivered sweets once a child sang to it, simulating the beautiful traditions of the Kuwaiti community in a modern tech-themed way.

Sponsoring entertainment programs

Every Ramadan, Zain is keen on diversifying the content of its campaign to include cultural and recreational programs. This year, Zain sponsored Al



Eaman Al-Roudhan with Zain's team during Iftar meals initiative.



Waleed Al-Khashti with Civil Aviation and MOI staff.

"Ayal-Kebret" on atv, a unique TV program hosted by two young girls, Muneera and Hessa Al-Kulaib, who are one of the most famous young media personalities in the GCC. The girls interviewed over 30 guests from across fields, including art, music, sports, science, business, and more.

Zain also sponsored "Fourth Ring Road", an all-new podcast from Marina Media Group that continued throughout the holy month of Ramadan every day after midnight. The show discussed topics related to Kuwaiti youth in a comedic manner and was broadcast LIVE on all Marina platforms and channels.



Zain hosted a special Ghabga for Kuwaiti media and press.

Padel tournament and Shaheed Challenge

During the holy month of every year, Zain is keen on supporting health and sports programs to encourage adopting a healthy lifestyle and exercising during the holy month. This year, Zain held the first Ramadan Padel Tournament for staff. The competition witnessed great positive participation from Zain employees, continuing for two consecutive days throughout the weekend at DOMS courts in Adaliya. 24 two-player teams competed for the title, which was won by ZAIN team, while KOBE team won second place. Zain awarded the winning teams during the awarding ceremony.

Zain also partnered with suffix, a sports management and consultancy leader, to power Al Shaheed Park Ramadan Challenge, which featured

walkathons and marathons at Al Shaheed Park throughout the holy month. Advanced tech tools were used to monitor the participants throughout the challenge, where results were recorded and uploaded to the leaderboards automatically. Zain also offered valuable prizes to the winners.

Ghabga for media and press

Zain hosted a special Ramadan Ghabga gathering for Kuwaiti media and press representatives as part of its social campaign during the holy month of Ramadan. The gathering came in recognition of the media's great role and efforts in serving the nation's

information and culture sectors.

The event celebrated the huge role played by press, TV, and radio institutions in the further progress of the nation. Zain strongly believes in the crucial role and powerful effects of the media in raising public awareness, especially during the COVID pandemic the past two years.

The Ghabga gathering was attended by a large number of local and regional media representatives, including editors-in-chiefs, press, television stations, radio channels, electronic news platforms, media personalities, video crews, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Information and Culture. The event featured many entertainment and recreational programs amidst a beautiful Ramadan atmosphere.

Social visits

Zain hosted a Ramadan Iftar banquet for Kuwait International Airport personnel in recognition of the great efforts they exerted during the holy month. Zain's team visited the headquarters of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) at Kuwait International Airport, sharing the blessings of the holy month of Ramadan with the staff of Civil Aviation and Ministry of Interior who operate at the airport and keep the nation and community safe. Zain hosted the Iftar banquet as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation to those who dedicate their time and effort to Kuwait's safety.

Zain also shared the blessings of Qiyam prayers with worshippers during the last 10 days of Ramadan. As it does every year during the last 10 days of Ramadan, specifically during Qiyam prayers, Zain shared the spiritual atmosphere of this period of time with worshippers by offering hospitality services in front of two of the country's biggest mosques: Jaber Al Ali Mosque at South Surra and Mohammed Al-Sadah Mosque at Abdullah Al-Salem Area.

Zain Forever

After a stoppage of two years due to COVID, Zain celebrated the 10th year of producing Eid Al-Fitr theatrical productions with the debut of "Zain Forever". The play drew joy and happiness on the faces of children and their families throughout Eid holiday at Arena Kuwait, 360 Mall.

The show centered around the story of a little girl and her friends adventuring through challenges and surprises via many art scenes, including snowy fields, green forests, and deep oceans. The play featured beautiful musical pieces and child-focused lyrics.

Zain Forever was produced by Zain, and was written by Heba Hamadah, composed by Haneen Hussain, distributed by Ammar Al-Bonni, and directed by Sameer Abood. The show starred Fatima Al-Saffi, Hamad Ashkanani, Nasser Abbas, Layliah Abdullah, Abdulsalam Mohammed, Hala Al Turk, Deema Ahmad, Haneen Hussain, Talal Basim, and Jood Abdulaziz.



Zain distributed Iftar meals across Kuwait.



Zain sponsored Al-Kharafi Center Girgian for special needs children.



Shaheed Park Challenge, powered by Zain.



Zain Forever celebrated 10 years of the company's theatrical productions.



Crowds jeer Sri Lankan PM on rare outing

Lula launches new presidential campaign to 'rebuild Brazil'

Page 6

Page 7



HONG KONG: John Lee (C) celebrates with his wife Janet (R) after he was named as the city's new leader in Hong Kong on May 8, 2022. John Lee, the former security chief who oversaw the crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy movement, was declared the business hub's new leader by a small committee of Beijing loyalists. — AFP

Ex-security chief anointed Hong Kong's leader

Outgoing leader Carrie Lam to leave office with record-low approval ratings

Northern Ireland in limbo after Sinn Fein triumphs

BELFAST: Northern Ireland's feuding leaders came under pressure Sunday to unite in a new government after the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein secured an unprecedented election win. Once the political wing of the paramilitary IRA, Sinn Fein won enough seats in the devolved legislature to nominate its Northern Ireland leader Michelle O'Neill as first minister.

The result from Thursday's election for the Stormont assembly marked a potentially seismic shift, a century after Northern Ireland was carved out as a Protestant fiefdom under British rule. O'Neill said the result "ushers in a new era" for the divided territory, and Sinn Fein said it wanted a referendum on reuniting Ireland within five years.



MAGHERAFELT, United Kingdom: Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and Irish republican Sinn Fein party member Michelle O'Neill (C) reacts after being elected on the first count to the Northern Ireland Assembly, at the Magherafelt Meadowbank sports centre in Magherafelt, Co Londonderry. — AFP

But only the UK government can grant a referendum, and Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis noted that a majority of voters overall still backed the constitutional status quo. Ahead of convening party leaders for talks in Belfast on Monday, Lewis recognised nevertheless that Sinn Fein's triumph was a "significant moment for Northern Ireland". "I think it is an important moment to show that everybody can work together, regardless of who is first and deputy first minister," he told BBC television. "That's what democracy is about," Lewis added, urging the leaders to "work with each other to find a way to come back into Stormont (and) form the executive". The Irish and US governments also urged Northern Ireland's leaders to form a new power-sharing executive, under the terms of a 1998 peace deal that ended three decades of bloodshed.

Johnson under pressure too

With all 90 Stormont seats filled from Thursday's proportional voting, Sinn Fein won 27 seats, ahead of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) on 25 and the cross-community Alliance party on 17. "The people have spoken, and our job is now to turn up. I expect others to turn up also," O'Neill told reporters. But DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson demanded Prime Minister Boris Johnson first "deliver on his word" and scrap post-Brexit trading rules with the EU, which unionists fear are casting Northern Ireland adrift from the UK.

Lewis said the government still preferred to negotiate a solution with Brussels-but reserved the right to act unilaterally to protect intra-UK trade and Northern Ireland's constitutional status. "It's very disappointing that what we're hearing is the EU is already saying it won't show any flexibility," the minister said.—AFP

HONG KONG: A former security chief who oversaw the crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy movement was anointed the business hub's new leader on Sunday by a small committee of Beijing loyalists. John Lee, 64, was the only candidate in the Beijing-backed race to succeed outgoing leader Carrie Lam.

The elevation of Lee, who is under US sanctions, places a security official in the top job for the first time after a tumultuous few years for a city battered by political unrest and debilitating pandemic controls. Despite the city's mini-constitution promising universal suffrage, Hong Kong has never been a democracy, the source of years of public frustration and protests since the 1997 handover to China.

Its leader is instead chosen by an "election committee" currently comprised of 1,461 people—roughly 0.02 percent of the city's population. After a brief secret ballot on Sunday, 99 percent of those who cast ballots (1,416 members) voted for Lee while only eight voted against, according to officials.

Political pluralism

Beijing hailed the near-unanimous result, saying it showed "Hong Kong society has a high level of recognition and approval" for Lee. "This is a real demonstration of democratic spirit," the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office said.

European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell countered that the selection process was a "violation of democratic principles and political pluralism". Borrell described Sunday's result as "yet another step in the dismantling of the 'one country, two systems' principle" where Beijing

promised Hong Kong could maintain key freedoms and autonomy.

Under President Xi Jinping, China is remoulding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image after huge and sometimes violent democracy protests three years ago. Beijing deployed a sweeping national security law to stamp out dissent and rolled out a new "patriots only" political vetting system to guarantee anyone standing for office is considered suitably loyal.



'It's just an empty gesture'

Protests have been largely outlawed, with authorities enforcing an anti-coronavirus ban on public gatherings of more than four people as well as the security law. The League of Social Democrats—one of the only remaining pro-democracy groups—held a three-person protest before polls opened Sunday, chanting "Power to the people, universal suffrage now". "We know this action will have no effect, but we don't want Hong Kong to be completely silent," protester Vanessa Chan said as dozens of police officers looked on.

A troubled city

While the democracy movement has been crushed, much of the population

still resents Beijing's rule and chafes at the city's entrenched inequality. Hong Kong also faces economic difficulties thanks to two years of strict pandemic curbs that have damaged its business hub reputation and left residents cut off as rivals re-open.

Lee was asked by reporters on Sunday whether he lacked a genuine mandate. "I do understand there will be time that is needed for me to convince the people," he replied. "But I can do that by action." He said he planned to build a Hong Kong that is "full of hope, opportunities and harmony" now that authorities had "restored order from chaos".

So far, his campaign has been light on concrete policy details—in particular how he plans to reopen Hong Kong to both international and mainland travel at a time when China is doubling down on its strict zero-COVID strategy.

'Empty gesture'

Hong Kong's chief executives find themselves caught between the democratic aspirations of the city's residents and the authoritarian demands of

Beijing's leaders. Outgoing leader Carrie Lam is on track to leave office with record-low approval ratings. According to a survey in March by the Public Opinion Research Institute, about 24 percent of the public has confidence in Lee, compared with 12 percent for Lam.

Waiting in a line outside a restaurant on Sunday, 25-year-old resident Alex Tam said he and his friends were paying little attention to proceedings. "It's just an empty gesture," he told AFP.

"If he didn't listen to the protesters, I don't see how he would listen to young people now, especially those who criticise the government." Retired businessman Yeung Wing-shun was more positive, saying he hoped Lee would guide Hong Kong with a "firm hand", adding that he believed the new leader could bring different sectors together.

Lee will take office on July 1, the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China from Britain and the halfway point of "One Country, Two Systems". Beijing and Lee say that formula is still intact. Critics, including many Western powers, say it has been shredded.—AFP

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International

Lula launches new presidential campaign to 'rebuild Brazil'

'We need to send fascism back to the sewer of history'

SAO PAULO: Former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva launched his campaign for a new presidential term Saturday, vowing to rebuild Brazil after what he called the "irresponsible and criminal" administration of far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro. The campaign launch sealed a remarkable political comeback for Lula (2003-2010), four years after the 76-year-old leftist icon was jailed on controversial corruption charges.

"We're ready to work not only to win the election on October 2, but to rebuild and transform Brazil, which will be even more difficult," the charismatic but tarnished steelworker-turned-politician told a rally in Sao Paulo, standing before a giant Brazilian flag.



Won't leave power without a fight

Speaking in his trademark gravelly voice, he said Bolsonaro-whom he did not mention by name-had made Brazil a "pariah" with polarizing policies, attacks on democratic institutions and surging destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

"We need to change Brazil once again... We need to return to a place where no one ever dares to defy democracy again. We need to send fascism back to the sewer of history, where it should have been all along," he told a cheering crowd of thousands, calling on "all democrats" to join him.

It was hardly a secret Lula, who has enjoyed a long-though shrinking-lead in the polls, would jump into the



SAO PAULO, Brazil: Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (2-L) celebrates the launch of his campaign for Brazil's October presidential election in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

campaign, which does not officially start until August. He has been in unofficial campaign mode since March last year, when the Supreme Court annulled the corruption convictions that sidelined him from politics. The ruling instantly set up this year's elections as a polarizing clash between arch-enemies Lula and Bolsonaro.

Surprise return

Lula left office with approval ratings of 87 percent, after presiding over a golden period that lifted some 30 million Brazilians from poverty. But the one-time shoeshine boy's towering legacy came crashing

down with the explosion of "Operation Car Wash," a sweeping investigation that uncovered a massive corruption scheme centered on state-run oil company Petrobras.

Lula, who calls the case a conspiracy, was convicted on bribe-taking charges and jailed from April 2018 to November 2019 — missing the 2018 presidential race, which Bolsonaro won. In a Brazil deeply divided over Bolsonaro's combative style, social media polemics, weak performance on the economy and chaotic handling of COVID-19, Lula returned to the ring with the immediate status of front-runner.

Hamas threats

The Elad killings followed a tense period in which the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, the Jewish festival of Passover and the Christian holiday of Easter overlapped. Tensions have boiled over into violent clashes between Zionists and Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a highly contested site in Jerusalem's Zionist-annexed Old City.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas had condemned the Elad attacks, warning that the murder of Zionist 'civilians' risked fuelling a broader cycle of violence. But the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas and Islamic Jihad, another Palestinian armed group, praised the latest violence, calling it a consequence of unrest at Al-Aqsa. Neither claimed responsibility.

"This operation demonstrates our people's anger at the occupation's attacks on holy sites," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said of the Elad attack. "The storming of the Al-Aqsa mosque cannot go unpunished."

Hamas last week threatened Zionist entity with rocket fire and attacks on synagogues if its security forces carry out further raids on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. "Whoever has a rifle must have it ready, and whoever does not have a rifle must prepare their knife or their axe," said Yahya Sinwar, Hamas chief in the Zionist-blockaded Gaza Strip.

A string of anti-Zionist attacks since March 22 have killed 18 people, including an Arab-Zionist police officer and two Ukrainians. Two of the deadly attacks were carried out in the Tel Aviv area by Palestinians.

A total of 27 Palestinians and three Zionist Arabs have died during the same period, among them perpetrators of attacks and those killed by Zionist security forces in West Bank operations. — AFP



ELAD: This image grab taken from a video released by the Zionist police on May 8, 2022 shows police detaining a Palestinian suspect following a manhunt near the central city of Elad. Two Palestinians suspected of killing three Zionists in an axe attack in Elad were arrested after a more than two-day manhunt. — AFP

Yonatan Habakuk, 44, and Boaz Gol, 49, both from Elad, as well as Oren Ben Yiftach, 35. The bloodshed unfolded as Zionist entity marked the 74th anniversary of its founding, which has previously been a tense day in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

For Palestinians, the anniversary of Zionist entity's 1948 declaration of independence marks the Nakba, or "catastrophe", when more than 700,000 fled or were expelled during the war surrounding Israel's creation.

ple that this war has to stop and this war has been brutal and that the people of the United States stand with the people of Ukraine."

Separately, Canadian leader Trudeau visited Irpin, a suburb on the northwest edge of Kyiv that was the scene of heavy fighting in the early weeks of the conflict. Local mayor Oleksandr Markushyn posted pictures on social media and said Trudeau "came to Irpin to see with his own eyes all the horror that the Russian occupiers had done to our city".

On the ground, the key battles were being fought in Ukraine's east. Civilians have now been evacuated from Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks, leaving a small force of defenders holed up in its sprawling network of underground tunnels and bunkers. The complex - the final pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the Black Sea port city - has taken on a symbolic value.

"We, all of the military personnel in the garrison of Mariupol, we have witnessed the war crimes performed by Russia, by the Russian army. We are witnesses," said Ilya Samoilenko, an intelligence officer with the far-right Azov regiment defending the site. "Surrender is not an option because Russia is not interested in our lives," he said.

Taking full control of Mariupol would also allow Moscow to create a land bridge between the Crimean peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and regions run by pro-Russian separatists in the east. In one of those regions, Lugansk, Ukrainian forces are now mounting a last-ditch defense of the city of Severodonetsk, formerly an industrial city of 100,000 people, now Russia's next target.

In the same region, governor Sergiy Gaiday said 60 civilians were feared dead after a school in the village of Bilogorivka was hit in an air strike. "The bombs fell on the school and unfortunately it was completely destroyed. There were a total of 90 people, 27 were saved," he said on Telegram. "Sixty people who were in the school are very probably dead."

Rescuers could not work overnight because of a threat of new strikes but resumed their work on Sunday. Rescuers were also looking for survivors in the neighboring village of Shepilivka after a strike hit a house where 11 people were sheltering in the basement, Gaiday said. — AFP

Zionist police arrest two Palestinian axe murder suspects

ELAD: Zionist security services on Sunday arrested two Palestinians suspected of axing to death three Zionists after a more than two-day manhunt, the latest in a spate of deadly attacks. The security services — who previously identified the suspects as Assad Yusef al-Rifai, 19, and Subhi Imad Abu Shukair, 20 — said the pair were spotted near a quarry just outside the central town of Elad, where the axe attack took place on Thursday.

"We said we would get the terrorists, and so we did," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said ahead of his weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday. The suspects had been hiding in a forested area, near the quarry, and did not fight with security forces as the arrest was carried out, security personnel at the scene told AFP. The deadly attack in Elad, populated by mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews, was the sixth in which Zionists have been targeted since March 22. Witnesses said two assailants leapt from a car swinging axes at passers-by, leaving three dead and four wounded, before fleeing in the same vehicle.

The manhunt included "intelligence and special forces units" from the police, domestic security agency and the army, along with helicopters and drones, the security forces said. Army chief Aviv Kohavi praised the operation, vowing "to strengthen the security... of Zionist civilians."

Zionist entity has identified the three dead as

Ukraine battles to hold bastion...

Continued from Page 1

"Decades after World War II, darkness has returned to Ukraine, and it has become black and white again," Zelensky said, in a monochrome social media video shot against the backdrop of a bombed-out apartment block. "Evil has returned, in a different uniform, under different slogans, but for the same purpose," he warned, trying to turn Russian leader Vladimir Putin's "anti-Nazi" rhetoric back on itself.

Russia, meanwhile, was gearing up for Monday's Victory Day parade designed to associate the invasion of its neighbor with the national pride felt over the Soviet Union's defeat of Germany. "Today, our soldiers, as their ancestors, are fighting side by side to liberate their native land from the Nazi filth with the confidence that, as in 1945, victory will be ours," Putin said.

Zelensky was also to meet G7 leaders via video conference to discuss the crisis. The group - which includes France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States - in a statement on Sunday said Putin's "unprovoked war of aggression" had brought "shame on Russia and the historic sacrifices of its people".

The White House said the G7 was "committed to phasing out or banning the import of Russian oil". But EU diplomats will meet again next week to hammer out the details of their latest sanctions package against Moscow, after a proposed embargo on Russian oil exposed rifts in the bloc. In a separate statement, the White House added that the United States would sanction three major Russian television stations and deny all Russian companies access to US firms' consulting and accounting services.

The US first lady met her Ukrainian counterpart Olena Zelenska at a school sheltering civilians, including children displaced by the conflict, near Ukraine's border with Slovakia. "I wanted to come on Mother's Day," Jill Biden told reporters. "I thought it was important to show the Ukrainian peo-

Slipping poll numbers

But Bolsonaro, 67, has narrowed the gap in the latest polls-and made it clear he won't leave power without a fight. Lula has meanwhile made a series of recent gaffes, including politically tone-deaf remarks on abortion, the police and the middle class. He has also looked out of sync with world leaders he aspires to rub elbows with again-saying, for example, that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is "as responsible as" Russia's Vladimir Putin for the Ukraine war.

Lula has reportedly shaken up his campaign team recently, removing long-time ally Franklin Martins as communications chief. "He has made several disastrous statements in recent weeks," Sylvio Costa, founder of news site Congresso em Foco, told AFP.

"And, above all, Lula needs to go to the street." The Workers' Party founder said he would now do just that, crisscrossing the country to meet with "the people." Wearing a sharp navy suit, his shirt open at the collar, Lula stuck strictly to the script at his rally, rather than speaking off the cuff as he typically does.

But he was short on tangible planks for his platform. "Instead of promises, I present the immense legacy of our administration," he said. Courting the wary business sector and seeking to build a broad base, Lula has tapped market-friendly centrist Geraldo Alckmin the opponent he defeated in the 2006 presidential race-as his running-mate.

"Brazil today has the most disastrous and cruel government in its history. Lula is our only hope," Alckmin, a former Sao Paulo governor who was home with a mild case of COVID-19, told the rally by video link.

Cheering the veteran leftist on, 63-year-old retiree Odilon da Silva Freire agreed. "Lula governed for everyone, especially the poor," he said. "He has to be president again. He's the best we ever had." — AFP

Hundreds rally in support of Tunisia's Saied

TUNIS: Hundreds of Tunisians demonstrated Sunday in a show of support for President Kais Saied and a series of extraordinary measures he took since last July that critics have slammed as a "coup". The rallies come as Saied faces mounting criticism over his July 2021 power grab, in which he sacked the government and suspended parliament before moving on to rule by decree.

Demonstrators gathered in the capital's central Bourguiba Avenue — the epicentre of vast protests that toppled former leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 — in response to a call by a pro-Saied alliance. They held banners reading "We are all Kais Saied" and demanded the prosecution of "corrupt" politicians, echoing a frequent refrain uttered by the head of state.

Critics have warned that Saied's moves mark a shift towards autocracy, threatening the only democracy to have emerged from the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. In late April, several Tunisian opposition parties announced the formation of a National Salvation Front to "save" the country from the deepening political crisis. Prominent leftist Ahmed Nejib Chebbi said at the time that the alliance aimed to unite political forces, re-establish constitutional and democratic processes and guarantee freedoms and rights in the country. Saied in early May announced the launch of a "national dialogue" to help resolve the crisis — but excluded critical opposition groups, including his arch-rivals, the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party. — AFP

Scholz's party soundly beaten in regional vote

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's SPD suffered a stinging defeat at regional elections on Sunday, with the opposition conservatives securing a thumping win in the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein a week before a bigger test. The Social Democrats saw their vote share diminish to around 16 percent from 27.3 percent in the last election in 2017, exit polls by national broadcasters showed.

They were overtaken by the Greens, who were in

Jabeur seeks to inspire more...

Continued from Page 1

With a tour-leading 12 victories on clay so far this season - and with Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty having retired - the omens seem positive for her. However, she has another glass ceiling to crack in reaching the last four of a Grand Slam for the first time - so she has two quarterfinals to her credit in Australia in 2020 and Wimbledon last year.

Jabeur - the junior champion at Roland Garros in 2011 - is, though, armed with a powerful weapon apart from her strokeplay. "Definitely all those matches I've won on clay will give me a lot of confidence," she said as she absorbed her Madrid victory. "When you're confident like that and you win a lot of matches, I think I should take this opportunity to go, like, really forward and win." Jabeur admits to not watching much tennis when she was growing up and it was her husband Karim Kamoun who was more "obsessed by Roland Garros".

Kamoun was on hand in Madrid - he planted a kiss on her cheek courtside after her triumph - as were her siblings and the head of the Tunisian tennis federation to see her momentous win. Jabeur wel-

second place with between 17-19 percent, after the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), who were comfortably in the lead with 41-42 percent, the polls showed. The CDU's Daniel Guenther was therefore poised for a second term as the state premier.

The northern state bordering Denmark is one of the smallest in Germany's 16 regions, but both the CDU and the SPD were hoping for momentum to carry them into next Sunday's regional election in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). A far bigger prize, NRW is Germany's most populous state, and currently in the hands of the CDU, although surveys show the SPD running neck and neck.

A win in NRW would give a major boost to Scholz, who has been under fire domestically over what critics deem to be a stuttering response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

comes such attention but she would like to see more company in the locker room on the tour as Arab female players have been a rarity. Her compatriot Selima Sfar reached a career high of 75 in the world in 2001 but there was little progress for other Arab women players until Jabeur came on the scene.

"Being the only Arab is not easy to be on tour right now," she said at Wimbledon last year. "I just want to say if I did it (succeed on tour), it's not impossible. Like I said before, I always try to inspire other generations." Jabeur's favorite player of all time is America's three-time Wimbledon finalist and 2003 US Open champion Andy Roddick - but it is Morocco's four-time Grand Slam quarterfinalist Hicham Arazi who has been her role model.

Jabeur said just as Arazi inspired her, so she hopes she can do the same for Arab women. "Honestly, he really inspired me, and I am trying to do the same here," she said. "I like to see how French people are together (on tour), Americans, Australian, and I feel like I want to see this, you know, with my country. It doesn't matter, Tunisia or Egypt or Morocco, I really want to see more and more players."

Even before her great run at Wimbledon last year, Jabeur's force of personality and talent had already convinced others, including American legend Venus Williams, that she will achieve her goal. "You're gonna see a whole other generation of women from North Africa coming into tennis," said Williams. "It's going to be all owed to her." — AFP

International

Thousands of security forces on alert ahead of Philippine polls

We are confident that we'll have a secure and orderly election: Colonel Ramon Zagala

MANILA: More than 60,000 security forces in the Philippines were on alert Sunday to safeguard ballots and polling stations on the eve of the presidential election, after police reported four people killed in an outbreak of violence. Elections are a traditionally volatile time in a country with lax gun laws and a violent political culture, but the national police said this season has been comparatively peaceful.

In one of the worst incidents, four people were killed Saturday in a gun battle between armed supporters of mayoral rivals in Magsingal town in the northern province of Ilocos Sur, said police spokesman Brigadier-General Roderick Alba. Another four were wounded. Police in the northern province of Nueva Ecija also arrested two dozen people and seized weapons, including five M-16 rifles, a 12-gauge shotgun and 15 handguns, following a shoot-out between bodyguards of two candidates running for mayor of General Tinio.

Five people were wounded in the incident, which also left the same number of sports utility vehicles riddled with bullets, Alba said. More than 18,000 posts, from president to town councillor, are up for grabs in the elections.

The son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos looks set to win the presidential vote by a landslide, returning the clan to the pinnacle of political power. Rights groups, Catholic church leaders and opponents see the elections as a make-or-break moment

for the country's democracy, amid fears Marcos Junior could rule with a heavy fist.

Personnel from the police, armed forces and coast guard have fanned out across the archipelago to help secure polling stations and ballots, escort election officials and guard checkpoints. The security deployment involves around 48,000 soldiers and 16,000 police, officials said.

"Based on our planning... we are confident that we'll have a secure and orderly election," said armed forces spokesman Colonel Ramon Zagala. There have been 16 "validated election-related incidents" since January 9, including four shootings and a "slight illegal detention", Alba said.

That compares with 133 incidents during the 2016 presidential elections and 60 in the 2019 mid-term polls. Police spokeswoman Colonel Jean Fajardo attributed the sharp drop to a heightened security presence, as well as military and police operations targeting "loose firearms" and private armed groups. The election commission largely prohibits the carrying of weapons during the election period that lasts until June 8.

'Stay awake'

Experts say the explosion of social media, which has made it easier to report incidents, and the growing domination of political dynasties, which smother electoral competition, have helped tamp down election violence. In the country's deadliest



MANILA: Police officers check documents of motorists at a check point along a road in Manila City, on May 8, 2022, a day before the May 9 presidential election. —AFP

single incident of political violence on record, 58 people were massacred in 2009 as gunmen allegedly belonging to a local warlord in the southern Philippines attacked a group of people to stop a rival filing his election candidacy.

Thirty-two of the victims were journalists covering the contest, making the attack also the deadliest on record against media professionals. The introduction of electronic voting in 2010 has made it harder for widespread vote-rigging that has histori-

cally plagued Philippine elections.

But Marcos Jr, who still insists he was cheated of victory in the 2016 vice presidential race, has warned of electoral fraud in these polls and urged his supporters to be alert. "We will win as long as you stay awake on Monday so there won't be another tragedy," Marcos Jr told hundreds of thousands of fans at his final campaign rally on Saturday. "Many undesirable things happen if we stop paying attention." —AFP

Crowds jeer Sri Lankan PM on rare outing

COLOMBO: Boos and heckles greeted Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Sunday on his first public outing since nationwide protests erupted demanding his ruling family resign over the worsening economic crisis.

Months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines have caused widespread suffering across the South Asian island in its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948. On Sunday, the premier visited one of the holiest Buddhist temples-housing a reputedly 2,300-year-old tree-in Anuradhapura.

But dozens of people carried hand-written placards and chanted slogans demanding that "thieves" be banned from the sacred city, 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of Colombo. "We will worship you if you stand down (as Prime Minister) and leave," one man shouted. Heavily armed Special Task Force (STF) commandos were deployed while police moved to clear the road for Rajapaksa's convoy of six vehicles.

Officials said the premier would return to the capital by helicopter. Several major roads in the country are blocked by people protesting the lack of cooking gas, petrol and diesel.

Looting

In the capital, a truck transporting cooking gas was looted Sunday by crowds who had been waiting in line overnight for supplies. Outnumbered police watched helplessly as men climbed onto the truck and got away with 84 cylinders of gas, officials said.

The government imposed a state of emergency granting the military sweeping powers to arrest and detain people on Friday, after trade unions brought the country to a virtual standstill in a bid to pressure President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down.

S Korea's president to get tough on North

SEOUL: South Korea's hawkish new president will be sworn in Tuesday, and he looks set to get tough with Pyongyang, departing from what he has called the "subservient" approach of his predecessor. For the past five years, Seoul has pursued a policy of engagement with North Korea, brokering summits between Kim Jong Un and then-US president Donald Trump while reducing joint US military drills Pyongyang sees as provocative.

But talks collapsed in 2019 and have languished since, while the nuclear-armed North has dramatically ramped up weapons tests, conducting 15 so far this year, including the launch of its largest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile. Unlike outgoing President Moon Jae-in, who saw North Korea as a negotiating partner, incoming leader Yoon Suk-yeol sees the country as an adversary, said Cheong Seong-chang of the Center for North Korea Studies at the Sejong Institute.

Yoon has pledged to officially define Pyongyang as South Korea's "principal enemy", Cheong added, and has not ruled out pre-emptive strikes on the North. This hard-line stance appears to have already annoyed Pyongyang.

On Thursday, North Korean propaganda website Uriminzokkiri said Yoon was stirring up "confrontational madness" and it was "preposterous" for him to discuss pre-emptive strikes.

Rough ride

Moon, who met Kim four times while in office,



COLOMBO: Buddhist monks participate in an anti-government demonstration demanding President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation over the country's crippling economic crisis, outside Sri Lanka's president office building in Colombo. —AFP

The defence ministry said in a statement Sunday that anti-government demonstrators were behaving in a "provocative and threatening manner" and disrupting essential services. Unions said they would stage daily protests from Monday to pressure the government to revoke the emergency.

President Rajapaksa, who is the brother of the prime minister Mahinda, has not been seen in public since tens of thousands attempted to storm his private residence in Colombo on March 31. Since April 9, thousands have been camping in front of his office in Colombo.

Divine intervention

Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to Anuradhapura is part of a flurry of religious activity by the ruling family as it clings to power in the Buddhist-majority nation. Local media reported that the president's personal shaman, Gnana Akka, had charmed bottled

water and delivered it to the protest site in the hope the movement would fizzle out. Another report said the premier's wife Shiranthi, a Catholic, had visited a Hindu temple seeking divine help for her family's bid to remain in power.

Official sources say the president may ask his brother Mahinda to stand down in an effort to clear the way for a unity government to navigate Sri Lanka through the crisis. But the country's largest opposition party has already said it will not join any government helmed by a member of the Rajapaksa clan. Sri Lanka was hit by an economic crisis after the coronavirus pandemic hammered income from tourism and remittances. In April, the country announced it was defaulting on its \$51 billion foreign debt.

Finance Minister Ali Sabry warned last week that the country will have to endure unprecedented economic hardship for at least two more years. —AFP



SEOUL: File picture shows South Korea's new president-elect Yoon Suk Yeol (C) of the main opposition People Power Party gestures to his supporters as he is congratulated outside the party headquarters in Seoul. —AFP

sought to avoid harsh rhetorical exchanges with Pyongyang, prioritising engagement. But Cheong warned of a rough ride ahead and said he expected no summits. Instead of delicate diplomacy, Yoon wants the "complete and verifiable denuclearisation" of North Korea—something that is anathema to Kim, said Hong Min, a researcher at the Korea Institute for National Unification.

Calling for Kim to give up his nukes first is "too high a hurdle for the North to accept" and looks set to put a final nail in the coffin of Moon's cherished programme of engagement, Hong told AFP. Avowed anti-feminist Yoon won the election in March by the narrowest margin ever, and has since backed off some of his more explosive domestic campaign promises, chiefly his vow to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality. —AFP

Record 12.3m Syrian children need aid: UN

BEIRUT: More Syrian children are in need than at any time since a devastating civil war erupted over a decade ago, but funding for them is "dwindling", the United Nations warned Sunday. "Syria's children have suffered for far too long and should not suffer any longer," the UN children's agency said in a statement, noting that 12.3 million were in need of aid both inside the country and in the wider region where they had fled.

"More than 6.5 million children in Syria are in need of assistance, the highest number recorded since the beginning of the crisis, more than 11 years ago," it added. Syria's war is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions since it began with a brutal crackdown of anti-government protests in 2011. It escalated to pull in foreign powers and global jihadists.

"Children's needs, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, are growing," said Adele Khodr, UNICEF's Middle East chief. "Many families struggle to make ends meet. Prices of basic supplies including food are skyrocketing, partially as a result of the crisis in Ukraine."

Children are among the most vulnerable and the UN warned they are bearing the brunt of the impact. "In Syria's neighbouring countries, strained by political instability and fragility, nearly 5.8 million children depend on assistance, their lives riddled with poverty and hardship," Khodr added. —AFP

News in brief

Care home fire kills 4

SOPIA: A fire at a retirement home in eastern Bulgaria has killed four residents, police said Sunday, the latest blaze to strike a care home in the country. An 88-year-old woman and three men aged 73-78 died in the overnight blaze in the city of Varna, regional police official Petya Kupova said. An 83-year-old woman was clinging to life, Kupova said. Investigators have not ruled out arson by a resident suffering psychiatric problems at the home which lacks care staff, particularly at night. Last July, four people died in a fire at another home with the same owner and in November, nine people perished at a home also in the Varna region. Probes into those fires are still underway but prosecutors have said numerous rules were being broken in retirement homes around the region. The latest blaze follows complaints from relatives of residents of a psychiatric clinic about ill-treatment and even deaths shortly after admission to the facility. —AFP

Coastguard rescues 106 migrants

ATHENS: Greece's coastguard on Sunday said it had rescued 106 migrants including many children from a half-sunken sailing boat on the Aegean Sea. A coastguard statement said the migrants were found late on Saturday near the southeastern island of Kos, a short distance from the Turkish coast. The group, of various nationalities which were not disclosed, included 14 women and 20 children. No other people are considered to be missing in the incident, the coastguard said. —AFP

Siberia fires kill 10

MOSCOW: Fires that have broken out across southwestern Siberia have killed at least 10 people and damaged hundreds of buildings, local authorities said on Saturday. Hundreds of firefighters are trying to contain the blazes, which are a rare occurrence in the region during May and have been fuelled by lack of rain and fierce winds, they said. In the Krasnoyarsk region, at least five people lost their lives in the fires, which damaged around 450 homes, the local authorities said, declaring a state of emergency. In the Kemerovo region, three people were found dead in a burnt home. In the Omsk region, two people died. "Extinguishing (the fires) is being complicated by meteorological conditions—violent winds are fanning the flames and preventing them from being put out," the regional ministry for emergencies in Krasnoyarsk said on Telegram. —AFP

Iran arrests 3 policemen

TEHRAN: Three Iranian policemen have been arrested in Tehran, state media reported Sunday, after a video appearing to show the officers violently arresting a woman sparked outrage. The police officers who violently arrested a young woman in Lavasan in eastern Tehran have been detained, the government-run Iran newspaper reported. A short video has sparked anger in recent days on social media in Iran, showing three police officers forcing a woman into a police car. The date of the incident is unknown. In the footage, a woman is seen screaming as she pleads to a man in civilian clothing, who pushes her to the ground in front of a police officer and another man in uniform. —AFP

Business

MONDAY, MAY 9, 2022

Companies envision taxis flying above jammed traffic

As urban traffic gets more miserable, commuters hope to hop into 'air taxis'

SAN FRANCISCO: As urban traffic gets more miserable, entrepreneurs are looking to a future in which commuters hop into "air taxis" that whisk them over clogged roads. Companies such as Archer, Joby and Wisk are working on electric-powered aircraft that take off and land vertically like helicopters then propel forward like planes.

"The Jetsons' is definitely a reference that people make a lot when trying to contextualize what we are doing," Archer Vice President Louise Bristow told AFP, referring to a 1960s animated comedy about a family living in a high-tech future. "The easiest way to think about it is a flying car, but that's not what we're doing." What Archer envisions is an age of aerial ride-sharing, an "Uber or Lyft of the skies," Bristow said.

Neighborhood parking garage rooftops or shopping mall lots could serve as departure or arrival pads for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.

Commuters would make it the rest of the way however they wish, even synchronizing trips with car rideshare services such as Uber which owns a stake in Santa Cruz, California-based Joby. Joby executives said on a recent earnings call that its first production model aircraft should be in the skies later this year.

That comes despite a Joby prototype crashing early this year while being tested at speeds and altitudes far greater than it would have to handle as part of an air taxi fleet. Joby has declined to discuss details of the remotely piloted aircraft's crash, which occurred in an uninhabited area, saying it is waiting for US aviation regulators to finish an investigation.

"We were at the end of the flight test expansion campaign at test points well above what we expect to see in normal operations," Joby executive chairman



CONCORD: Xwing safety pilots Ryan Olson (left) and Gabriele Di Francesco are seen checking on the flying systems in a Cessna 208B Grand Caravan which has been outfitted with autonomous flying equipment at Xwing headquarters in Concord, California. — AFP



This undated image released by Wisk Aero LLC, shows the company's all-electric, self-flying, vertical takeoff and landing air taxi. — AFP

Paul Sciarra told analysts. "I'm really excited about where we are right now; we have demonstrated the full performance of our aircraft."

Its eVTOL aircraft have a maximum range of 150 miles (241 kilometers), a top speed of 200 miles per hour and a "low noise profile" to avoid an annoying din, the company said.

Joby has announced partnerships with SK Telecom and the TMAP mobility platform in South Korea to provide emissions-free aerial ridesharing. "By cooperating with Joby, TMAP will become a platform operator that can offer a seamless transportation service between the ground and the sky," TMAP chief executive Lee Jong Ho said in a release.

Joby has also announced a partnership with Japanese airline ANA to launch

air taxi service in Japan.

And Toyota has additionally joined the alliance, with an aim to explore adding ground transportation to such a service there, Joby said.

Rethinking required

Hurdles on the path include establishing infrastructure and adapting attitudes to make air taxis a part of everyday life. "For mass adoption, people need to have a mindset change," Bristow said.

"Getting people to want to travel in a different way will take some rethinking."

The need for the change, though, is clear, she reasoned. Roads are congested with traffic that wastes time, frays nerves and spews pollution. "There is nowhere else for traffic to go," Bristow said.

"You have to go up." Miami and Los

Angeles are already exploring the potential of aerial ridesharing, and Archer is hoping to have a small air taxi service operating in at least one of those cities by the end of 2024. "It's a monumental task that we're taking on," Bristow said.

"It's going to take a while before the infrastructure supports the mass expansion of what we're trying to do." Archer last month announced that it teamed with United Airlines to create an eVTOL advisory committee.

The US airline has pre-ordered 200 Archer aircraft with an eye toward using them for "last-mile" transportation from airports, Bristow told AFP. "Imagine flying from London to Newark, New Jersey, then getting in an Archer and being deposited somewhere in Manhattan," Bristow said.

More time for life

Silicon Valley startup Xwing specializes in making standard aircraft capable of flying safely without pilots, with an aim of turning commuting by air into a cheaper and more efficient way to travel. "We're strong believers here that the industry is going through a pretty dramatic transformation," Xwing chief and founder Marc Piette told AFP.

"In a few years you'll start seeing taxi networks of electric aircrafts regionally or on long hauls and it's going to be quite a different landscape." Thousands of regional airports used mostly for recreation could become part of aerial commute networks, air mobility consultant Scott Drennan told AFP.

To Drennan, the primary reason for taking to the skies is to "give people back their time." — AFP

Boursa Kuwait edges lower in lackluster trading

KUWAIT: The Boursa Kuwait closed its trading on Sunday with the general market index declining by 52.3 points to reach the level of 8,407.68 points, a decrease of 0.62 percent. The Main Market Index dropped by 43.7 points to 6420.35 points, a decline of 0.68 percent, trading 155 million shares through 5,939 cash transactions worth KD 22.6 million.

The primary market index also dropped by 56.8 points to reach the level of 93,657 with a decrease of 0.6 percent, trading 93.8 million shares in 6,387 transactions valued at KD 43.19 million.

Saudi Arabia's stock exchange claimed the top spot among its peers in the Gulf Cooperation Council, with the highest year-to-date gain of 21.7 percent, a recent report by Kamco Invest revealed. Backed by a rally in the oil market, the Kingdom saw its major players, especially banks,



posting higher first-quarter earnings which led to stock market wins.

Abu Dhabi and Kuwait came next, rising 18.8 and 18.75 percent, respectively, according to the latest monthly report. It revealed that the MSCI GCC Index, which captures the performance of indexes across the region, went up by 3.3 percent in April, thanks to strong quarterly earnings.

Dubai was the region's highest gainer, registering a monthly gain of 5.5 percent, followed by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Qatar, all up between 0.4 and 4.9 percent. The Omani and Bahraini bourses recorded declines of 1.1 and 0.8 percent, respectively. — Agencies

Xi warms up China economy, but virus narrows options

BEIJING: President Xi Jinping has offered state backing for tech, infrastructure and jobs to revive China's economy, but analysts warn growth will continue to wilt until Beijing drops its rigid virus controls. Two and a half years since the coronavirus first emerged in Wuhan, China is the last major economy still closed off to the world, despite its relatively low death toll.

Lockdowns across dozens of cities—from the manufacturing hubs of Shenzhen and Shanghai to the breadbasket of Jilin—have wreaked havoc on supply chains over recent months, crushing small businesses and trapping consumers at home. That has imperiled Beijing's full-year growth target of about 5.5 percent, with forecasters anticipating that around one percentage point may be shaved off that figure.

"We remain deeply concerned about growth," Nomura analysts said this week. "We believe the

Omicron variant and zero-COVID strategy represent the dominant challenges to growth stability."

Yet China's Communist leadership insisted Thursday that the country will stick "unswervingly" to zero-COVID, with a meeting chaired by Xi declaring that "persistence is victory". To curtail the growing economic damage, Beijing has offered words of respite to the tech sector from rolling regulatory crackdowns and promised to pump prime the economy with an "all-out" infrastructure campaign.

But observers say rallies may be temporary as long as the state's reflex remains to hammer down the virus caseload at all costs. "The measures are all very welcome... but how many more bridges and how many more sports stadiums are going to help us in creating an environment of predictable growth?" European Chamber president Joerg Wuttke told reporters on Thursday.

While many cities have bounced back after short, targeted lockdowns, other areas such as agricultural base Jilin province have been slow to recover from waves of restrictions.

"That precedent (Jilin) could mean a longer-lasting impact from Shanghai's highly disruptive lockdown," said Ernan Cui of Gavekal Dragonomics in a report Friday. — AFP

Facing soaring rents, some US tenants are fighting back

NEW YORK: Before the start of each month, Anh-Thu Nguyen and her two roommates send rental checks to their landlord. A few days later, the checks are mailed back. The bizarre ritual began soon after the March 2021 purchase of Nguyen's Brooklyn building by a shadowy real estate firm called Greenbrook Partners, which told residents they had to leave by June 30.

Some neighbors moved out, but Nguyen and tenants from four other units sued the financially connected Greenbrook, one of several investor-backed rental housing firms to draw scrutiny in Washington. "We have to fight back," said Nguyen, who has helped organize tenants in other buildings that belong to Greenbrook, which has more than 150 properties in Brooklyn and Queens, most bought during the pandemic.

"This has been my home for 13 plus years. It's a wonderful community and I want to stay here... it's also the right thing to do," said Nguyen, 39, a trained attorney who works on labor organizing for an NGO. Nguyen and other activists back a pending tenant protection bill in the New York state legislature. The battle comes as rising rent adds to today's historic inflation surge, with horror stories abounding of landlords in the unregulated portion of New York's rental market seeking increases of 30 percent or higher.

"The market has bounced back, and that has led to rent increases and lease renewals that are really burdensome for tenants," said Charles McNally, director of

external affairs at the Furman Center, a New York University urban policy research organization. "It's a really difficult market for renters, and the inflationary pressures for owners are real as well." Greenbrook was one of the actors highlighted in a February event organized by Senate Democrats, where Nguyen described herself as a "suboptimal tenant" for such firms.

"Their goal is maximizing profit, not the stability that comes with a long-term tenant," she told the panel. Housing experts told senators that a frequently changing cast of shell companies and subsidiaries appearing on official ownership documents hinders accountability for tenants.

They also said some of the firms target traditionally non-white areas where home values have risen steeply. The rental firms' defenders say restrictions on landlords can discourage needed investment and that the industry is being scapegoated for the housing affordability problem, a complex issue with many factors. They also point to estimates that Wall Street-backed firms comprise a tiny stake of the US rental housing stock—figures that housing experts say are based on outdated pre-pandemic data. Recent news reports abound of the shift in cities such as Atlanta and Jacksonville, where Wall Street-backed rental firms snap up available stock, pricing out some first-time homeowners.

Greenbrook tenants have also garnered support from leading New York politicians, including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and state Senator Jabari Brisport, who led a rally last month where Greenbrook was booed. "Fight, fight, fight! Housing is a human right," the group chanted in support of "good cause eviction" legislation, which would limit evictions to cases where tenants don't pay rent or behave egregiously. The bill would also limit rent increases on apartments with market-based leases. — AFP



NEW YORK: New York City Comptroller, Brad Lander with New York State Senator Jabari Brisport (second right), speaks to people gathered to protest rent increases and aggressive evictions and in support of tenant rights in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP

Business

C Africa's leap into bitcoin leaves its people bemused

All transactions using the cryptocurrency being authorized in CAR

LIBREVILLE, Gabon: In the Central African Republic (CAR), nine out of 10 people do not have internet, and only one in seven has electricity—that is, when there are no power cuts.

Yet the CAR has just followed El Salvador in adopting bitcoin as legal tender, a currency that requires access to the net to be bought, sold or used. Foreign experts and CAR citizens themselves are struggling to understand why the world's second least developed economy has announced this leap into monetary hyperspace. Among people queuing at one of the rare automatic teller machines (ATMs) in the capital Bangui, the word "bitcoin" stirred befuddlement.

"What is it?" asked Sylvain, a man in his 30s, waiting for his turn at the cash machine, which was operating thanks to a generator. "I don't know what cryptocurrencies are—I don't even have internet," said Joelle, a vegetable hawker nearby.

On April 28, President Faustin Archange Touadera announced that lawmakers had unanimously approved a bill that legalized the use of bitcoin alongside the CFA franc. All transactions using the cryptocurrency, including payment of taxes, are being authorized.

Government spokesman Serge Ghislain Djorie told AFP: "We are going to launch an awareness campaign and shortly introduce fiber optic cable—a low internet connection is enough to buy cryptocurrency." But even among CAR's business community, which in theory is best placed to use bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies regulated by the new law, skepticism runs deep.

"I'm not interested in having bitcoin here—we have no infrastructure and no knowledge for getting involved in this adventure and there's no cybercrime unit to ensure security," said an entrepreneur, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "There are other priorities, like security, energy, access to water, the internet, building roads..."

Sickly economy

Technical hurdles are just one of the questions raised by the bitcoin move. Foreign analysts have been pondering why this deeply troubled economy should adopt a novel and volatile currency rather than a time-honored stable unit such as the US dollar. Just this week, Economy Minister Herve Ndoba said a shortfall in government income was so severe that without foreign help, spending cuts of up to 60 percent loomed for some ministries. "CAR has many problems. Adding another currency like bitcoin as legal tender will unlikely meaningfully address those," said Ousmene Jacques Mandeng, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics (LSE).



The Central African Republic is the second poorest country in the world, according to the UN's Human Development Index. — AFP

Bitcoin's "excess volatility... translates to fluctuations in household savings, consumption and wealth," warned Ganesh Viswanath-Nastraj, an assistant professor of finance at Warwick Business School in England. Locked in a nine-year-old civil conflict, the CAR is heavily dependent on mineral extraction, much of which is informal, for its economy.

In a report in December 2020, a US watchdog called The Sentry said the CAR had become "a breeding ground for transnational criminal networks."

"Money laundering and the trafficking of natural resources, drugs, weapons, and diplomatic passports are rampant," it said. The CFA franc that until now was the CAR's sole legal tender is a regional currency backed by France and pegged to the euro.

Other members of the currency are Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Didier Loukakou, regulatory chief at the Central African Financial Market Surveillance Commission, said the six had been discussing plans to regulate crypto-currencies. But, he said, "we were not warned by Bangui about its decision."

Russian factor?

Some experts see a possible explanation for Touadera's announcement in his entwinement with Russia, perceived as desperate for currency after Western countries imposed sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine. In 2020, Russia sent paramilitaries to shore up Touadera as armed groups advanced on the capital. France and rights campaigners describe these operatives as mercenaries from the Wagner group, which reputedly receives mineral wealth in exchange for their services.

"The context, given systemic corruption and a Russian partner facing international sanctions, does encourage suspicion," said Thierry Vircoulon, a specialist on Central Africa at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) think tank. "Russia's search for ways to get around international sanctions is an invitation to be cautious." But some voices, including the head of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, have voiced doubts that digital currencies can be an effective tool for bypassing sanctions. — AFP

How Portugal became Europe's bitcoin hub

LISBON: As governments slowly shackle the crypto industry with regulations and obligations, Portugal is increasingly isolated in Europe—a place with few rules that investors describe as a crypto paradise.

"You don't need to do anything else because you already have a perfect system, with zero percent tax on bitcoin," said Didi Taihuttu, a prominent crypto enthusiast who shifted his family to Portugal from the Netherlands. "For bitcoiners, it's heaven," he added. Financial authorities across the globe are grappling with fundamental questions about cryptocurrencies. Firstly, are they currencies or assets? If they are assets, how do you categorize and tax them? Right now, Portugal is one of the last countries in Europe to regard them as currencies from a tax point of view, meaning profits from trading are not taxed.

The finance ministry told AFP it was reviewing the situation and wanted a common European framework, but pressure is building for quick action. Mariana Mortagua, a far-left MP, called recently for urgent regulation and summed up the situation bluntly: "Portugal has become a tax haven."

Even those in the crypto industry accept that things will have to change. "It's hard to justify other financial assets being taxed at around 28 percent but not cryptocurrencies," said Pedro Borges of CriptoLoja, the first crypto exchange registered in Portugal. Portugal has long sought foreign cash by giving tax breaks and special visas to foreign investors and so-called digital nomads—those who work online without the need for a fixed business location. And the tax regime is not the only appeal—beaches, climate and cuisine all figure, particularly for people from northern Europe. "Portugal has the sun, amazing food and amazing people," said Taihuttu, who has set up in the Algarve in the country's heavily visited south. "Portugal can become one of the best countries in Europe for living, for investing." —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 5 MAY 2022

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	38,929	9,422.50	1.2%	1.2%	23.3%	99,740,941	54,762,332	7,702	28.7	3.1	78.2%
Main Market	10,825	6,464.07	1.2%	1.2%	9.8%	139,250,450	19,603,951	5,014	17.5	1.6	21.8%
All Share	49,754	8,460.04	1.2%	1.2%	20.1%	238,991,391	74,366,283	12,716	25.9	2.7	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	29,517	1,990.21	1.6%	1.6%	22.6%	68,665,954	38,797,456	4,249	33.0	3.1	58.72%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,045	1,172.16	1.1%	1.1%	14.4%	574,293	438,365	158	27.8	1.7	2.08%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	827	1,618.28	0.2%	0.2%	21.1%	2,885,348	569,418	295	37.9	8.0	1.65%
CONSUMER STAPLES	217	711.95	0.3%	0.3%	-2.6%	236,939	138,495	38	18.0	1.5	0.43%
ENERGY	264	1,269.98	1.7%	1.7%	-11.1%	2,718,493	344,266	178	11.7	1.3	0.53%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,825	1,666.72	0.6%	0.6%	17.1%	109,829,652	16,046,971	2,868	13.0	2.3	9.60%
HEALTH CARE	245	494.42	2.6%	2.6%	-38.0%	14,115	7,146	21	16.3	2.4	0.49%
INDUSTRIALS	5,120	1,440.08	0.9%	0.9%	26.2%	14,246,930	9,615,548	2,286	7.9	1.5	10.19%
INSURANCE	643	1,541.03	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	382,857	36,418	45	7.7	1.0	1.28%
REAL ESTATE	2,969	1,378.87	0.6%	0.6%	4.0%	34,197,746	4,976,653	1,646	16.3	1.6	5.91%
TECHNOLOGY	9	669.30	0.0%	0.0%	-2.1%	3,500	322	1	-	0.8	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	4,344	1,416.01	0.2%	0.2%	30.0%	4,652,090	3,266,213	861	19.2	2.5	8.64%
UTILITIES	244	584.21	0.0%	0.0%	-2.6%	583,474	129,012	70	18.0	4.2	0.49%

Top Gainers

Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
PAPER	265	10.42	244,385	61,940	53
ATC	558	7.93	14,115	7,146	21
OSOUL	99	7.38	2,100	202	3
AQAR	75	7.14	274,216	20,391	20
KPPC	52.2	6.53	3,554,568	179,565	93

Top Losers

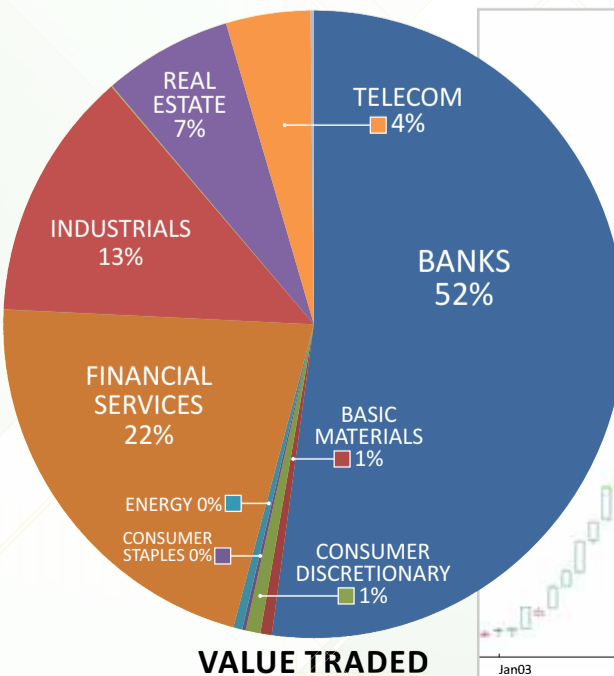
Stock	Last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
EKTITAB	15.6	-7.69	2,753,578	43,527	99
MARAKEZ	57	-5.00	42,860	2,491	8
WARBACAP	93	-4.12	11,526	1,110	12
NICBM	241	-3.60	2,500	603	1
AGHC	355	-3.53	336,204	118,827	33

Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
GFH	107	1.91	26,533,758	2,825,292	334
ARZAN	172	3.61	17,030,610	2,893,517	357
NBK	1,075	2.19	15,875,481	16,980,947	1,232
AUB	316	0.32	14,397,164	4,556,339	331
ALOOLA	94.9	0.42	12,862,887	1,225,409	320

Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
NBK	1,075	2.19	15,875,481	16,980,947	1,232
KFH	995	1.01	6,471,386	6,427,299	870
AGLTY	1,260	0.80	4,613,743	5,820,725	1,108
AUB	316	0.32	14,397,164	4,556,339	331
GBK	362	6.16	12,681,751	4,481,511	681



All Share Price Index YTD



Market Summary:

- Kuwait Boursa M. Cap reached 49.75 Billion KD, of which the Premier market is 78.2% while the Main market is 21.8%.
- The Premier index has shown strength and reached a new high level, while the Main index is yet to overcome the resistance it created due to weakness and high volatility.
- Technically, the All-Share index registered a new all-time high-level closing at 8460, support levels at 8394, 8367, and 8314, while resistance at 8463. Premier index registered a new all-time high-level closing at 9422, support levels at 9350, 9312, 9255, and 9190, while resistance at 9426. The Main index closed at 6464, with support levels at 6463, 6411, 6383, and 6357, while resistance at 6470.

Business

Nigerian airlines to suspend all flights over soaring fuel prices

Ukraine war, Western sanctions send fuel prices skyrocketing

ABUJA: Nigerian airlines are to suspend all flights from Monday over rising jet fuel prices, an umbrella organization of operators said on Saturday. The cost of fuel has soared worldwide since Russia invaded its neighbor Ukraine in February and the West responded by slapping sanctions on Moscow.

The Airline Operators of Nigeria said the price of jet fuel had jumped from 190 to 700 Nigerian naira per liter (from \$0.45 to almost \$1.70). "No airline in the world can absorb this kind of sudden shock from such an astronomical rise over a short period," the AON said.

The group said it would now cost a customer 120,000 naira (\$289) for a one-hour flight, a sum unaffordable for Nigerians "already experiencing a lot of difficulties". The AON therefore wished "to regrettably inform the general public that member airlines will discontinue operations nationwide with effect from Monday May 9, 2022 until further notice," it said. The aviation ministry responded by urging airlines to "consider the multiplier effect of shutting down operations, on Nigerians and global travelers".

The Nigerian consumer protection agency also implored "domestic airlines to consider the effect of

the proposed shutdown on passengers and the magnitude of difficulties and hardship associated with such an action". It added it was "concerned with rising consumer feedback that airlines have continued to sell tickets beyond the date announced for the proposed service shutdown."

Social media users made fun of the airlines suggesting customers find alternative means of travel.

"Airlines in Nigeria will shut down their services to passengers from Monday," one tweeted to more than 110,000 followers. "I hope you can trek from Lagos to Abuja?" they wrote, of the journey of more than 700 kilometers (more than 400 miles) by road between the country's largest city and its capital—one that normally takes just over an hour on an airplane.

"If you use the roads, I hope you have your ransom money?" they added, making light of abductions in other parts of the oil-rich country. Nigeria produces 1.4 million barrels of crude a day, but it refines little. It relies almost completely on fuel imports, making the local market vulnerable to disruptions.

The rising price of fuel has caused prolonged power blackouts in recent weeks. —AFP



NBK Money Markets Report

Fed dilemma over tackling inflation, averting recession

KUWAIT: The Federal Reserve deployed its most aggressive tightening policy in decades upon delivery of a 50bp rate hike, taking the federal funds rate to a range of 0.75 percent to 1 percent. The move marked the first time the Fed delivered a hike this size since 2000 and boosted rates at consecutive meetings since 2006. The 50bp rate hike was favored unanimously and Fed Chair Jerome Powell flagged future rate hikes at that pace, nixing a more worrisome and larger 75bp rate hike for the time being.

The Fed also announced it would begin trimming its \$8.96 trillion balance sheet next month. The balance sheet reduction is to happen in phases, allowing a capped level of proceeds from maturing bonds to roll off each month while reinvesting the rest. Starting June, the Fed will begin declining its holdings of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities at a combined monthly pace of \$47.5 billion (\$30 billion in Treasuries and \$17.5 billion in mortgage-backed securities) for three months, which will then pick up to \$95 billion (\$60 billion in Treasuries and \$35 billion in mortgage-backed securities).

"Inflation is much too high and we understand the hardship it is causing and we are moving expeditiously to bring it back down," Chair Jerome Powell said, maintaining his confidence in the Fed's ability to pull off a soft landing for the American economy.

US economy chimes on

Despite the latest quarterly GDP figure shrinking by 1.4 percent in the first quarter as higher prices begin to bite, the US economy did not show signs of any material slowdown. Although figures fell, activity in both the manufacturing and service sectors are above the thresholds that indicate growth. Softening growth in orders, production, and employment sent the ISM Manufacturing PMI unexpectedly dropping in April to 55.4, the lowest level since 2020, compared to 57.1 last month. The ISM Service PMI also dropped in April to 57.1 compared to 58.3 last month but recorded growth for the 23rd month in a row. The labor market remains in robust health. April non-farm payrolls matched last month's figure and beat estimates, adding 428K jobs while the unemployment rate held at 3.6 percent. On a brighter note, average hourly earnings grew, but less than expected rising by 0.3 percent instead of the estimated 0.4 percent.

Markets took a sharp U-turn after rallying the most since May 2020 celebrating the results of the Fed meeting and safety assurances from a 75bp rate hike.

US companies break long silence on abortion rights

NEW YORK: After carefully avoiding the taboo topic for decades, more and more US companies are taking a stand on the right to abortion, a sign of a new generation with growing influence and very different expectations than their predecessors. Mere hours after the leak of a draft Supreme Court opinion indicating the national right to abortion would be overturned, a variety of American businesses began to react publicly.

"Given what is at stake, business leaders need to make their voices heard and act to protect the health and well-being of our employees," Levi Strauss said in a statement. "That means protecting reproductive rights." Like the iconic denim brand, Apple has also pledged to cover costs for employees who have to travel to another state to get an abortion. Revoking the nationwide right to abortion "will jeopardize the human rights of millions of women," the review platform Yelp told AFP, saying it would have "a seismic impact on our society and economy" and urging other companies to "step up to safeguard their employees."

Since Texas in September implemented a law banning abortion after six weeks—before many women even know they are pregnant, and with no exceptions for rape or incest—the stigma on speaking out has

Solid US jobs growth and wages remain an enduring source of inflationary pressures. The Dow Jones, S&P 500, and Nasdaq all closed the week in the red and the 10-year Treasury yield shot back above 3 percent. The US Dollar index climbed to just under 104, its strongest level since 2002 before fluctuating after the data release, ending the week at 103.66. Despite the decline, it still remains the winner against its peers.

Operation stagnation

Europe just narrowly avoided slipping into a recession in its ongoing battle with inflation, war, and supply chain issues conspiring to drag the region's economy down. German GDP grew 0.2 percent last quarter compared to last quarter's 0.3 percent decline. However, the outlook of the German's economy darkened in recent weeks as the manufacturing sector suffered from input shortages and record price pressures caused by the war. Factory orders in Germany dropped by 4.7 percent in March, much higher than the anticipated 1 percent drop and the previous month's 0.8 percent drop, reflecting disruptions to global supply chains and the lack of access to the Russian market, a key export destination for German firms. German joblessness in April fell by 13K only, its slowest pace in a year compared to an 18K drop in the previous month, pointing to labor market vulnerabilities as the war in Ukraine and surging inflation weigh on Europe's largest economy. European Union proposals to restrict their reliance on Russian energy supplies will be a headwind on growth this year as alternative sources of energy will take time acquainting with the region's economy.

Inflation in the Eurozone continues to be driven mainly by energy prices, which are 38 percent higher in April than they were a year ago. Price pressures in the region were unveiled as monthly PPI figures in April rose by 5.3 percent compared to 1.1 percent in the previous month, and exceeded expectations of 4.9 percent increase.

Pause for thought

The European Central Bank's (ECB) monetary policy timeline has been complicated by the spillover from the war in Ukraine. It already signaled it will terminate quantitative easing in the third quarter, after which interest rate hikes will be considered. However, the latest economic data and its go-slow approach that is beginning to contrast its major peers may coerce the ECB to move sooner. Germany's 10-year Bund yields rose above 1 percent for the first time since 2015, closing the week at 1.13 percent. The euro tumbled, demoralized by an increasingly concerning economic outlook and persisting geopolitical complications. After breaking below 1.0500 for the first time since 2016, it collapsed to 1.0483 before closing the week at 1.0555.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30640.

started to break. Amazon, Uber and even the bank Citigroup have all announced they will cover the additional costs that the Texas legislation might cause for their employees.

"We're in a very unusual political time where this issue's come back up as a pressing political issue, and it will force companies to take a stand," said Maurice Schweitzer, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton business school. "Businesses that are located in states that might overturn (abortion access), they have to make a decision one way or the other: Are they going to offer that benefit in terms of travel to a location where those services could be accessed? Or are they not?" said Neeru Paharia, a professor at the Georgetown University McDonough School of Business. "It kind of forces a lot of these (companies) to take a stand on this issue."

According to The New York Times, Tesla, which moved its headquarters from California to Texas, has also pledged to cover its employees' abortion-related expenses. The newfound boldness of US businesses is also tied to the fact that "in this country, people who are pro-choice are larger in number than people who are anti-abortion," said Paharia.

The announcements by several leading companies are part of a "general trend" that has been developing for the past decade and "picked up steam" under former US president Donald Trump, she said. Immigration, LGBT rights, gun regulations, the Black Lives Matter movement, voting rights—hot-button issues keep coming up, in a climate of heightened polarization, and many companies have been pressured to respond by their employees. —AFP

Ogilvy EMEA chairman Paul O'Donnell retires

KUWAIT: Ogilvy on Sunday announced that Paul O'Donnell, Chairman of Ogilvy EMEA, will be retiring after 37 years with the agency. Throughout his tenure, O'Donnell has held a range of leadership positions spanning clients, geographies, and businesses.

"It has been an honor to have worked with thousands of Ogilvy colleagues and clients across the globe during my career. It has been a rich and fulfilling experience in which I have travelled the world and helped grow brands and businesses in just about every market you can imagine," O'Donnell said. "The longevity of my career was due to two things: working with great people and managing to bring enough variety to my roles. Now, I'm proud to leave behind a highly skilled and experienced team that is driving the business forward as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and we are already experiencing significant growth under their leadership," he added.

Andy Main, Global Chief Executive Officer of Ogilvy, said: "Paul's career, spanning four decades, has the hallmark of reinvention. He progressively challenged himself and the teams around him to adapt to the needs of our clients and take Ogilvy's business forward. We are very grateful to Paul for his leadership, passion, and dedication to Ogilvy, our clients, and our people. We wish him all the best as he begins this exciting new life chapter." O'Donnell joined Ogilvy in 1985 after completing a BA (Hons) in Politics from the University of Hull. His career began in telemarketing and account management, before rising through the ranks to help establish the Planning Department in London. He then went on to hold key positions in Jakarta, Singapore and Hong Kong where he spent three years as the President of Asia-Pacific. O'Donnell's skills as both a marketer and a business leader were apparent early on. During his term as Managing Director in Singapore he led the business to become one of the most creatively award-winning offices in the global network in a few short years.

He was a key part of the team that created OgilvyOne, being responsible for the brand and identity of the new agency. In 1998 he was appointed



Paul O'Donnell

Executive Vice President, International Development Director of OgilvyOne Worldwide, where he strengthened capabilities through more than 20 mergers and acquisitions. This was followed by becoming CEO of the Ogilvy Group in the UK, where he led a team that delivered five years of double-digit growth. In 2014 O'Donnell was appointed CEO for all Ogilvy operations across EMEA, becoming Chairman in 2021. In this capacity he led the project to consolidate all of Ogilvy's UK operations into the award-winning Sea Containers building on London's South Bank.

O'Donnell's experience in the industry extends far beyond Advertising to Digital Marketing, CRM, Data, Public Relations, Design and more. He has brought this range of experience to his role on Ogilvy's Global Executive Committee, which he has served on since 2014. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Data & Marketing (IDM), being one of the first participants in the BDMA Diploma. He holds the INSEAD Diploma in Consulting and Coaching for Change and a master's degree from HEC, Paris.

O'Donnell has also been active in the industry beyond Ogilvy. He served as a Trustee of the IDM, helping successfully merging it with the DMA to create a single powerhouse for the UK's Data and Direct industries. He has been the President and Chairman of the International Advertising Association, UK Chapter. He is currently the President of The European Association of Communication Agencies as well as being a Director of The American European Business Association. After Ogilvy, he intends to spend more time sailing, skiing, and playing tennis. He will also further his interest in wine by studying for the WSET Diploma and launching a specialist Sherry business. He also hopes to develop a small portfolio of non-Executive and mentoring roles.

US sanctions bitcoin 'mixer' firm for aiding N Korea

WASHINGTON: The United States announced sanctions Friday on virtual currency mixer Blender.io, saying the service was used by a North Korean hacker group to support weapons programs, the Treasury Department said. US officials said the case marks the first US sanctions on a virtual currency "mixer," which is used to conceal participants in transactions involving Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. Officials said the Lazarus Group, a North Korean-backed hacker group, stole \$620 million from the online game Axie Infinity, employing Blender to process more than \$20.5 million of the illicit funds that went to the benefit of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

"Today, for the first time ever, Treasury is sanctioning a virtual currency mixer," said Brian Nelson, a Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence. "We are taking action against illicit financial activity by the DPRK and will not allow state-sponsored thievery and its money-laundering enablers to go unanswered."

The action comes just days after Seoul reported the latest North Korean ballistic missile test, its 14th since January in a provocative streak that has drawn criticism from the United Nations and Washington. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said sanctions were needed on Blender, which has "enabled DPRK malicious cyber actors to mix illicit virtual currency with anonymous virtual currency to facilitate money laundering," according to a State Department statement.

"The United States remains committed to seeking diplomacy with the DPRK and calls on the DPRK to engage in dialogue," Blinken said. "At the same time,



we will continue to address the DPRK's unlawful cyber activities, as well as violations of UN Security Council resolutions."

Blender has been used to transfer more than \$500-million worth of Bitcoin since 2017. Besides aiding the DPRK, Treasury officials also found the service supported Russian-linked malign ransomware groups. "While the purported purpose is to increase privacy, mixers like Blender are commonly used by illicit actors," said the Treasury Department. The crackdown on Blender.io comes after US authorities on April 14 tied Lazarus Group to the Axie heist, one of the biggest to hit the crypto world. Lazarus Group gained notoriety in 2014 when it was accused of hacking into Sony Pictures Entertainment as revenge for "The Interview," a satirical film that mocked North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

In Axie Infinity, players participate in battles using colorful blob-like Axies, and are mainly rewarded with "Smooth Love Potions" (SLPs) that can be exchanged for cryptocurrency or cash—or invested back into the game's virtual world Lunacia. Attackers exploited weaknesses in the set-up put in place by the Vietnam-based firm behind Axie Infinity, Sky Mavis, which created an in-game currency and a sidechain with a bridge to the main ethereum blockchain.

The result was faster and cheaper—but ultimately less secure. —AFP



Workers take care of the creation of tartans at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.



A worker takes care of the creation of a tartan at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland. At a tartan workshop in northeast Scotland, machines slowly unwind miles of the familiar criss-cross patterns of fabric in green, red, black, blue and white. — AFP photos



A worker takes care of the creation of the 'Ukraine Forever Tartan' at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.

Ukrainian tartan proves a hit in Scotland

At a tartan workshop in northeast Scotland, machines slowly unwind miles of the familiar criss-cross patterns of fabric in green, red, black, blue and white. But one chequered design at the Macnaughton Holdings' giant factory in Keith stands out for its unconventional colors: yellow and royal blue. For a few weeks now, the Great Scot company, a client of the firm, has been weaving its "Ukraine Forever Tartan", to raise funds for victims of the war.

"We saw what was happening on the news and like so many people we were appalled," said Patrick Lewtas, Great Scot's head of operations. "We thought,

what can we do? We could do something to raise some money and give to charities. Let's design a tartan," he told AFP. "We've had an amazing response from this from all over the world." The tartan design refers to the pattern of interlocking stripes of two or more colors running horizontally and vertically through the cloth.

It is Scotland's national fabric and different colors, particularly on kilts, have long been identified with Scottish regions and Highland clans. Once banned in the 18th century, the design has since been popularized both as a political and a fashion statement, in Scotland and around the world. When the Ukrainian tartan was first unveiled on Great Scot's Facebook

page, it was shared 10,000 times, got nearly 140,000 likes and more than 2,700 comments. Ukraine's foreign ministry also praised the initiative on its Twitter account.

Proud history

More than two miles of the fabric have already been sold, with strong demand from the United States, as well as Ukrainian expatriates. The design is now included on the Scottish Register of Tartans, and each sale sees a donation to the UK Disasters Emergency Committee's Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. "Ultimately we'd like to raise more than £40,000 or £50,000 (\$50,000-

\$63,000, 48,000-59,000 euros)," said Great Scot founder Margo Page, wearing a belted red tartan jacket. "We're not there yet but people keep asking us to weave." To those who accuse her of profiting from the war to boost sales, Page says she has chosen independent, family-run factories to produce the tartan.

"We could profit from many, many things. The whole basis of Great Scot is all about putting cloth to work in UK family-owned artisanal mills," she said. "It's about keeping those traditions going." She added: "We're not the most commercially viable by choosing those traditional mills. Our balance sheet proves we didn't profit from this tartan." Creating a

Ukrainian tartan has not been without financial risk: money has had to be advanced for yarns, dyes and production.

Now Page says her dream is to "put a kilt on (Volodymyr) Zelensky", Ukraine's president. Euan Dalgliesh, assistant manager in the Keith factory, said: "We're proud of weaving our national fabric. "If it helps other people it's great. We're always surprised by the demand for tartan. Generation after generation, we've been weaving tartan. "But you think you're always at the peak but demand continues and continues. "We're proud of our history and Ukrainians are proud of their history." — AFP



A worker wears special glasses as she sews a tartan at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.



A worker takes care of the creation of the 'Ukraine Forever Tartan' at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.

'Brain training': New frontier for eSports

The days of playing your favourite game for hours at a time to stay competitive in eSports are gone, with gamers now focusing on brain development, if one leading team is to be believed. At the Team Liquid training centre in the Dutch city of Utrecht, coach David Tillberg-Persson, alias "Fuzzface", frowns and scratches his beard, focused, eyes glued to a screen.

Using the keyboard, the 28-year-old former Swedish player must recognise shapes and "catch" red dots, anticipating, identifying and reacting with increasing speed. Tillberg-Persson is testing a new training program before it is made available to the Team Liquid players themselves. Team Liquid is one of the biggest in the professional eSports leagues and they are keen to keep their edge, with the focus on brain training adding to the use of coaches.

The image of the overweight teenager locked in his room is a distant memory in a sector that has rapidly professionalised, with prize money worth millions of dollars,

and players leading disciplined lifestyles. With new generations of gamers adding to the pool of talent, competition is fierce and teams are now seeking to optimise the cognitive aspect, which is crucial in a field where every millisecond counts.

'Revolutionary'

Described as "revolutionary" by Team Liquid, the new training program, dubbed The Pro Lab, has also been implemented in California where the team is based. "We believe The Pro Lab will make waves in the eSports industry and beyond," Dutchman Victor Goossens, founder and co-CEO of Team Liquid, said in a statement.

"The Pro Lab is a first-of-its-kind training space backed by eSports science, fundamentally changing not only the way these athletes train but how they grow and evolve along with the industry," said Team Liquid. The Team Liquid players, young people living all over the world, will be subjected to cognitive tests involving relatively simple games, the results of which will then be analysed to target both shortcomings and qualities. There are four main types: attention, memory, control and anticipation.

"We are trying to use technology and data to make our practice more efficient and more focused than what we are used to, sitting behind a PC for eight hours," explains Brittany Lattanzio, senior athletics manager at Team Liquid. "At the very, very top level it's a game of inches. The

smallest detail can make your team perform so much better than other teams", the 32-year-old Canadian tells AFP. The goal is to determine training activities for each player to improve concentration, reaction speed or memory.

'Future of eSports'

"All Team Liquid athletes are going to play the games and based on that, we're going to get a lot of data from which we create profiles," says Rafick de Mol, 28, an analyst at BrainsFirst, the Dutch company responsible for the development of Pro Lab. "It's a fairly recent development and we're at the forefront of that-that can add so much value because it provides information that other tests or conversations don't provide," observes De Mol. "It's part of the future of esports," he said.

"Fuzzface", the coach of a team that plays PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG), a multiplayer combat and survival video game, is eagerly awaiting the first results. "Historically, training has been very focused on just game performance" but the new tests will give them much more data to work with, says the coach, who is already a veteran in a "very young" industry. Lattanzio said it made sense to use technology in a such a tech-based field. "There are so many more tools that you can use on a computer than you can with like running around on a football field," she said. — AFP

U2's Bono puts on 'freedom' show in Kyiv metro

Irish rock star Bono praised Ukraine's fight for "freedom" during a performance in a metro station in downtown Kyiv Sunday, where the U2 frontman also issued his own prayer "for peace". From the platform of a Kyiv metro station, the 61-year-old rock icon belted out U2 classics "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "Desire" and "With or without you". "The people in Ukraine are not just fighting for your own freedom, you are fighting for all of us who love freedom," said Bono during a break.

The singer also referenced the past conflicts in the band's native Ireland and

the troubles it had with a more powerful neighbor. "We pray that you will enjoy some of that peace soon," said Bono. The surprise appearance by Bono—a long time humanitarian who frequently lends his voice to a variety of causes including the fight against poverty and AIDS—came as air raid sirens echoed in the Ukrainian capital and fighting raged in the country's east.

At one point, Bono invited a Ukrainian soldier to sing along who called on the world's support for the embattled country as they covered "Stand by me". Bono performed alongside U2's guitarist 'The Edge' to a small crowd of fans including fatigued members of Ukraine's armed forces. "It's some good emotions, that's all," said a member of the Ukrainian territorial forces in the audience. "It's a strange feeling, like being a child going to first grade," said 36-year-old university lecturer, Olesia Bezsmertna, ahead of the show. — AFP



Bono (Paul David Hewson), an Irish singer-songwriter, activist, and the lead vocalist of the rock band U2 (left), and Antytilla, a Ukrainian musical band leader and now the serviceman in the Ukrainian Army Taras Topolia, perform at subway station which is bomb shelter, in the center of Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on May 8, 2022. — AFP



Yogurt products on the assembly line at the Stonyfield Farm plant in Londonderry, New Hampshire. The new production line at Stonyfield's Londonderry plant churns out 800,000 plastic yogurts a week, and the company, a subsidiary of French dairy giant Lactalis, plans to build a second line this year. — AFP photos

Yogurt maker Lactalis betting on US appetite

French dairy giant Lactalis is betting big on North America, adapting to local preferences to attract consumers while it manages country-specific issues, such as the extreme volatility of US milk prices. On the new production line at Stonyfield Farm in Londonderry, New Hampshire, a Lactalis subsidiary since 2017, 800,000 yogurts are pumped out every week. The organic brand is seeing strong demand for its products aimed at babies and children, so Stonyfield plans to build a second production line for them this year.

To nibble at US market share in the yogurt sector, where Lactalis is behind Danone, Chobani and Yoplait, the company has also adopted targeted strategies. Unlike Europeans, who often eat yogurt at the end of a meal, Americans "have yogurt for breakfast or as a snack," said Esteve Torrens, Stonyfield's CEO. "So the yogurts must be more nutritious, and in larger portions," he adds, noting that individual cups in the US market generally weigh 170 grams, compared to just 125 grams in France.

The company also is monitoring changes in taste, like the thick, high-protein and low-sugar Icelandic yogurts from the Siggi's brand, acquired by Lactalis in 2018. "When I came to the United States as a student, a lot of foods were full of sugar,"



founder Siggi Hilmarsson recalls, noting that the best-selling yogurt at the time contained proportionally more sugar than a soda. He introduced Icelandic skyr to the American market in 2006, but sales really took off in 2012 and 2013 when "sugar replaced fat as public enemy number one in healthy eating," he said.

Driver shortage

He decided to sell his business four

years ago to Lactalis in order to promote his yogurt in other countries. The brand is now available in France, Australia, Canada and South Korea. With Siggi's and Stonyfield, as well the natural, specialty and organic cheeses acquired from Kraft in 2021, and the labne and other dairy products from Karoun integrated into its portfolio in 2017, the United States will become Lactalis' largest market this year after France. It is just ahead of Canada

where the group, with an annual turnover of 22 billion euros, has grown in recent years, especially after buying Ultima Foods.

The firm relies on its experience in the sector and its global reach to relaunch products whose financial performance no longer satisfied their former owners, and to expand some promising brands. Most of the new machines installed at the Stonyfield production site come from

Europe "because we have historical relations with our suppliers and they know what we need," production manager Mathieu Le Duey told reporters during a tour of the plant.

A private company founded in Laval, France in 1933 and still controlled by the Besnier family, Lactalis first entered the North American market when it opened an import-export office in the early 1980s to introduce French products. The group has expanded through various acquisitions and now has 30 sites and 7,400 employees in Canada and the United States.

More recently it has had to grapple with issues particular to the American market, including labor shortages and volatile dairy prices, which are based on trading on the Chicago exchange. "For two years, it's been hellish. We can't find carriers because they have trouble finding drivers," said Gilles Meziere, the group's North America chief executive. "We have very high turnover rates in our factories," sometimes forcing the temporary suspension of production lines, he adds. At the Stonyfield factory, the group "had to bring in executives for a day because we couldn't put the products in the boxes." — AFP

Fathers relive nightmare on Gaza's Wehda Street

On a fateful night in May 2021, three Palestinian fathers living on Gaza City's Wehda Street shared a common tragedy in air strike. Flashbacks haunt surviving family members to this day. "I was there under the rubble, I could hear my daughter Dana's voice screaming: 'Daddy! Daddy!'. I shouted back but she didn't answer anymore," sighs Riad Eshkountana in front of the wasteland where the family apartment, part of a

three-storey block, used to stand. On May 16, the building collapsed in Zionist attacks targeting the Gaza "metro", a network of tunnels built by the Islamist movement Hamas which rules the impoverished coastal territory of 2.3 million residents.

Eshkountana was in the living room when his building was hit. "I rushed to the boys' room. I saw my wife trying to pick them up, but the ceiling suddenly collapsed on top of them and the floor gave way under my feet," he said. "Under the rubble, I heard my two-and-a-half-year-old son Zayn crying out until his voice died out. When I was pulled out of the rubble, I was told Dana and Zayn were now martyrs, like my wife Abeer," said Eshkountana, 43, choking back sobs.

'Life changed forever'

He lost four of his five children as well as his wife that night. "At that moment, my life changed forever... If 100 years passed, I would still remember them," said the father who emerged alive from the rubble along with seven-year-old daughter Suzy. Initially, they moved into an apartment near



Palestinian Alaa Abu Al-Ouf, 47, sits at his rented grocery store on Wehda street in Gaza City.

Wehda Street, before settling in another one not far off, together with his mother, Suzy and a new wife. "Almost every day I go back to the destroyed house, I remember my life with the children, moments with the family," said Eshkountana, who also lost his possessions in the rubble, including family photos.

'Impossible to forget'

After last year's 11-day war between Hamas and Zionists that left 260 dead in the Gaza Strip and 14 in the Jewish state, Gaza's few psychotherapists converged on Wehda Street to help survivors of the grieving Eshkountana, Abu al-Ouf and Kolak families. "I thought we were safe on Wehda Street," a busy area with its clothing stores, cafes and a bakery, says Shukri al-Kolak, 50, who lost 22 family members, including his wife, three of his children and his parents.

The Kolaks' apartment, located in a building just 50 meters from the Eshkountanas' home, also collapsed in a crater left by the air strike that left a total of some 40 dead. The father survived along with daughter Zaynab and son Osama. "I remember the dead every moment. I try to forget, but it's impossible," says Kolak, a

tall man with curly hair, who says he has not bought any Zionist products since the war and will never remarry. "I would be wrong for any woman. No woman could live with my suffering," he said.

'Nightmares during the day'

Alaa Abu al-Ouf, 49, says he stopped psychological counseling for his surviving children "because it reminded them too much of what happened". He lost 14 family members in the strikes on Wehda Street, including his wife Diana, who died of her injuries, and daughters Shaima and Rawan.

After the war, Abu al-Ouf moved to an apartment 200 metres from his former address where he now lives with his second wife, their baby daughter, and his two older children. Every day, he returns to a mini-mart near the old home, wondering if one day his apartment and life will ever be rebuilt. "I don't have nightmares at night, I have them during the day, every time I pass here, where my house used to be. Everything here reminds me of the family I lost." — AFP



Palestinian Alaa Abu Al-Ouf, 47, looks at pictures of his wife and two daughters who died in a Zionist airstrike, during an interview at a rented apartment on Wehda street in Gaza City.



An aerial picture shows a view of Wehda Street in Gaza City.



A Palestinian man walks past the site where the Abu al-Ouf building stood on Wehda street. On a fateful night in May 2021, three Palestinian families living on Gaza City's Wehda Street shared a common tragedy in Zionist air strike. — AFP photos

Nepali climbers begin this year's Everest summits

Eleven Nepali climbers reached the top of Mount Everest on Saturday, the first of hundreds of climbers expected to summit the world's highest mountain from its southern approach in the coming weeks. Among them was Kami Rita Sherpa, who extended his own record as the person with the most Everest summits.

The team reached the peak as part of an expedition to fix ropes leading up the ascent, setting the route for foreign climbers. "We have received information that the rope-fixing team of eleven climbers has reached the peak at around 6:55 pm Nepal time," tourism department official Bhisma Raj Bhattarai told AFP. Nepal has issued 316 permits to mountaineers for this year's spring climbing season, which runs from mid-April to the end of May.

Most Everest hopefuls are each escorted by a Nepali guide, meaning more than 600 climbers will tread the same path to the top of the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak in the coming weeks. "Now the road has opened for other climbers to summit Everest, we will see teams move up in the coming days," said Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, which led the rope-fixing team. Mingma Sherpa added that Kami Rita Sherpa "has reached the summit for the 26th time, making a new record". His record-setting 25th ascent was also made as he led rope-fixers up Everest last year.

"Some people chase records, but I have not been doing this for records," Kami Rita Sherpa said in an interview with AFP in March, before heading off to Everest. "I think about how we can increase tourism in Nepal, what can we do for more mountain climbers to come here and how can we satisfy them and make them happy." The 52-year-old followed in his father's footsteps and became a mountain guide, first summiting the peak in 1994. He has climbed Everest almost every year since.

A Chinese expedition reached the top of Everest on Wednesday from its north side in Tibet, according to Chinese state broadcaster CGTN. Although China continues to ban foreign climbers because of the coronavirus pandemic, Nepal reopened its peaks to mountaineers last year. With COVID-19 cases receding, expedition operators in Nepal are hopeful for a busier climbing season this year. There has already been one fatality this season - a Nepali climber carrying equipment uphill was found dead last month. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Photo shows workers processing orchids to be exported for wholesale at an orchid farm in the central Thai province of Nakhon Pathom. Once considered a popular pastime among the Thai elite, orchid growing has developed into a multi-million dollar industry and the kingdom is the world's biggest exporter, but the pandemic has seen one in five farms shut recently and growers are expecting further hits due to the war in Ukraine. — AFP photos



A worker watches as orchids are watered at an orchid farm in the central Thai province of Nakhon Pathom.



Workers process orchids to be exported for wholesale at an orchid farm in the central Thai province of Nakhon Pathom.



Photo shows a worker watering orchids at an orchid farm in the central Thai province of Nakhon Pathom.



A vendor moves baskets of orchids at the Pak Khlong Talat wholesale flower market in Bangkok.

BLOOMING SHAME: PANDEMIC, UKRAINE WAR HURTS THAILAND'S ORCHID INDUSTRY

Thailand's orchid growers, already weary after two years of being battered by the pandemic, are bracing for fresh blows to their livelihood as the war in Ukraine and changing weather patterns further cloud their futures. Once considered a popular pastime among the elite in Thailand, orchid growing has developed into a multi-million dollar industry, and the kingdom is the world's biggest producer and exporter of cut orchids.

But the pandemic has seen one in five farms shut recently, according to the Thai Orchid Exporter Association. "No one has the heart to buy flowers, and transportation is very complicated," said Somchai Lerdrungwitayachai as he stares in despair at the sea of purple at his orchid farm west of Bangkok.

He grows Dendrobium Sonia orchids—a hybrid variety with delicate white and purple petals. Popular in Japan, China and the United States, they are used for anything from religious ceremonies to college

graduations. At his 20-hectare property, workers treat the cut flowers with a special solution before trimming the stems and fitting them with a small vial, containing vitamins and nutrients, to preserve their fresh appearance for up to two weeks.

But times are tough: Somchai has been dipping into his savings for two years to keep paying his 50-odd employees. COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have sent the price of fertilisers and pesticides up by 30 percent, he said. Adding to his woes are dramatically falling sales: pre-pandemic China bought 270 million orchid stems annually from Thailand—a figure that dropped to 170 million last year.

Once accounting for 80 percent of Somchai's export income, China has been hit with coronavirus lockdowns in a number of cities, including its biggest: Shanghai. Transporting orchids to the key market by road used to take up to three days, but the same journey can now take

between eight and 10 days. In the flower business, time is money, and wilted orchids are frequently discarded before they can ever reach a Shanghai customer's home to be admired.

'Time is running out'

While Somchai delivers his produce directly overseas, the majority of orchid growers in Thailand use large exporters based in Bangkok. Air-freight costs have tripled or quadrupled in recent months, depending on the destination, said Wuthichai Pipatmanomai, vice-president of the Thai Orchid Exporter Association and co-owner of Sun International Flower, a major exporter. Before the pandemic, the company was delivering 3.6 million orchids a month to China, Japan, Vietnam and the United States.

Now, only 1.2 million flowers leave the warehouse, and he has had to let go of half of his staff. "We have asked the authorities for financial support, but we

have not received anything," Wuthichai said. "Time is running out." Increasing his selling price by 20 percent has resulted in several importers—particularly those in Europe—dropping him to concentrate on more local flowers. The only hope is that sales to Japan remain stable and those to the United States increase with the start of the wedding season, he said.

However, in the long term, changing weather patterns are also troubling for growers. "We are increasingly experiencing the effects of climate change," Wutachai said, pointing to a recent surprise cold snap at the start of April in which the temperature dropped sharply from 36 Celsius (97 Fahrenheit) to 21C in just 24 hours, affecting orchid production. "We are worried that these situations will occur more and more frequently."

Wilted fortunes

Thailand's coronavirus restrictions have also hit domestic sales—a lack of tourists

meant restaurants and hotels scaled back orders, and bans on gatherings affected Thai Buddhist ceremonies. And despite the kingdom's international reopening, local demand remains lukewarm. While Bangkok's biggest flower market appears busy—wholesalers can be seen scurrying through colourful aisles laden with large woven baskets containing flowers—vendors tell a different story.

Than Tha Win, waiting patiently at her orchid stall for customers, said her income is down 70 percent. "Everyone is still afraid to come to the market because of Covid-19," the 21-year-old said. Meanwhile, 45-year-old vendor Waew said she now has about 600 unsold orchids left over daily and tries to stem her losses by plucking off the petals and selling them as a separate product. "Stop working with orchids? Impossible, I don't know how to do anything else," she said. — AFP

TikTok to launch ad revenue-sharing program for creators

TikTok has announced an ad revenue-sharing program with the social media platform's most prominent creators, moving closer to a model already used by its competitors. The short-video format app has become wildly popular in recent years with more than a billion active users globally, but has been criticized for not providing a way for creators to effectively monetize content.

Under the new TikTok Pulse program, companies can place their ads next to user content in specific categories, including health, fashion, cooking, gaming and others—and creators will get a cut. "We will begin exploring our first advertising revenue share program with creators, public figures and media publishers," the company, a subsidiary of Chinese tech firm ByteDance, said in a statement.

"We're focused on developing monetization solutions in available markets so that creators feel valued and rewarded on TikTok." Only accounts with at least 100,000 subscribers will be eligible for the first phase of the program, TikTok said. The firm's North America General Manager Sandie Hawkins told tech website The Verge that Pulse will roll out in the United States in June, and that approved creators will get a 50 percent cut of ad revenue.

In 2021, TikTok generated an estimated 4.6 billion dollars in revenue, according to industry publication Business of Apps. That figure is more than double the previous year's revenue, but remains roughly on par with competitor Snapchat, which has about 300 million daily users, according to Snapchat's data. Other major social networks that focus on video, such as YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat, have already implemented revenue-sharing systems. — AFP



A man looks at a mural depicting the tiger fight, during the rain petition ritual in Zitlala, Guerrero state, Mexico.

Mexican tiger fight ritual draws blood to bring rain

Seeking to appease the god of storms and end a drought, men and women in tiger costumes whip each other mercilessly into submission in an ancient ritual in southern Mexico. "They say it's a drop of blood for a drop of rain," Karina Vicente says as she prepares to take part in the annual tradition for the first time. "I'm very excited but nervous,"

the 22-year-old psychology student tells AFP in the town of Zitlala in Guerrero, one of Mexico's poorest and most violent states.

In the past, the 300-year-old indigenous ceremony to bring rain and plentiful harvests was only for men. But these days, women also want to help keep the three-century-old tradition alive, even if the lashes do hurt, Vicente says. According to tradition, blood spilled in the May 5 ritual, called Atsatsilistli, is an offering for the rain god Tlaloc. The sound of each whiplash represents a clap of thunder, the yellow color of the costumes a drought and the whip a tiger's tail.

Doing battle

Before the fight begins, the residents of Zitlala split into two groups and dance under the intense sun along steep streets, to the rhythm of banda, a type of



A boy in a tiger costume walks through the neighborhood of San Francisco during the rain petition ritual in Zitlala, Guerrero state, Mexico.

Mexican music. First, the male contestants enter the battleground—the town's basketball court—to fight for about five minutes at a time, watched by crowds of spectators.

"Come on! Come on!" a burly, bare-chested man says, challenging his opponent. Minutes later, he raises his arms in victory, blood starting to seep from the wounds inflicted by his rival. Referees stand by ready to separate the fighters if they break the rules. The musicians of both sides play simultaneously, adding to a chaotic atmosphere. Soon the air is filled with the aroma of mezcal, an agave spirit that the contestants drink and use to wet their whips to make them more effective.

Equality replaces machismo

Three hours later, it is the women's turn. They greet and hug each other before and after the fight, unlike the men.

Within minutes, Vicente's opponent removes her mask in defeat after some well-aimed lashes. "I felt good, proud!" Vicente declares, savoring her victory. The ritual ensures the rainy season begins punctually—a lifeline for a community that relies on corn and other crops, says resident Cleofas Cojito, 60.

She welcomes the participation of women in the tradition, which was once so brutal that some contestants even died, Cojito says. "Now there's equality. There isn't so much machismo anymore," she adds. This year, around 30 women fought—compared with three at their debut in 2019—and 200 men. The next day, Vicente feels sore, but motivated. "I'll fight again. We have to look after what we've already won," she says with a smile. — AFP



Gabriel Vicente prays at an altar before the tiger fight during the rain petition ritual in Zitlala, Guerrero state, Mexico.



People of the San Mateo neighborhood, dressed in tiger costumes, walk during the rain petition ritual in Zitlala, Guerrero state, Mexico. — AFP photos

Sports

Giannis scores 42, lifts Bucks over Celtics as Warriors rout Grizzlies

Painful defeat as Morant limps out with knee injury

SAN FRANCISCO: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 42 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and passed off eight assists to spark defending champion Milwaukee over Boston 103-101 on Saturday in the NBA playoffs. The Greek superstar center also had two blocked shots and two steals for the Bucks, who seized a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference second round series, which continues at Milwaukee on Monday. In Western Conference action, the Golden State Warriors went up 2-1 on the Memphis Grizzlies with a 142-112 blowout in San Francisco.

The defeat was even more painful for the Grizzlies as they saw star Ja Morant limp out with an apparent knee injury late in the fourth quarter. Morant had been sensational in defeat, scoring 34 points with three rebounds and seven assists. He appeared to hurt his knee in a tussle for a loose ball in the final period.

But the Grizzlies couldn't slow a Warriors team that connected on 63.1% of their shots, with Stephen Curry leading the way with 30 points and Jordan Poole adding 27 off the bench. Klay Thompson scored 21 for the Warriors, who had six players score in double figures in a comprehensive victory. Memphis got off to a hot start, leading by as many as 13 on the way to a 28-26 lead at the end of the first quarter.

But the Warriors responded and pulled ahead in the second quarter, building a 64-57 halftime lead that would have been bigger but for Morant's buzzer-beating three-pointer from halfcourt. The Warriors took a 21-point lead into the final quarter and were never threatened. "We were a little bit more composed," Curry said. "They got off to a hot start, like six threes in the first quarter. We had to settle in. We still had too many turnovers. "But our shot selection, moving the ball, let us settle in the game a little bit, helped our defense, helped us run away with the game."

In Milwaukee, the Celtics rallied from 14 points down to pull within 103-100 with 4.6 seconds remaining, and Boston's Marcus Smart sank the first of two free throws to lift the visitors within the final margin. Smart missed the second free throw with



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks is defended by Al Horford #42 of the Boston Celtics during the second half of Game Three of the Eastern Conference Semifinals at Fiserv Forum on May 07, 2022.— AFP

hopes of grabbing a rebound and making a tying inside shot, but Robert Williams missed a tip-in try and Al Horford's tip-in was ruled to have come after the final buzzer, giving Milwaukee the victory. "It was very close," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer acknowledged of the Horford tip-in.

Celtics coach Ime Udoka said the foul by Jrue Holiday on Smart, ruled before a shot attempt, should have been seen as coming in the act of shooting and brought three free throws, which would have given Smart a chance to tie the game at the line. "He was going into the shot," Udoka said. "Poor no-call. It's a shot. He's curling into a shot. Bad missed call." Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said the Bucks were "fortunate it was two free throws but we were not trying to foul him."

Sloppy Celtics

Udoka also said it should not have come down to that. "We were sloppy in the third execution-wise and allowed them to get that lead, then battled back in the fourth," he said. "But we can play a lot better." Holiday had 25 points for the Bucks, while Lopez added 13 points and 10 rebounds. Antetokounmpo, meanwhile, bounced back from a poor shooting night in game two, connecting on 16 of 30 shots. "I know what my strengths are," Antetokounmpo said. "Just try to read what's in front of me and just play with my instincts." Jaylen Brown led Boston with 27 points and had 12 rebounds, while Horford had 22 points and 16 rebounds for the Celtics, but Jayson Tatum went 4-of-19 from the floor and scored only 10 points.— AFP



BUDAPEST: Team BikeExchange Jayco Mitchelton's British rider Simon Yates competes during the second stage of the Giro d'Italia 2022 cycling race, a 9.2 kilometers individual time trial in Budapest, Hungary, on May 7, 2022.— AFP

Yates wins Giro time-trial, Van der Poel retains lead

BUDAPEST: British rider Simon Yates of BikeExchange-Jayco won stage two of the Giro d'Italia on Saturday, crossing the Budapest finish line of the 9.2km time-trial 03sec faster than Mathieu van der Poel, who retained the overall lead, while Tom Dumoulin was third. Dutch maverick Van der Poel holds onto the pink jersey by 11 seconds from Yates while the 2017 champion Dumoulin is third at 16sec after the inner-city run, the second of three stages in Hungary before a switch to Italy. Yates timed 9min 50sec round the picture-postcard run around the monuments and sights of the city with its Gothic parliament, the Danube river and thermal baths.

The circuit, with its tight bends and varying surfaces and gradients, made the stage a test of bike-handling skills, although the forecast rain held off. "It was pretty special," said van der Poel. "There were a lot of fans yesterday and again today again and I was surprised by the beauty of the city, to be honest." Third in the Giro last year, Yates has never been known for time-trialing, but with only 26km of the discipline on the 2022 route the mountains are the more important terrain.

"I've only won two time trials. I've done some good ones and some bad ones. But I'm sure this is my best," said Yates, who flew over the cobbled section where

others appeared to bounce around. This was Yates' fifth stage win on the Giro. "We'll celebrate this tonight but it's a tiny section of the Giro, with all those mountains coming up," he said. "It was a 12-minute effort today, from Etna on, it will be an hour-long effort. Of course, I'm thrilled to have gained time and not lost any."

Yates led the Giro for almost two weeks in 2018 before a late meltdown and has promised to be more patient this time round. Van der Poel was rueful of his narrow miss of a second stage win in two days following his triumph at the Visegrad Citadel Friday. "I would have loved to win, the difference between winning and second is very close, isn't it?" said the Alpecin-Fenix rider who wore the Tour de France yellow jersey, as race leader, for six days last year.

"The best time-trial specialists are not here," he said. "I knew there was a good chance of keeping the jersey. That was the main goal." "It's a discipline I don't really spend much time on, so I think I can be happy." Pre-Giro favorite Richard Carapaz came 19th at 28sec, while another fancied rider Romain Bardet was 17th at 24sec. Astana Qazaqstan's Miguel Angel Lopez and Mikel Landa of Bahrain-Victorious both dropped more time than expected.

Sunday's stage, the last of the Hungarian trio, is a flat 201km race from Kaposvar to Balatonfured. It should end in a mass bunch sprint when Mark Cavendish and the fast men can unleash their speed. The Giro then goes home to Italy where stage four takes the peloton up the volcanic slopes of Mount Etna on the Island of Sicily of for the first meaningful skirmish between the overall contenders. "If things go as expected, I should be able to keep the pink jersey until Etna, but then, I think, I will lose it," said van der Poel.— AFP

"This is my first 100 in a few years. So I put a lot of expectations on myself, and so I feel like I give myself a B+ overall." Japan's Yuki Koiike took second place in 10.22sec, and Australian Rohan Browning came third in 10.23sec. The 100m season best is held by Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala, who ran it in 9.85sec on Saturday in Nairobi. Spectators were barred from Olympic athletics events over Covid-19 concerns, but on Sunday fans filled the stadium's lower stands, clapping enthusiastically for their favourites.

"To come here and compete in the Olympic Stadium is always exciting, and it's a blessing," said Coleman, who in March took silver in the 60m at the World Indoor Championships, losing out to his rival Lamont Marcell Jacobs. American athletes dominated the main events on Sunday, including Rai Benjamin, who took silver in the 400m hurdles at last year's Olympics with a blistering time of 46.17sec.

On Sunday he came first in the same event, clocking in at 48.60sec. "Time was slow, I'll say that much, but it felt really good to be back out there," he said. And US runner Michael Norman won the men's 400m, but said he was not happy with his time of 44.62sec.— AFP

World champion Coleman wins first 100m after ban

TOKYO: US sprint star Christian Coleman took first place in his 100-metre debut after returning from a ban for breaching anti-doping rules, clocking a "pretty decent" 10.09sec in Tokyo on Sunday. The reigning 100m world champion made his comeback in January after the 18-month suspension for failing to adhere to whereabouts requirements, which kept him from last summer's Tokyo Olympics. On Sunday the 26-year-old finally hit the track in Japan's National Stadium for his first 100m this season—an experience that left him feeling "pretty good" overall. "I feel excited to have opened up my season with a pretty decent time... it's definitely something I can continue to build off," Coleman said after the race at the Golden Grand Prix 2022.

Lucknow crush Kolkata to top the IPL table

PUNE: Fast bowler Avesh Khan helped Lucknow Super Giants hammer Kolkata Knight Riders by 75 runs on Saturday to go top of the IPL table as teams jostle to secure a play-off spot. Lucknow bundled out Kolkata, who were chasing 177 for victory, for 101 to replace fellow newcomers Gujarat Titans at the summit, with the Twenty20 tournament moving towards its business end.

In the first match of the day, Rajasthan Royals beat Punjab Kings by six wickets to improve their chances of making the final four. The result meant five-time winners Mumbai Indians crashed out of the play-off race after eight losses in 10 matches. Quinton de Kock, who made a 29-ball 50, and Deepak Hooda, who hit 41 off 27 deliveries, put on 71 runs to lay the foundation of Lucknow's 176 for seven after being put in to bat first in Pune.

Kolkata were never in the chase after they lost their top four including skipper Shreyas Iyer, for six, and Aaron Finch, for 14, early. They fell to 25-4. "Having skill is good, but bowling well under pressure and being brave, trusting the best ball on the wicket without being worried about who's playing makes our bowling unit commendable," said Lucknow skipper KL Rahul. "I can't think of any game where we've had a complete performance, and no team will find the perfect performance. We are sticking to our plans and winning which is great."

West Indies power

West Indies big-hitter Andre Russell gave them some hope during his 19-ball 45 but the innings fell apart after his departure. Russell attempted to turn the tide with three fours and five sixes but was caught at third-man off Avesh who finished with figures of 3-19. West Indies' Jason Holder wrapped up the Kolkata innings with two successive wickets and a run out.

The left-right batting pair of De Kock and Hooda set up victory after they took the attack to the opposition bowlers following Rahul's run out for nought in the first over. Marcus Stoinis, who hammered 28 off 14, and Holder, who made a four-ball 13, also added to the total with their breezy cameos and hit five sixes between them in a 30-run over from Shivam Mavi.—AFP

Alcaraz downs Djokovic in thriller to reach final

MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz believes the sky is the limit after becoming the first player to beat Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic at the same tournament on clay as he stormed into the Madrid Open final on Saturday. The 19-year-old Spaniard reached his second ATP Masters final in five weeks and claimed his first win over a reigning world number one, overcoming Djokovic 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) in front of a sell-out home crowd at the Caja Magica.

Alcaraz has a tour-leading seven wins against top-10 players this season. He enters Sunday's final against Stefanos Tsitsipas or defending champion Alexander Zverev—carrying a nine-match winning streak, having triumphed in Barcelona a couple of weeks ago. He is the youngest player to beat a world number one in 17 years. Asked if he sees a limit to what he can achieve, Alcaraz said: "I don't think so. Tomorrow I will go for the final as I did in Miami. I'm really happy to be able to play a second Masters 1000 final."

"I would say that I feel ready to compete against them (the top players) in every single tournament, in every single surface," added the Miami champion. A calm and collected Alcaraz kicked off the match with a service break, thanks to a well-timed cross-court backhand passing shot. He was soon up 3-1 on the top seed. Djokovic, who turns 35 this month, struck back to draw level at 4-4 as the set went to a tie-break. A fired-up Djokovic sped to a 5-1 advantage and soon got his hands on four set points.

Alcaraz saved the first with an aggressive return and another with an ace. The Spaniard saved a third with a spot-on drop shot to narrow his deficit to 5-6 but Djokovic closed out the set on his fourth opportunity after 62 minutes. The players were neck and neck in the second set, until Alcaraz upped the ante in game 12, winning key battles at the net and perfectly using his drop shot when he needed to. The Murcia native claimed a break and the set with a sensational get, running down a Djokovic drop shot and hitting a winner from outside the doubles alley.



MADRID: Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates after winning against Serbia's Novak Djokovic during their 2022 ATP Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament men's singles semi-final match at the Caja Magica in Madrid on May 7, 2022.— AFP

Djokovic cuts hand

Djokovic staved off three break points on his serve in game four of the decider, digging deep for a 2-2 hold. The world number one fell during the next game and needed some medical attention for a wound on his right hand. Two more break points came and went for Alcaraz on his opponent's serve as Djokovic battled to hold for 3-3. It was Djokovic's turn to put pressure on the Alcaraz serve, but the seventh seed successfully sidestepped a break point to hold in game seven.

The crowd went wild as Alcaraz blasted a forehand winner for his first match point. Djokovic responded with a steely ace and dug deep to level at 5-5. It all came down to a final-set tie-break and the Caja Magica was shaking with "si se puede" ("Yes you can") chants. Alcaraz drew first blood, opening up a 4-2 gap. Djokovic saved a second match point for 5-6 but Alcaraz was third time lucky, claiming a statement three-hour 35-minute victory with another forehand winner—his 35th of the match.—AFP



TOKYO: USA's Christian Coleman (right) and Australia's Rohan Browning compete in the men's 100m final during the Golden Grand Prix 2022 athletics competition at the National Stadium in Tokyo on May 8, 2022.— AFP

Sports

Liverpool's Premier League title bid suffer major blow

Man United concede four in 'humiliating' defeat at Brighton

LONDON: Liverpool's Premier League title bid suffered a blow as Tottenham earned a 1-1 draw against the quadruple chasers, while Manchester United crashed to a "humiliating" 4-0 defeat at Brighton on Saturday. Jurgen Klopp's side fell behind to Son Heung-min's second-half goal at Anfield before Luis Diaz equalised in the closing stages. Son tapped in Ryan Sessegnon's cross in the 56th minute after good work from Harry Kane in the build-up. Diaz bagged Liverpool's fortuitous equalizer when his 20-yard drive went in off Rodrigo Bentancur.

Liverpool, who have already won the League Cup and have Champions League and FA Cup finals to come, moved to the top of the table above Manchester City on goal difference. But champions City will go three points clear of Liverpool if they beat Newcastle in their game in hand at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday. That would be a massive boost to City's hopes of retaining the title with just three games left for both teams after this weekend.

"It is incredibly difficult to play against an opponent with world-class players and a world-class manager when they have had a week to prepare and we play every three days," Klopp said. "The dressing room is not flying, come on, but there are other games to play. We just have to keep going." The draw was also not enough for Tottenham in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish. Tottenham remain fifth and will fall four points adrift of fourth-placed Arsenal if the Gunners beat Leeds.

United fall to new low

Manchester United have endured a host of humiliations in one of their most embarrassing seasons for

decades and their lacklustre loss at Brighton was among the very worst. Ralf Rangnick's side were routed by goals from Moises Caicedo, Marc Cucurella, Pascal Gross and Leandro Trossard at the Amex Stadium.

Sixth-placed United are certain to miss the Champions League for only the fifth time in 30 seasons. With 58 points and only one game left, United's fifth successive away defeat means they will finish with their lowest points total in the Premier League era. "It was a terrible performance. From the first until the last minute it was not enough, we can only apologise for this performance and a humiliating defeat," Rangnick said.

It was a day of mixed emotions at Stamford Bridge, where Chelsea blew a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw with Wolves in front of prospective owner Todd Boehly. Los Angeles Dodgers co-owner Boehly and his consortium have won the battle to buy Chelsea from Roman Abramovich in a £4.25 billion (\$5.2 billion) deal.

Boehly's consortium still need to satisfy the Premier League's owners' and directors' test and gain approval from the UK government, but Chelsea expect the sale to be completed by the end of the month.

After the protracted sale sparked fears for Chelsea's future, Blues boss Thomas Tuchel welcomed the takeover, saying: "It gives us an outlook, if terms are agreed and hopefully the process will be streamlined and go forward as soon as possible. Good news." But Tuchel's third-placed team were unable to celebrate the deal with a victory as they squandered an opportunity to move closer to qualifying for the Champions League.



LIVERPOOL: Tottenham Hotspur's French goalkeeper Hugo Lloris catches the ball during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on May 7, 2022. —AFP

Watford go down

Chelsea striker Romelu Lukaku scored his first Premier League goals since December 29 in the 56th and 58th minutes, the first from the penalty spot and the second a long-range effort. But Francisco Trincao hammered home in the 79th minute and Conor Coady nodded a close-range equalizer in stoppage-time to leave Boehly shaking his head in frustration. Watford needed a win at Crystal Palace to keep alive their faint hopes of avoiding the drop, but Wilfried Zaha's 31st-minute

penalty clinched a 1-0 victory that condemned them to relegation.

"I have never given a press conference in charge of a top-flight team that has been relegated. It is a first I wasn't looking forward to claiming," Watford manager Roy Hodgson said. Burnley wasted a chance to boost their survival chances as Aston Villa cruised to a 3-1 victory at Turf Moor. Brentford crushed Southampton 3-0 at their Community Stadium, with the goals coming from Pontus Jansson, Yoane Wissa and Kristoffer Ajer. —AFP

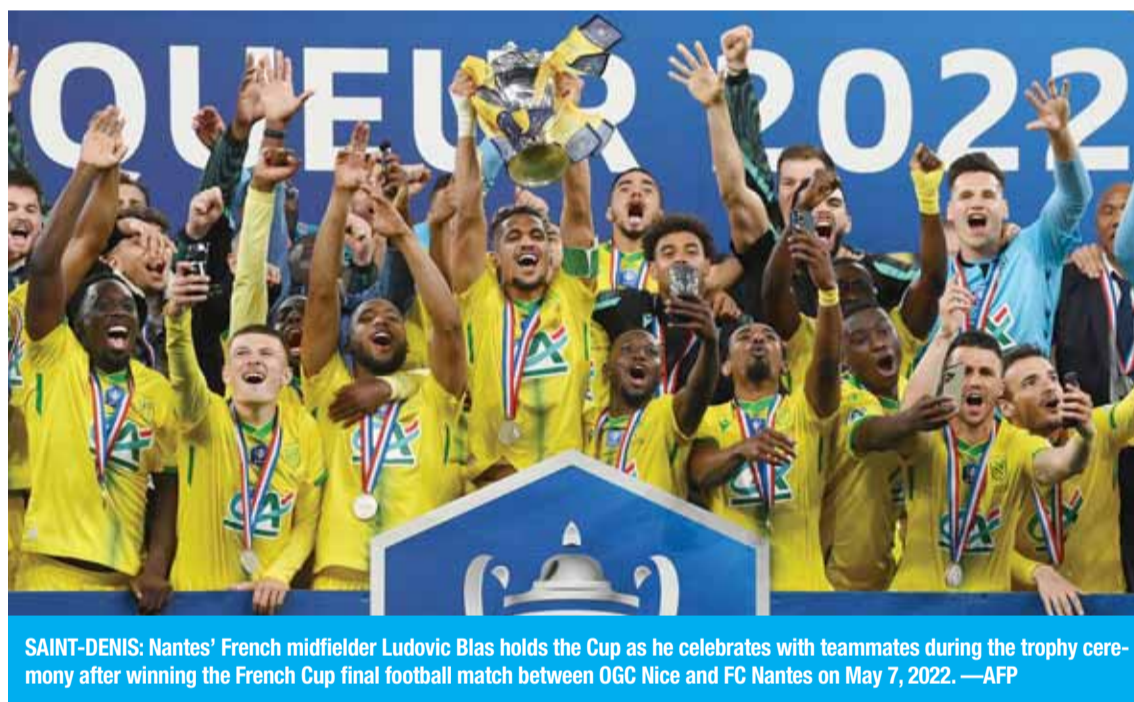
Nantes beat Nice to win French Cup final

PARIS: Nantes won the French Cup for the first time in 22 years on Saturday, beating Nice 1-0 in the final at the Stade de France. Ludovic Blas drilled home a penalty at the start of the second half to bring Nantes the club's first major trophy since winning the Ligue 1 title in 2001.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would coach Nantes and win a trophy," said Antoine Kombouare, an ex-Nantes player who was the first coach sacked by Paris Saint-Germain following the Qatari takeover. "We came from nowhere. We could have finished in Ligue 2 last year. Now we're going to play in the Europa League and the Champions Trophy, it's hard to believe. "It's incredible, almost a miracle."

Nantes, who only avoided relegation in a play-off last season, lifted the French Cup for the fourth time and qualified for Europe for the first time in two decades. For much of the season, Nice, owned by Ineos, the group chaired by Monaco-based British petrochemicals billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, looked certain to qualify for the Champions League but after a recent stumble could miss out on Europe altogether.

"It's disappointing. When you get to the final and have this magnificent trophy, you do everything to try and win it," said Nice coach Christophe Galtier. After the two finals played in an almost entirely empty stadium due to the pandemic, a sell-out



SAINT-DENIS: Nantes' French midfielder Ludovic Blas holds the Cup as he celebrates with teammates during the trophy ceremony after winning the French Cup final football match between OGC Nice and FC Nantes on May 7, 2022. —AFP

crowd of around 80,000 packed the Stade de France—roughly two-thirds Nantes supporters.

Nice knocked out PSG and Marseille en route to a first final since 1997, but struggled to create chances with Amine Gouiri and Kasper Dolberg both without a goal in the league since January. Nice goalkeeper Marcin Bulka, the PSG loanee who helped dump out his parent club on penalties in the last 16, smothered well as Blas darted into the box, with Gouiri then having a shot deflected wide in a gritty first half.

Champions Ahly hit 4; Wydad stun Petro

JOHANNESBURG: South African Percy Tau scored two goals and created two as CAF Champions League title-holders Al Ahly of Egypt thumped 10-man Entente Setif of Algeria 4-0 on Saturday in their semi-final first leg. Tau opened and completed the scoring in Cairo, while Taher Mohamed and Mohamed Sherif also netted as 10-time champions Ahly took advantage of Setif having Amir Karaoui sent off when trailing 1-0 on 35 minutes. If Ahly qualify for the final after the return match in Algiers next Saturday, they will likely face Wydad Casablanca in a repeat of the 2017 title decider won by the Moroccan outfit.

In Angola, rival captains Tiago Azulao of Petro

A first final without PSG since 2014 burst into life 15 seconds after half-time when Hicham Boudaoui was harshly penalized for a handball by Stephanie Frappart, the first woman to referee a French Cup final. Blas hammered the resulting spot-kick straight down the middle past Bulka, sparking euphoric celebrations from the Nantes players and fans. Pedro Chirivella nearly grabbed a second as he blasted just wide following a corner, with Jordan Lotomba making a crucial block to deny Moses Simon from Randal Kolo Muani's cutback. —AFP

Luanda and Yahya Jabrane of Wydad scored for the visitors, who took a significant step towards reaching the final by beating the surprise qualifiers 3-1. Seeking a record third consecutive Champions League title, Ahly had a goal correctly ruled offside and rattled the woodwork twice before Tau struck on 30 minutes at the Al Salam Stadium.

Mohamed crossed and Tau nodded past goalkeeper Sofiane Khedairia, whose brilliant saves had enabled Setif to shock Esperance of Tunisia in the quarter-finals last month. A highly-charged north African showdown boiled over when Karaoui stamped on the foot of Hussein el Shabat and the referee changed an initial yellow card to red after viewing the foul on the VAR monitor. Despite being disadvantaged numerically, Setif should have levelled as half-time approached, but unmarked Hicham Belkaroui fluffed a chance at the far post after a free-kick landed favourably for him. —AFP



CAIRO: Ahly's forward Percy Tau (right) vies for the ball during the CAF Champions League semi-final match between Egypt's al-Ahly and Algeria's ES Setif at the al-Salam stadium in Cairo on May 7, 2022. —AFP

COVID curbs push China off global sporting map

BEIJING: China's ambitions to be a global sporting hub took a heavy blow as the postponement of this year's Asian Games further isolated a country already cut off by its hardline zero-COVID strategy. The ruling Communist Party tarnished its global image with an array of dazzling spectacles such as Beijing's 2008 Summer and 2022 Winter Olympics, tennis and golf tournaments featuring all the world's leading stars, and a showpiece annual Formula One grand prix.

The country also wants to host football's World Cup. But with the exception of this year's Winter Olympics—held in a virus-secure, closed-loop Beijing bubble in February—the world's most populous nation has cancelled or postponed almost all events since COVID emerged in Wuhan in late 2019. The Olympic-sized Asian Games became the latest and biggest casualty on Friday as organizers decided to delay the multisports extravaganza "after carefully considering the pandemic situation and the size of the Games".

No new dates have yet been given for the continental showpiece, originally scheduled for September 10 to 25 in the eastern city of Hangzhou with around 10,000 athletes due to compete across 40 sports. The World University Games due to begin next month in Chengdu were also postponed for a second time citing "continued uncertainty over conditions".

They were part of a blitz of announcements on Friday as the Asian Youth Games were also cancelled, having been delayed once already, and two prestigious Diamond League athletics meetings later this year in Shanghai and Shenzhen were shelved. China's costly and labor-intensive Winter Olympics bubble—when participants took daily COVID tests and were not allowed to mix with the public—now appears to have been the exception rather than the rule, experts said.

Sport in limbo

The Winter Olympic Games "were a huge political priority and nothing was going to stop them", said Mark Dreyer, author of "Sporting Superpower: An Insider's View on China's Quest to Be the Best". "The Asian Games are big, but not big enough," he told AFP. Beijing maintained strict COVID measures including snap lockdowns, mass testing and lengthy quarantines to extinguish outbreaks even as other countries learn to live with the virus. Event calendars will remain in limbo as long as China sticks with zero-COVID, Dreyer said.

A revamped FIFA Club World Cup has already been suspended indefinitely, while big-ticket events such Formula One's Chinese Grand Prix and ATP Tour's Shanghai Masters tennis have fallen by the wayside since the coronavirus pandemic was declared in early 2020. The World Golf Championships HSBC-Champions tournament has not been held since 2019, when won by former world number one Rory McIlroy. Stringent conditions leave any visiting athletes facing multiple COVID tests, difficult entry rules, reduced flights and potentially long isolation periods if they test positive.

Beijing has maintained that its COVID policy has saved lives, and one Chinese expert told AFP he saw "no problem" with the country continuing to bid for major tournaments. "Once the pandemic has been brought under control, these events will be great spectacles," he said, requesting anonymity to speak freely. "It's very good that the government controls outbreaks so strictly. If other countries don't get it, that's not our problem." —AFP

Toulouse beat Munster on penalties to make Champions Cup semis

PARIS: Holders Toulouse beat Munster in a penalty shootout after fighting back to draw 24-24 in Dublin on Saturday to reach the semi-finals of the European Champions Cup. In only the second shootout in the competition's 27-year history, Conor Murray missed once and Ben Healy twice, while Toulouse landed their first four kicks.

In the previous shootout, Leicester Tigers beat Cardiff in the 2009 last four. "Against a great team, we're going to keep the memory of what we did here, it's powerful," Toulouse full-back Thomas Ramos told France Televisions. "It was a crazy match, with an unusual finish, we kept our heads better than them. We found it hard today, but we're still in it."

The French club will return to Dublin to face Leinster next weekend after the Irish province overcame the Tigers 23-14 at Welford Road later in the day. Leinster scrum-half Jamison Gibson-Park was impressed by Toulouse. "They're an unbelievable team, they went to Ireland today and won which shows how good they can be," Gibson-Park told BT Sport. "We'll take it a day at a time and prepare for as best as we can for next week."

There were more than 40,000 at the Aviva Stadium, for a game moved to the Irish capital because of two Ed Sheeran concerts at Munster's Thomond Park in Limerick. In the 19th quarter-final for both clubs, Alex Kendellen powered over to give Munster an early lead but France fly-half Romain Ntamack responded after 12 minutes. Just before the half-hour, Les Bleus winger Matthis Lebel strolled over in the corner following a dominant scrum by the visitors. Ireland fly-half Joey Carbery missed a 34th-minute penalty before atoning by setting up Keith Earls and converting the try to make the score 14-14 at the interval. —AFP



LONDON: Leeds United's French goalkeeper Illan Meslier (left) reacts after his mistake gifts a goal to Arsenal's English striker Eddie Nketiah (right) as Arsenal take the lead during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Leeds United on May 8, 2022. — AFP

Arsenal boost top four bid

Leeds slump into relegation zone

LONDON: Eddie Nketiah boosted Arsenal's bid to finish in the Premier League's top four with a brace in their 2-1 win against Leeds as the Yorkshire club dropped into the relegation zone after Everton's 2-1 victory at Leicester on Sunday. While second placed Manchester City waited for their chance to go three points clear of leaders Liverpool with a win against Newcastle later on Sunday, the focus in the day's early games was on the top four and the relegation battle.

Nketiah netted twice in the first 10 minutes at the Emirates Stadium as Mikel Arteta's side earned their fourth successive win. Leeds had skipper Luke Ayling sent off and, although Diego Llorente got one back, it was too little, too late for Jesse Marsch's strugglers. Fourth placed Arsenal are four points clear of fifth placed Tottenham, with three games left for both teams in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

Tottenham's gritty 1-1 draw at Liverpool on

Saturday had kept them in the hunt, but Arsenal will visit their north London rivals on Thursday knowing a win would guarantee they finish above Antonio Conte's men. Arteta signed a three-year contract extension on Friday and he is on course to repay that faith by leading Arsenal to their first Champions League campaign since 2016-17. Nketiah spent time on loan at Leeds earlier in his career, but the Arsenal forward showed no mercy to his old club.

In the fifth minute, Nketiah punished a poor touch from Illan Meslier, closing down the Leeds keeper and tapping into the empty net. Nketiah hardly celebrated out of respect for Leeds, but he struck again five minutes later, this time meeting Gabriel Martinelli's cross with a fine finish from 12 yards.

A dismal day for Leeds took another turn for the worse in the 27th minute as Ayling was sent off after a VAR review of his crude lunge on Martinelli.

Llorente reduced the deficit with a smart finish from Leeds' first corner in the 66th minute, but Arsenal held on. Leeds sit third bottom of the table due to having a worse goal difference than Burnley.

Everton out of bottom three

Everton made the most of Leeds' stumble as they beat Leicester to secure a second consecutive win. Frank Lampard's side arrived at the King Power Stadium with just one win and three draws from 16 away games, including losses in their last seven matches on their travels. But Lampard and his players were given a rousing send-off by Everton fans outside the club's Finch Farm training ground when they left for Leicester on Sunday morning. Everton responded to that show of support with a dream start. Ukrainian left-back Vitaliy Mykolenko ran onto Alex Iwobi's flick and netted with a stunning volley from the edge of the area in the sixth minute. Everton surrendered the lead five minutes later

as Yerry Mina and Seamus Coleman went up for a header, only to collide and allow Patson Daka to run through and beat Jordan Pickford. However, Mason Holgate won it for Everton in the 30th minute, the defender converting the rebound after Kasper Schmeichel saved Richarlison's header. Everton, hoping to avoid playing in the second tier for the first time since 1954, are one point above the relegation zone with a game in hand.

West Ham crushed relegated Norwich 4-0 at Carrow Road to ease the pain of their Europa League semi-final defeat at Eintracht Frankfurt on Thursday. Said Benrahma put West Ham in front after 12 minutes when his shot deflected off Max Aarons and squirmed past Norwich keeper Tim Krul. Michail Antonio doubled West Ham's advantage after 30 minutes with his first league goal since January 1. Benrahma bagged the third on the stroke of half-time and Manuel Lanzini converted a 65th minute penalty after Jacob Sorensen's handball. — AFP



SEVILLE: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets (2nd left) stops the ball during the Spanish League football match between Real Betis and FC Barcelona at the Benito Villamarín stadium in Seville on May 7, 2022. — AFP

Barca secure top-four spot with Betis win

MADRID: Barcelona secured qualification for next season's Champions League on Saturday as Jordi Alba's 94th-minute winner against Real Betis guaranteed the Catalans' place in the top four of La Liga. Alba's stinging injury-time volley snatched a 2-1 victory for Barca at the Benito Villamarín to ensure they will play in the Champions League next term, an achievement likely to be crucial to the club's hopes of financial recovery.

When Xavi Hernandez took over as coach in November, Barcelona lay ninth in La Liga, with genuine concerns about their chances of closing the gap. But, Xavi's team surged up the table and can now look forward to rejoining their rivals Real Madrid in Europe's premier tournament next season. "We have saved the situation," said Xavi. "This team believes until the end, it has a competitive edge that we didn't have in November."

The difference between Champions League and

Europa League football could be worth more than 50 million euros (\$52.7 million) to Barcelona, who began the season with debts of more than a billion euros, and were forced to let Lionel Messi leave for free last summer. While a trophyless season can never count as a success for Barca, finishing in the top four is an impressive achievement for Xavi and a huge relief for the club.

"We are Barca, so this is the minimum requirement, but in November we were ninth," added Xavi. "We've had a very good second half of the season and now we look forward to next year, to improve enough to win titles." Victory leaves Barcelona second in the table, 11 points clear of Betis in fifth. Both teams have three games left to play. Barca should now be confident of clinching second place too, with a five-point edge over Sevilla, who play at Villarreal on Sunday.

Betis looked like they had sealed a point after Marc Bartra headed in an equalizer in the 78th minute, three minutes after Ansu Fati had come off the bench to give Barcelona the lead. Alba, though, fired in at the back post to claim all three points for the visitors. Fati's goal was his first in the league since November as the 19-year-old continues his latest recovery from another lengthy spell on the sidelines. — AFP

Tunisia's Jabeur hungry for more after historic title

MADRID: Ons Jabeur says she is hungry for more success after she claimed the biggest title of her career, becoming the first Arab or African player to win a WTA 1000 title thanks to a 7-5, 0-6, 6-2 victory over American Jessica Pegula on Saturday in Madrid. The Tunisian trailblazer picked up her second WTA trophy and is set to return to her career-high ranking of number seven in the world on Monday. Jabeur, who is the first Arab player-man or woman to crack the top 10, owns a tour-leading 12 victories on clay so far this season and picked up a 20th win overall in 2022.

"I honestly still can't believe it. I went through a roller coaster of emotions during the past few days, just after the semi-final. I was really stressed trying to breathe," said Jabeur, who had won just one of her previous five WTA finals. "I really didn't want to get disappointed again. I thought my heart was going out of my chest today. I'm very happy and trying to realise that I won today really."

Pegula had to save four break points in her opening two service games before she upped the pressure on the Jabeur serve to break for 3-1. The Tunisian struck back in game seven, finding her range on the return and was soon on level terms with Pegula. Jabeur faced a set point in an error-strewn 10th game but weathered the storm to hold then broke Pegula to love using a signature drop shot return. The world number 10 closed out the set on the 54-minute mark.

Pegula was in trouble at the start of the second set, but she swatted away three break points and it was her turn to attack as she swept the next six games in under 30 minutes. The first three games of the decider went against serve until Jabeur finally consolidated a break to inch ahead 3-1. The 27-year-old doubled her advantage and fell to her knees when she wrapped up a milestone victory.

Pegula set for career-high

Jabeur improved to 2-4 in WTA finals and to 3-2 head-to-head against Pegula, who will rise to a



MADRID: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrates with the trophy after winning against US Jessica Pegula during the 2022 WTA Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament women's singles final match on May 7, 2022. — AFP

career-high number 11 in the world on Monday. "I think for both of us, the last two weeks proved a lot. We've come a long way from a few years ago, we were ranked 75 and 76, we were right next to each other. So that's pretty amazing," Pegula told Jabeur during the trophy ceremony.

The 28-year-old American has shown great consistency at WTA 1000 tournaments, winning 28 matches at that level since the start of the 2021 season. Only one player has tallied more victories within that span at such events-world number one Iga Swiatek. Meanwhile, Jabeur has already shifted her focus onto her next tournament in Rome, where she faces Romanian Sorana Cirstea in the opening round on Tuesday. "Definitely all those matches I've won on clay will give me a lot of confidence. I'm just going to try to take as many (ranking) points as I can in Rome. I know I didn't play last year, so it's extra points for me," said Jabeur. "When you're confident like that and you win a lot of matches, I think I should take this opportunity to go, like, really forward and win." — AFP