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# Al Jazeera journalist killed 'in cold blood' by Zionist forces

## Kuwait strongly condemns Zionist occupiers' assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh



(Left) An undated handout photo released by the Doha-based Al-Jazeera TV shows the channel's veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during one of her reports from Jerusalem. (Right) Colleagues and friends react as the body of Abu Akleh is brought to the offices of the news channel in the West Bank city of Ramallah on May 11, 2022. — AFP

**JENIN:** Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, a respected veteran of the Al Jazeera network, was shot dead Wednesday as she covered a Zionist army raid in the occupied West Bank. The Qatar-based TV channel charged Zionist forces deliberately and "in cold blood" shot Abu Akleh, 51, in the head during the unrest in the Jenin refugee camp.

Another Al Jazeera journalist, producer Ali Al-Samudi, was wounded in the incident in which both wore helmets and vests marked "Press". He later said no Palestinian fighters were nearby, stressing that otherwise "we would not have gone into the area".

Kuwait condemned in the strongest terms the Zionist occupiers' assassination of Abu Akleh and injuring her colleague, saying this heinous act violated international laws and norms. A statement by the foreign ministry held the Zionist occupiers responsible for this crime, which is contrary to freedom of speech and journalistic integrity, stressing the assassination is part of a long history of inhumane treatment perpetrated against the Palestinian people. The international community must hold the Zionist

occupying forces responsible for crimes committed against the Palestinian people, providing them with protection within the parameters of international and humanitarian laws, added the statement. The foreign ministry expressed Kuwait's sincere condolences over the assassination of Abu Akleh and hoped for the swift recovery of her colleague involved in the Jenin incident.

An AFP photographer reported Zionist forces were firing in the area and that he then saw Abu

Akleh's body lying on the ground, with no Palestinian gunmen visible at the time. The Zionist army confirmed it had conducted its latest in a string of military operations in the flashpoint camp but firmly denied it had deliberately targeted a reporter.

Abu Akleh's body was in Ramallah on Wednesday evening, where thousands were carried her remains around the West Bank city, chanting "thank you, dear Shireen". In a sign of her prominence in the West Bank, residents laid flowers on the roadside as the vehicle carrying her body moved towards

Continued on Page 6

SEE PAGE 3

### News in brief

#### Qatari Amir to visit Iran

**TEHRAN:** Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani is to visit Tehran Thursday following the Iranian president's visit to Doha, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported. "The Amir of Qatar will arrive on May 12 in Iran to follow up on the implementation of agreements and expand relations between the two countries," the news agency said Wednesday. It added that the visit would focus on cooperation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. — AFP

#### Five soldiers killed in Sinai

**CAIRO:** Five Egyptian soldiers and seven jihadists were killed early Wednesday when the army was attacked in the Sinai region, the military said, the second such deadly jihadist attack in days. Jihadist fighters attacked at dawn, an army spokesman said in a statement. "One officer and four soldiers were killed and two other soldiers were wounded," the statement read, adding that seven jihadists were killed. — AFP

#### Biggest white diamond fetches \$18.8m

**GENEVA:** The Rock, the biggest white diamond ever auctioned, sold for a hammer price of 18.6 million Swiss francs (\$18.8 million) on Wednesday, far short of the record for such a jewel. The 228.31-carat stone, larger than a golf ball, was sold by Christie's auction house in Geneva. The world record for a white diamond still stands at \$33.7 million, fetched in the Swiss city in 2017 for a 163.41-carat gem. — AFP

## Final refrain for iPod as Apple stops production

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Apple on Tuesday put out word it is no longer making iPods, the trend-setting MP3 players that transformed how people get music and gave rise to the iPhone. Late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs introduced the devices nearly 21 years ago with his legendary showmanship flare, and the small, easy to operate players helped the company revolutionize how music was sold.

It packed "a mind-blowing 1,000 songs" the company said at the time, and together with Apple's iTunes shop established a new distribution model for the music industry. Buying complete albums on vinyl gave way to paying 99 cents a piece for

Continued on Page 6



HONG KONG: In this file photo taken on July 21, 2004, a model shows the latest model of Apple iPod during a press conference. — AFP

New master franchise agreement in Kuwait is part of Subway's ambitious international expansion plan

### Subway® Announces an Exclusive Partnership with Kout Food Group in the State of Kuwait



Subway®, one of the world's largest restaurant brands, has signed a new exclusive master franchise agreement in the State of Kuwait with Kout Food Group (KFG), a leading food and beverage company in the region. The agreement marks the start of an exciting chapter for Subway in Kuwait where guests can expect updated, modern "Fresh Forward" restaurants and an improved, consistent ordering experience, whether in-person, on the app or through a third-party delivery service.

"The agreement with KFG is another important milestone on Subway's international expansion journey," said John Chidsey, Chief Executive Officer of Subway. "As a large-scale operator with regional expertise and a proven track record of scaling operations to meet guest demand, KFG is an ideal partner for Subway as the company grows its global footprint."

Established in 1982, KFG was responsible for bringing the first local franchised restaurant to Kuwait. The company now manages, operates and develops international food brands in the region, overseeing approximately 200 restaurants.

"We are thrilled to partner with KFG — a group that is just as passionate about great food and delivering a great guest experience as we are at Subway," said Mike Kehoe, EMEA President at Subway. "With KFG's partnership, Subway will be able to continue to evolve and meet the increasing demand for better-for-you, convenient, and affordable food options in Kuwait."

"We believe KFG's best-in-class operations paired with Subway and its commitment to relentless evolution when it comes to food, guest experience and digital offerings position this partnership for unparalleled growth in Kuwait's dynamic market," said Amin Mohamed, CEO of Kout Food Group. "We are looking forward to embarking on this journey with Subway and growing the business together."

Kout Food Group has opened the first branch of Subway restaurants under its management in the area of Salmiya "in front of AUK" followed by Jaber Al-Ahmad and Fahuheel areas, in addition to 12 delivery kitchens. The Company is now working on an aggressive plan to open and operate more branches in the near future.

The agreement with KFG is part of Subway's multi-year transformation journey to build a Better Subway, improving on all aspects of the brand and expanding its global presence. In EMEA, Subway plans to double its number of restaurants across the region in the coming years and will continue to seek strong partners to support the brand on its journey.

## Local

# Kuwait laws fall short of protecting workers demanding rights: Lawyers

## Employers use fake absconding reports to threaten employees

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times has received several complaints regarding the arbitrary decisions that workers face when they resign or try to leave their sponsors, as a number of employees were deported after demanding their right to resign and get a better job. Speaking to Kuwait Times, Mohammad Al-Jassem, lawyer and Interpol-accredited expert in international law enforcement cooperation, confirmed there are defects in the unclear legislation in the country, where having connections (wasta) can obstruct the law and manipulate the system.

Jassem pointed out the legislative and executive authorities in the country should quickly form investigation committees to overcome legal obstacles in the system and apply penalties to improve the administrative system to keep pace with the development of laws and regulations, such as in developed countries.

According to US Trafficking in Persons Report, the Kuwait government does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. It includes recommendations to help Kuwait fully

comply with minimum international standards in this regard, which include serious reforms to the sponsor-based employment system and increased law enforcement efforts to investigate human traffickers.

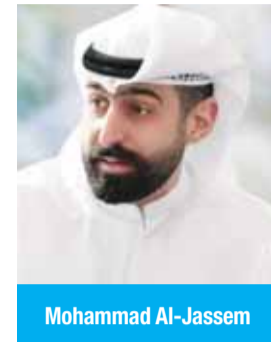
### Inapplicable

Jassem noted that laws in Kuwait cannot be applied in real life sometimes due to many reasons, where sponsors try to end contracts of the employee if they demand to transfer their work visa or resign, advising employees to always have an official written letter from the company, whether accepting the resignation or rejecting it.

"Some employers manipulate the law. The employee must take a copy of their resignation letter or email and get official approval for resigning physically and not verbally to prove their situation and avoid any 'absconding case' that may result in their deportation later," Jassem said. He said that there will be a labor inspection to prove the absence of the employee, and even if the sponsor tells the employee not to come to work, they must prove this at the Public Authority of Manpower to avoid

being deported.

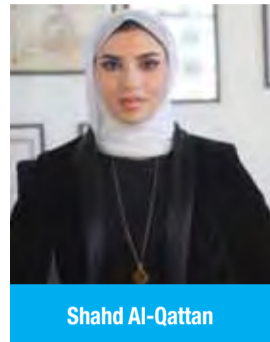
"Many absconding cases are false, with employers attempting to sidestep their legal obligations to pay wages or force employees to take back their resignation. Reporting workers as absconding is also easy for employers to rid themselves of responsibilities towards the workers, taking advantage of the often-weak verification process," he said. Jassem said in case of rejection, the employee must take the written rejection of resignation and submit it along with a complaint to the Public Authority of Manpower, where the accusation will be investigated and then they will determine the final decision.



Mohammad Al-Jassem



Jumanah Issa



Shahd Al-Qattan

### Workers must always have resignation in writing



## Kuwait's Foreign Minister leads delegation to anti-IS meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah headed the country's delegation partaking in a ministerial meeting of the global coalition to defeat the so-called Islamic State (IS), better known as Daesh, held in Morocco's Marrakech at the joint invitation of Morocco and the US. Addressing the gathering, the minister thanked Morocco and the US for co-hosting this first-of-its-kind gathering in the African continent to weigh anti-IS efforts. He said the much trust of the countries in the global coalition and its groups has become very valuable and significant for the continuation of counter-terrorism in the region at all levels, welcoming the 85th member, Benin joining the coalition, which reflects its obvious interest in Africa. He added that out of belief in the big role played by the UN and its bodies in establishing the pillars of security and stability all over the world, the countries should commit to taking the required measures to fight terrorist in all its forms and manifestations as per international law, mainly international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The Kuwaiti foreign minister went on to say that UN Resolution 2254 backs the legiti-



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends the ministerial meeting of the global coalition to defeat IS. — KUNA

mate ambitions of the Syrian people for determining their future via a political transition, and for ending the ongoing conflict in this Arab country. He pointed out swift political, military and economic challenges and changes amid the major developments in different world countries, which require more concerted efforts, coordination and sharing of intelligence for fighting terrorism. In this regard, he underlined the importance of implementing the principles adopted during the coalition's first ministerial meeting in the Asian continent, namely in Kuwait, in February 2018. In conclusion, the minister invited the member states of the counter-terror coalition's group of suppressing the flow of foreign terrorist fights, to attend the group's meeting due in Kuwait on May 24, 2022, in a bid to find sustainable and globally beneficial solutions. —KUNA

KD 100 to KD 500. Participants also stood a chance to win a 3-month Deliveroo Plus membership and to receive unlimited free delivery on their orders.

"On behalf of our entire team, I would like to wish everyone a joyous Eid holiday," said Seham Al-Husaini, General Manager of Deliveroo in Kuwait. "Since launching in Kuwait, Deliveroo has been proudly serving foodies everywhere, making it that much easier for them to enjoy the meals they know and love. We were very excited to see everyone pass by our booth at Murooj, and are looking forward to celebrating even more holidays with our beloved community in the years to come!"

Deliveroo recently celebrated its third year of business in the Kuwaiti market, delivering hundreds of thousands of meals to hungry customers around the country since its launch. Since its launch, Deliveroo has achieved noteworthy milestones, including being named "Best Delivery App" in Kuwait by Service Hero, the company providing the region's only consumer-powered customer satisfaction index. With exclusive restaurant partners, special offers, and meal deals, Deliveroo is always here to deliver.

## Deliveroo celebrates Eid with family-fun activities at Murooj

KUWAIT: Deliveroo, one of Kuwait's leading food-delivery companies, is celebrating Eid with two days of exciting activities at Murooj. During the Eid holiday, Deliveroo set up a gigantic delivery box booth at Murooj, inviting passersby to download the Deliveroo Kuwait app and celebrate the Eid festivities with a number of fun and exciting activities for the whole family, including a timed digital memory game with food photos. Passersby were also invited to play scratch and win games for the chance to win prizes provided by Deliveroo's restaurant partners.

Participants played for the chance to win various prizes including restaurant vouchers, Deliveroo-branded merchandise (including socks, jackets, hoodies, caps, and more), and voucher prizes from



KUWAIT: Participants at the 11th session of the Joint Gulf Municipal Work Conference. —KUNA

## Gulf Conference presents best uses of GIS systems

KUWAIT: Participants of the 11th session of the Joint Gulf Municipal Work Conference affirmed on Wednesday the importance of urban planning based on geographic databases to meet the challenges facing decision-makers in laying their spatial plans. Participants presented on the second day of the conference, which was held in Kuwait, the top global uses of the GIS system as well as volunteer work in fields of municipal work. Muneera Al-Jeri, from Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), discussed the importance of analyzing the pattern of human temporal and spatial transport in urban areas, which is considered a necessity to face traffic and other problems. Abdulrahman Al-Otaibi, from the Saudi Ministry of Municipal Rural Affairs and Housing, presented a paper titled "Land and Property Management System" which helps decision-makers to lay their spatial plan. Maitha Al-Nuaimi, from Dubai Municipality, presented a paper titled "Geospatial Digital Twins" which reviewed Dubai's Municipality's digital strategy to build a modern and reliable, and a first of its kind technology in the UAE, through "Digital twins."

Meanwhile, Huda Al-Afifi from Oman discussed the "digital system for drilling permits for Muscat Governorate", and the positive outcomes of implementing it in eliminating the arbitrary approach of drilling permits. Amer Al-Hmedi from Qatar talked about the "Geographical Information Systems Techniques - My Address Project", where he referred to factors that distinguished the GIS in Qatar as a technical reference and provider of basic databases, licenses, and technical support for ministries. Hmedi reviewed the mechanism of establishing the national network for GIS and the network of continuous transmission of ground coordinates and cartographic specifications of the country's maps and their compatibility with international standards and the National Center for Aerial Photographs.

In the meantime, Munera Al-Manae from Kuwait Municipality's Space Administration discussed the use of GIS and its implementation in the Municipality, and the steps for digitalizing maps, data types in the Space Administration, and the conversion of paper survey plans into information in the GIS programs. Manae reviewed the unified real estate number, one of the most important projects Kuwait Municipality implemented, as it contributes to facilitating communication processes and linking transactions and data related to the property. The 11th session of the Joint Gulf Municipal Work Conference under the title 'Smart Municipality' kicked off Tuesday, will last for three days, with the participation of GCC municipalities, and will discuss several important files. —KUNA



KUWAIT: KFAED, IFRC and KRCS officials pose for a group picture after signing the agreement. —KUNA

## KFAED signs tripartite MoU with IFRC, KRCS to enhance cooperation

GENEVA: Kuwait Fund for Arabic Economic Development (KFAED) signed Tuesday a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the International Federation of Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies (IFRC) and the Kuwaiti Red Crescent (KRCS). In a statement to the press, KFAED Director General Marwan Al-Ghanim said that the MoU is an essential step for setting up a joint coop-

eration mechanism that enhances the role of the three sides. He also added that this memorandum keeps pace with the objectives and areas of common interest between the three parties, not to mention the exchange of practical experiences and cooperation. KRCS Director General Maha Al-Barjas affirmed that this tripartite memorandum is a consolidation of its efforts to provide humanitarian support in the world. The MoU establishes a framework between the parties over a period of five years with the aim of enhancing cooperation in areas of common interest and in the countries in which the three parties are active. This cooperation seeks to enhance joint action in programs to improve sustainable livelihoods, maintain peace and disasters prevention. Moreover, it will provide the opportunity to participate in forums, seminars and workshops organized by the parties. —KUNA

Local

# Shireen Abu Akleh's assassination evidence of Zionist entity's weakness: Kuwait's Speaker

## Crime exposes Zionist entity's attempts to mask the truth: Ghanem

KUWAIT: The assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh is new evidence of the false allegations of the occupation as well as the weakness and disgrace of the Zionist entity, Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said. He added that the crime exposes the Zionist entity's attempts to mask the truth "that it fears", expressing condolences to Shireen's family, colleagues and the Palestinian people.

Abu Akleh was killed while on duty in uncovering the horrific facts and acts of the brutal Zionist occupation, affirmed Ghanem, which refuted the Zionist entity's accusations of so-called "terrorism" when it came to Palestinians right to fight back. The top Kuwaiti lawmaker encouraged Palestinian journalists and media personnel to continue their quest for truth and justice against the Zionist oppressors.

Kuwait strongly condemned the Zionist forces' assassination of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and the injury of her colleague near the Jenin refugee camp. This crime, which the Zionist entity's occupying authorities bear full responsibility for, is a blatant violation of international law, a flagrant attack on the freedom of the press, and new evidence of the heinous assaults committed by the occupiers against Palestinians, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Kuwait urges the international community to launch an investigation that leads to

holding accountable those responsible for this crime, and to take necessary measures to stop the occupying authorities' assaults against the Palestinian people, the statement reads. "Kuwait expresses its deepest condolences to the martyr's family and to the government and people of Palestine," the foreign ministry concluded in the statement.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Journalists Association sent condolences to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate on the death of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu

strength of the Palestinian people's unity in the West Bank and Gaza, and between Muslims and Christians of this steadfast people. May God bestow His mercy on her. Our condolences go to Palestinian journalism and media, the family of Shireen and all colleagues in Al-Jazeera and the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate."

### Palestinian Presidency condemns murder

The Palestinian Presidency strongly condemned the Zionist entity's murder of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the city of Jenin. Killing Abu Akleh and injuring journalist Ali Al-Samoudi was just a result of Zionist entity's policy in order to blur the ugly truth of committing more crimes, the presidency added. The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, "This crime is only an extension to ongoing murdering crimes against Palestinians generally, and especially against journalists in order to cover the truth."

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi condemned the Zionist occupiers' assassination of Palestinian journalist Abu Akleh, describing it as an awful crime and a clear violation of the freedom of the press. According to a statement by the Foreign Ministry, Safadi stressed the necessity of "launching a real, transparent and immediate investigation that leads to the accountability



JERUSALEM: This handout file picture obtained from a former colleague of Al-Jazeera's late veteran TV journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, shows her reporting from Jerusalem on June 12, 2021. —AFP



### Ghanem urges Palestinian journalists to continue quest for truth

Akleh. "I convey to you the condolences of the Kuwaiti journalism community on the death of the able colleague Shireen Abu Akleh," reads a letter signed by members of Kuwait Journalists Association's family to Head of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate Dear Nasser Abu Baker. "The bullets that shed the blood of this hero will not hide the truth. Rather, it proved the depth and

of the perpetrators of this crime and the crime of shooting Palestinian journalist Ali Al-Samoudi in occupied Jenin as well." The Jordanian Minister called his Palestinian counterpart Riyadh Al-Maliki and offered condolences for the assassination of Abu Akleh and reassured the health of journalist Ali Al-Samoudi.

The Arab League strongly condemned the assassination of proficient late journalist Abu Akleh in Jenin camp. It accused the

Zionist entity's occupation government of this horrible act of crime, calling on international justice bodies to account for the criminals guilty. This is considered a war crime that seriously violated all acts of international law, the League affirmed. The Zionist entity works to suffocate the voice of freedom and truth and stands against the humanitarian justice cases with continuous aggression against the Palestinian people and the Jenin governorate. — Agencies

## Shireen Abu Akleh murdered in cold blood: Palestinian Ambassador

KUWAIT: Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub expressed profound condemnation of the assassination of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. "In the name of the Palestinian community in the State of Kuwait, and on behalf of all employees at the embassy of the State of Palestine in Kuwait, I condemn the murder, in cold blood, committed by

the Zionist entity's occupation snipers towards the martyr of truth, journalist Shireen Nasri Abu Akleh, Al-Jazeera reporter in Palestine."

"This heinous crime adds to the crimes of the Zionist entity's occupation, state terrorism of the occupation state, and its gangs of settlers committed against our Palestinian people who seek to live like other people of the world with freedom and in dignity, and to get rid of the heinous occupation," he said. "May God bestow his mercy on Shireen."

### 'Heartfelt emotion'

French Ambassador to Kuwait Claire Le Flecher expressed condolences on the Abu Akleh's death. "I would like to express my heartfelt emotion and sincere condolences on the occasion of the terrible death of highly respected journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin," she said. "Freedom of the press and



Rami Tahboub

preservation of the security and life of journalists are key values which France is committed to defend all over the world."

### 'Greatest dismay'

The Belgian Embassy also condemned the killing of Abu Akleh. "The Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium has learned with the greatest dismay the death of Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during clashes in the occupied territories. This Embassy wishes to express its con-

dolences to Al-Jazeera and to the family of Shireen Abu Akleh," it said in a statement. "While not knowing of the specific circumstances, it remains essential that the safety and security of well identified press people and journalists be ensured by the responsible authorities and security forces, which is a pre-requisite for press freedom and the full exercise of democratic rights everywhere."

### 'Shocking' news

The British Consulate in Jerusalem expressed its shock over Abu Akleh's death. "Shocked at news of the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, veteran Palestinian Al-Jazeera journalist," it wrote on Twitter. "Shireen was shot during a [Zionist] operation in Jenin refugee camp this morning. Media freedom and safety of journalists are essential and must be respected."

## Kuwait reaffirms steadfast support to Palestinian people

BRUSSELS: Kuwait has once again stressed its unwavering support to the Palestinian people and reiterated calls for ending the Zionist entity's occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967. "Kuwait has been a steadfast in its multipronged backing of the Palestinian people and will continue to do so to ensure the support they get the support they desperately need," Kuwait's Ambassador to the EU, NATO and Belgium, Jasem Al-Budaiwi, told an international donor meeting on Palestine in Brussels Tuesday evening. He noted that "this meeting comes at an important time as the Palestinian people and the government are witnessing a difficult period and require unlimited support from the entire international community."

To this end, Kuwait, through the three conferences that were held to support Palestine in Paris (2007), Sharm El-Sheikh (2009), and Cairo (2014), has contributed a total of \$700 million. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has been supervising its distribution to support various projects in the Gaza Strip, the latest of which is the financing of development programs in the southern governorates with \$100 million out of the total value of the \$200 million, he said. Kuwait calls for ending the occupation of al Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since June 4, 1967, based on international legitimacy resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab peace initiative adopted by all Arab countries at the Beirut Summit in 2002, he said. Kuwait supports a peaceful solution that achieves the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, he stressed.

### UNRWA budget

Budaiwi noted that Kuwait shares the concern of the UN and the international community concerning the severe financial deficit in the UNRWA budget. In response to these challenges, Kuwait has provided over \$120 million to UNRWA for the period 2014-2018. Most recently in October 2021, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development concluded a grant agreement worth \$21.5 million with UNRWA to support the Agency's program budget for the years 2021-2022, and to contribute to financing the health program for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Referring to recent developments, Budaiwi expressed Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of the Zionist occupation forces storming Al-Aqsa Mosque and attacking worshippers at dawn on Friday April 15, 2022, which resulted in the injury and arrest of hundreds of innocent people. "These attacks are a dangerous escalation and a flagrant violation of all international charters and resolutions, and a reason to fuel extremism and violence and undermine the stability of the region," he warned. The annual spring meet-

ing of the international donor coordination group in support of the Palestinian economy, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) was hosted by EU High Representative Borrell and chaired by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anniken Huitfeldt.

"The two-state solution is the only sustainable solution to the conflict [between the Zionist entity and Palestine]. The occupation must end. [The Zionist entity] must cease settlement building and evictions. The Palestinian Authority must implement vital reforms and strengthen its legitimacy. And the Palestinians need to unite under a single political leadership," Huitfeldt told the gathering. The Palestinian Authority is faced with a huge budget deficit. The Palestinian people have been hit by the steep rise in prices for food and fuel resulting from Russia's war on Ukraine. International contributions to the Palestinian Authority have decreased significantly over the past few years, she noted.

Meanwhile, Borrell said the aim for this meeting is to get more concrete economic, fiscal, security and political results. Because despite the political complexities, efforts must be made for the political process to restart. The meeting discussed the worrying financial crisis of the Palestinian Authority, the need to ease the occupation with more economic and personal freedoms for Palestinians, the clear need for reforms in the Palestinian Authority and the importance of fulfilling the democratic aspirations of the Palestinian people, he noted. The main aim of the AHLIC is to develop an institutional and economic basis for a Palestinian state based on a negotiated two-state solution.

### \$2 million donation

In Ramallah, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) welcomed the Kuwaiti additional donation amounting to \$2 million. In a press statement, UNRWA said that Kuwait Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Dihani presented UNRWA Acting Director of External Relations Tamara Alrifai with the donation cheque at the Embassy of Kuwait in Amman. The statement quoted Dihani as saying "this donation from the government of Kuwait aims to enhance activities and programs of the UNRWA for about five million Palestinian refugees in the region."

"It comes in line with directives of the Kuwaiti higher political leadership and the government of Kuwait to stress the Kuwaiti position toward the Palestinian case, and the commitment to support the humanitarian situation to the Palestinian refugees," Dihani stressed. He praised the role played by UNRWA and its efforts in providing basic services such as health and education to Palestinians refugees in its fields of operations, pointing to Kuwait's cooperation with the UN organizations in order to achieve development goals for societies. This funding is in addition to an earlier \$10 million contribution to the Agency for 2022, in support of its core programed Budget for essential services including health care, education, and relief and social services. Rifai said, "With this additional donation, Kuwait is showing Palestine's refugees that its long-term support is still firm." — KUNA

## On the occasion of the



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## News in brief

Kuwait Amir receives  
letter from Saudi King

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday received a written letter from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud about good fraternal bonds between both countries and brotherly people and ways of promoting and developing them in all fields. In the letter, the Saudi King wished His Highness the Amir perpetual wellness and happiness and further progress and prosperity for both brotherly countries under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al Saud delivered the letter to Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

Training course on  
environmental reporting

KUWAIT: Director of Public Relations and Information at the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikha Al-Ibrahim said the EPA will hold a training course on environment media in cooperation with Kuwait Journalists Association under the patronage of EPA Chairman and Director General Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, adding that environment media in Kuwait and Arab World needs development towards professionalism. She said this training course titled "Basic Course in Environmental Media", will start May 15th and ends on May 19th. It will be held at the EPA Shuwaikh building and will include various subjects such as preparing environmental news, environmental investigative reporting in addition to the art of writing environmental stories.

Hajj campaign prices  
fair, says union

KUWAIT: The Hajj Campaigns Owners Association issued a statement thanking Saudi Arabia's authorities for resuming the reception of pilgrims from abroad. Head of the Association Ahmad Al-Duwaihi said "what is being published on the media about high costs of Hajj are not approved and do not represent prices of Hajj campaigns." He said there are several options available for pilgrims, with prices that meet the abilities of all groups of the society of affordable Hajj "that starts with KD 1500 or a little more." Duwaihi said "any rise in services prices is linked to circumstances beyond the will of campaigns."

Kuwait oil price down  
\$4.80 to \$112.42 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$4.80 to \$112.42 per barrel on Tuesday a decrease from \$117.22 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Wednesday. Globally, the price of the Brent crude went down by \$3.48 to \$102.46 per barrel, the same with the West Texas Intermediate, which declined by \$3.33 to \$99.76 pb. The price of the OPEC crudes went down by \$4.30 to settle at \$108.18 per barrel on Tuesday as opposed to \$112.48 pb last Monday, said the international oil cartel on Wednesday. According to the OPEC bulletin, the average oil price of the cartel basket in 2021 was at \$69.89 per barrel. OPEC said in a recent report that the prices of oil, including the organization's basket, had increased last March by \$20 pb due to increasing geopolitical tension in eastern Europe, which heightened fears of decrease supplies amid commercial turmoil.

Initiative seeks better protection  
from sexual violence in Kuwait

## Effort to extend legal protection to include all forms of sexual violence

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Democratic Forum held a press conference on Tuesday to launch a campaign called Aman (safe), which aims to raise awareness about sexual violence and lobby to pass a bill on protection from sexual violence in Kuwait.

This project is led by co-founder of Aman Esra Al-Amiri, a human rights lawyer and doctoral candidate at Fordham University School of Law. Amiri worked with students at Fordham Law on drafting a master bill on protection from sexual violence. This project was executed in partnership with Kuwait Democratic Forum, Kuwait Bar Association and experts Dr Lubna Al-Qadhi, Dr Malak Al-Rasheed, Sheikha Al-Hashem and Mohammed Al-Yousef.

Hashem said that this project came after repeated sexual harassment cases that went viral on social media. "After many videos and stories on sexual harassment in Kuwait, some members of parliament presented a draft law on sexual harassment, which unfortunately hasn't been enforced till today as the executive regulation of this law has not been approved for over two years. We also think some changes should be made in this law," she said.

"Although the number of victims of sexual harassment in Kuwait is high, such cases are not always reported. Sexual violence in Kuwait is not properly organized by law. It's only vaguely included in the penal code, labor law, cybercrimes law, and domestic violence law, which hasn't been enforced yet. Victims of sexual harassment don't receive any rehabilitation or even protection," Amiri pointed out.

The kidnapping and killing of a woman - Farah Akbar - in a public place in daytime in front of people was a shock to the community and evoked strong reaction. "Unfortunately, the legal system in Kuwait doesn't include a complex law on sexual violations, and from here comes the importance of the 'Aman' bill on protection from sexual violence to extend legal protection to include all forms of sexual violence, considering it as a violation of personal security and physical, mental, and sexual safety of individuals. This draft

Bill remains in  
parliament for  
over two years

KUWAIT: Participants attend a press conference of the Kuwait Democratic Forum to launch the Aman campaign. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

also includes providing necessary protection to survivors of sexual violence," added Amiri.

Aman is focusing on the victim rather than the attacker. "This law focuses on the community and rehabilitation more than punishment and penalties.

In this law we suggest scrapping the death penalty for the criminal. In many cases, the rapist kills the victim after raping her to get away with his crime. We also propose avoiding imprisoning youngsters and instead sentence them to social work. We also recommend having female officers at police stations, as their absence is one of the main obstacles in reporting the sensitive issue of sexual harassment," she said.

"Although the Kuwait penal code includes various articles on sexual violence, yet not all forms of sexual violence are included. For instance, sexual harassment at the workplace is not properly included in the legislation. So, this draft law aims to fill

these gaps through securing reporting channels and protecting the victims. It also aims to provide official statistics and train state officials in charge of dealing with such cases, to act according to international standards under international human rights laws," stressed Amiri.

Ali Bushehri, one of those working on this law, spoke about another part of the Aman bill. He emphasized the reporting mechanism should support those reporting sexual violence cases. "There should be cooperation between different public authorities related to these cases and nongovernmental organizations to support the victim. We should have private hotlines available 24/7 for victims of sexual violence. There should also be an option to choose between calling or chatting online, while providing information discreetly," he stated.

"There are some legal practices that are not available in Kuwait but are found in the United States. For instance, a restraining order protects the victim by preventing an attacker from coming close to the victim, even before convicting him of the crime. Kuwait has adopted many commercial laws from the US, so we can also take inspiration from their laws in this matter," added Bushehri.

Zain sponsors  
AUM career fair

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its gold sponsorship of the American University of the Middle East's Career Fair 2022. The event, organized by AUM's Tawteen Career Development and Recruitment center, is the first of its kind in Kuwait, featuring both virtual and in-person activities.

Zain took part in the opening ceremony held at the AUM campus in Egaila, attended by Chairman of the Board of Trustees Fahad Al-Othman. Zain is proud to continue supporting this career fair on an annual basis given the high turnouts it witnesses from over 15,000 students and graduates.

Through its virtual and in-person booths, Zain introduced students and alumni to its leading experience in the telecom sector, as well as its internal policy and wonderful workplace environment. The company also presented the available job vacancies, provided a detailed explanation of the nature of work at various departments and divisions, and answered questions and inquiries from visitors.

This career fair is considered the first of its kind in Kuwait, having introduced a new hybrid experience of both virtual and in-person programs. During its virtual segment, the event offered students and graduates a chance to learn about the participating companies, e-meet them, easily upload their CVs and share their details, and conduct inter-



KUWAIT: Fahad Al-Othman with Zain officials at the company's booth.

views via video conferencing tools. The in-person career fair featured physical interviews, a chance to directly meet HR staff from companies, and many career development programs.

Zain is always eager to participate in career fairs all year round as part of its Human Resources strategy, which closely focuses on supporting the education sector hand in hand with various universities, colleges, and educational institutions in Kuwait

(both public and private), with the aim of providing students and graduates with career opportunities in the private sector.

Zain is committed to playing an active role in the investment in the human capital of Kuwait. The company seeks to provide young and eager Kuwaitis with job opportunities that allow them to apply their practical skills, achieve their potential, and fully develop their capabilities.



KUWAIT: The booths of Belgium and Czech Republic are seen at the Europe Day 2022 event organized by the European Union delegation to Kuwait on Monday.



Lebanon vote set to entrench status quo

## Cardinal, pop star among latest Hong Kong security arrests

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COLOMBO: Soldiers check documents of a driver at a road checkpoint in Colombo on May 11, 2022. Sri Lankan police have been ordered to go on the offensive and use live ammunition to stop rioting, a top official told AFP on May 11, after another night of sporadic arson attacks. —AFP

# Sri Lanka's troops quell unrest

## 'Economy will completely collapse and no one will be able to save it'

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's economy will "collapse" unless a new government is urgently appointed, the central bank chief warned Wednesday, as security forces fanned out on the streets to restore order after spasms of mob violence.

Police say nine people have died since Monday, when frustration at a dire economic crisis erupted into clashes between backers and opponents of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, injuring more than 200.

Opposition parties have refused Rajapaksa's overtures for a unity government to resolve a political deadlock and instead demanded his resignation.

Central Bank Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said it was critical that a new administration take charge by Friday or the country would suffer a catastrophe. "The economy will completely collapse and no one will be able to save it," he told reporters. "The country was fast going down a slope when I took over just over a month ago. I thought we were able to apply the brakes, but with events of Monday the brakes no longer work."

Shortly after taking over as the bank's chief in April, Weerasinghe announced a default on Sri Lanka's \$51 billion external debt, saying the country had no money to pay its creditors. He said political stability was vital to implement the reforms needed to address Sri Lanka's snowballing debt crisis and the acute shortage of foreign exchange to import essentials.

Security forces have largely curbed public disorder after they were deployed to enforce a nationwide curfew with orders to "shoot on sight" anyone engaged in looting or violence. "If the situation is not brought under control, there could be total anarchy," a senior security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

### Deserted streets

The capital Colombo was almost deserted on Wednesday aside from soldiers manning checkpoints, near

the charred remains of buses that had been set alight by anti-government crowds. With armoured personnel carriers and a heavy security presence, Sri Lanka's military chief addressed a press conference to deny speculation of a looming coup.

"Don't ever think that we are trying to capture power," said Kamal Gunaratne, the secretary of Sri Lanka's defence ministry. "The military has no such intentions."

A small crowd continued to defy the curfew near the president's seafront office, where a protest camp has for the past month maintained a vigil calling on him to step



### Shortages of essential goods

down. "We want the whole Rajapaksa clan out because they are so, so corrupt. They have been eating into Sri Lanka like a caterpillar eating into some fruit," activist Kaushalya Fernando told AFP.

In a tweet, Rajapaksa on Wednesday called for "all Sri Lankans to join hands as one, to overcome the economic, social & political challenges".

But the main opposition SJB party reiterated it will not be a part of any government with Rajapaksa still president, even after his brother Mahinda's resignation as prime minister on Monday.

stuffy port-side barbershop brightened by a florescent striplight and posters of K-Pop hair models.

He predicts that by the end of Marcos Jr's six-year term "there will be a lot of jobs", enough to go around. "Maybe I'll get another job. Maybe I'll become a security guard," he says while admitting he lacks the necessary training.

Like many young Filipinos, Foras has bought into the torrent of misinformation that has reinvented the Marcos family image. For believers, Marcos senior's bloody decades-long rule has been transformed into a gilded age for the Philippines, making Bongbong the obvious choice to restore those imagined glories.

"I voted for him because of what his father accomplished," says Foras. "We were number one in Asia. I just feel like he would do it again." The Marcos rebranding was so successful that, according to initial results, Baseco voters narrowly backed him as president over Isko Moreno, an actor-turned-politician who grew up in the poverty of a nearby slum.

### COVID side effects

But economists warn that even if Marcos's government does not descend into another free-for-all of cor-

ranging powers to the police to arrest people, who can even face life imprisonment, for an act or speech that "brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government". "The rigours of Section 124A (are) not in tune with the current social milieu, and was intended for a time when this country was under the colonial regime," India's chief justice N.V. Ramana, part of a three-judge bench hearing a petition against the law, said.

Ramana asked the government not to file any new sedition cases and pause ongoing sedition investigations. "All pending trials, appeals and proceedings" under sedition, the court said, "be kept in abeyance" until the "re-examination of the provision is complete".

The government had said Monday that it had decided to "re-examine and reconsider" the law but it remained in force. The top court also urged people jailed for sedi-

### Turning point

Sri Lankans have been suffering shortages of essential goods, fuel and medicines for months in the island's worst economic downturn since independence in 1948. The crisis moved into a darker phase on Monday when government supporters with sticks and clubs attacked demonstrators who had been protesting peacefully for weeks demanding the president's resignation.

Mobs then retaliated across the country, torching dozens of homes of ruling-party politicians. Mahinda Rajapaksa had to be rescued in a pre-dawn military operation on Tuesday and taken to a naval dockyard for safety after protesters tried to storm his official residence.

Echoing the UN rights chief and the European Union, the United States on Tuesday said it was concerned both with the violence and the deployment of the military.

"We stress that peaceful protesters should never be subjected to violence or intimidation, whether that's on the part of the military force or civilian units," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

India meanwhile was forced to deny social media rumours — some using old images of Mahinda boarding a helicopter — that it was helping Rajapaksa family members to flee. The Indian "High Commission would like to categorically deny speculative reports in sections of media and social media about India sending her troops to Sri Lanka," said a statement.

With vital tourism revenues torpedoed by the pandemic, Sri Lanka last month defaulted on its foreign debt, some of it stemming from Rajapaksa vanity projects built with Chinese loans.

The International Monetary Fund this week began a "virtual mission" of staff-level talks on a possible bailout. IMF mission chief Masahiro Nozaki said the lender aimed to be "fully prepared for policy discussions once a new government has been formed". —AFP



MANILA: File photo shows Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (front 2nd L), son of the late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, his wife Maria Luisa (centre R), and cousin Martin Romualdez (back C) as they are surrounded by members of the media and supporters. —AFP

ruption and cronyism, he will have a hard time meeting lofty promises. In a country where 43 percent consider themselves poor, and 39 percent say they are on the borderline, the COVID-19 crisis hit especially hard. —AFP

tion to approach local courts for bail. India's official crime data says 236 people faced sedition charges between 2018 and 2020.

The law has long been misused by all Indian political parties in power but critics say Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has widened its scope, including to target minorities and ideological dissenters. The government of India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh, led by firebrand monk Yogi Adityanath from the BJP, has been an especially enthusiastic user of the law.

Police there last year jailed three students from Indian-administered Kashmir for sedition after they celebrated India's defeat to arch-rival Pakistan in a cricket match. India sparked global outrage last year after 22-year-old climate change activist Disha Ravi was arrested for sedition for allegedly creating a "toolkit" to aid anti-government farmer protests. —AFP

## UK and EU ramp up tensions over N Ireland accord

BELFAST: The Northern Ireland Protocol was signed separately from the Brexit trade deal between the UK and the European Union in order to avoid a "hard" border on the island of Ireland. Physical infrastructure on the border between the province and EU member state Ireland was a regular flashpoint during three decades of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland.

Removing customs posts and allowing the free movement of goods and people between the north and south was a key part of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that brought peace. But it has complicated the post-Brexit situation. To keep the border open, Northern Ireland is effectively still in the European single market-but checks are required on goods heading east-west from mainland Great Britain. Imposing controls was designed to prevent unchecked goods heading into the single market and customs union from England, Scotland and Wales via Northern Ireland.

### 'Not sustainable'

London has indefinitely suspended implementing those checks, and says it is ready to scrap the pact unless Brussels agrees to changes. The EU is insistent the UK must abide by the terms of the deal it signed up to, warning it risks a possible trade war with the bloc if it unilaterally suspends any of the protocol.

But Brussels has made concessions, including proposing fewer checks on goods heading east-west to Northern Ireland. The UK and the EU are set to resume talks but appeared to be on a collision course: Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday told his Irish counterpart Micheal Martin that the protocol was "not sustainable in its current form". European leaders have insisted the terms will not be renegotiated. In a growing dispute, The Times reported that British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss could scrap large parts of the deal from British law as early as next week.

The protocol has a suspension clause that allows either side to take "appropriate safeguard measures" if there are "serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties". Brussels has warned of "serious consequences" if London triggers the clause, raising the prospect of a trade war of tariffs and barriers between the two sides. The United States, which helped broker the Good Friday Agreement, and Irish-American President Joe Biden are watching closely, warning the UK to stick to what it signed. Washington has warned that London can forget about a trade deal if its actions in Northern Ireland threatens the still-fragile peace.

### Politics and business

The protocol has created political tensions in Northern Ireland between pro-British unionists and republicans who want the province to become part of Ireland. There has already been some violence from hardline unionists, prompting fears of a return to Northern Ireland's troubled past.

The province's unionist parties oppose the protocol, warning it threatens Northern Ireland's status within the UK. They have vowed not to nominate ministers to the Northern Ireland Assembly in Belfast until the protocol is scrapped. That has raised the prospect of political paralysis at the legislature, after Sinn Fein nationalists became the biggest party for the first time in Thursday's elections. Sinn Fein leader Michelle O'Neill, who is set to become Northern Ireland's first minister, has warned she "will not be held to ransom" by Brexit disputes. —AFP

## Marcos faces high expectations from Philippines poor

MANILA: Despite his Oxford education and jet-set lifestyle, the Philippines's president-elect Ferdinand Marcos Junior sailed to victory this week as a champion of the poor. Now they expect him to deliver. Residents of the impoverished Baseco neighbourhood in Manila do not think of 64-year-old Marcos, nicknamed Bongbong, as the mega-rich scion of a political dynasty famed for extorting billions, stockpiling designer shoes and treating public coffers like an all-you-can-eat buffet.

In this thick lattice of roads, lanes and alleyways jam-packed with street kids, push trikes and hawkers, Marcos means hope. "A lot of change will happen when he becomes president," 30-year-old JR Foras says matter-of-factly, as he waits for customers in a

## India's top court suspends British era sedition law

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court on Wednesday suspended a colonial-era sedition law that activists say is often used by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to target free speech and dissent. Modi's critics say that the law, which was once used by Britain to target independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, has been abused by his government against many journalists, activists and students.

Section 124A of the Indian penal code gives wide-

## International

# Despite public anger, Lebanon vote set to entrench status quo

## New independent candidates have failed to build a coherent front

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon's elections Sunday won't yield a seismic shift despite widespread discontent with a graft-tainted political class blamed for a painful economic crisis and a deadly disaster, experts say. Given Lebanon's sectarian-based politics, it will likely "reproduce the political class and give it internal and international legitimacy", said Rima Majed of the American University of Beirut.

"Maybe candidates from the opposition will clinch some seats, but I don't think that there will be a change in the political scene," said Majed, an expert in sectarianism and social movements. Beirut voter Issam Ayyad, 70, put it more simply: "We will not be able to change."

The small country's political system has long distributed power among its religious communities, entrenching a ruling elite that has treated politics as a family business.

By convention, the Lebanese president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shiite. In the current parliament, the Shiite Hezbollah party and its allies, including the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, command a majority.

The system has held back the emergence of non-sectarian political parties and civil society representatives. The elections will be the first since a youth-led protest movement broke out in October 2019 against a political class seen as inept, corrupt and responsible for a litany of woes, from power blackouts to piles of uncollected garbage.

The anger exploded into months of street ral-

lies but lost momentum as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, together with a financial crash that the World Bank has labelled one of the world's worst in modern times.

### 'Game of loyalty'

Popular fury flared again after a huge stockpile of ammonium nitrate that had languished in a Beirut port warehouse for years exploded in August 2020, killing more than 200 people and devastating entire neighbourhoods.

Successive governments have since failed to chart a path out of Lebanon's worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war that has sparked runaway inflation, deepened dire poverty and fuelled a mass exodus. Where the Lebanese state has failed to provide basic services, traditional political leaders have tended to step in with their decades-old patronage networks — a trend more alive than ever during the current crisis.

"The elections are not meant to assess the performance of politicians," said Majed. "They are more a game of loyalty to whoever provides... the most basic services." Public sector jobs have long been among the main handouts, but now fuel and cash assistance also feature high on the list, giving an advantage to established parties over new opposition groups that lack funds and foreign support.

While bolstered by the 2019 protest movement, new independent candidates have also failed to build a coherent front that could energise a dispirited electorate, observers say. Nearly 44 percent of

"They're not giving us any information. They say that young men escaped to save their lives," said Leisi Zambrano, desperate for news about her brother. "There are many mothers who still have not received any news about their loved ones. They don't even know if they are alive," she added.

Zambrano, 48, said she had rushed to the prison with other family members as soon as she heard about the riot. "We heard prisoners calling for help, asking that we don't let them die," said Zambrano. "It was a massacre inside."

Shocking online video footage of the riot aftermath showed a pile of bloody, mutilated bodies in a common room and corpses littering prison corridors next to mattresses that showed signs of having been set on fire.

Prior to the latest riot, some 350 inmates had been killed in five separate uprisings in Ecuador's hopelessly overcrowded prisons since February 2021. Just last month, at least 20 inmates died at the El Turi prison in Cuenca, southern Ecuador.

President Guillermo Lasso insists the problem inside the facilities mirrors that outside, where drug gangs are vying for control of trafficking routes. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, via spokeswoman Liz Throssell, on Tuesday expressed "deep alarm at recurring prison violence" in Ecuador.

"These worrying incidents once again highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive reform of the criminal justice system, including the penitentiary system to tackle what has been a protracted crisis in the country," she said in Geneva.

Minister Yair Lapid said the country was seeking a "joint pathological investigation into the sad death of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh". "Journalists must be protected in conflict zones and we all have a responsibility to get to the truth." Senior Palestinian Authority official Hussein Al-Sheikh said there had been no contact from the Zionist entity about any joint probe and held the Zionist entity "responsible" for Abu Akleh's killing.

US ambassador to the Zionist entity Thomas Nides called for a "thorough investigation" into the killing of the US citizen, who joined Al Jazeera in 1997 and became a widely respected Palestinian voice in coverage of the conflict. The Zionist army has stepped up operations in Jenin, a historic flashpoint in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, in recent weeks.

Witnesses in Jenin said Wednesday that the army had been targeting the home of an Islamist operative, with an apartment's heavy metal door blown off its hinges. Majid Awais, a witness, told AFP that Abu Akleh "turned in panic" when she saw her colleague Samudi was shot and that she was struck by the fatal bullet moments later. Her death came nearly a year after a Zionist air strike destroyed a Gaza building that housed the offices of Al Jazeera and news agency AP. The Zionist entity has said the building also hosted offices used by key members of the Hamas Islamist group, which controls the Zionist-blockaded Gaza strip. — AFP

impacted more than just the music industry," said Apple senior vice president of Worldwide Marketing Greg Joswiak. "It also redefined how music is discovered, listened to, and shared."

Joswiak said that the "spirit of iPod" lives on in its lineup of products including iPhone, iPad, Apple TV, and its HomePod smart speaker. "Since its introduction over 20 years ago, iPod has captivated users all over the world who love the ability to take their music with them on the go," Apple said in a blog post. "Today, the experience of taking one's music library out into the world has been integrated across Apple's product line - from iPhone and Apple Watch to iPad and Mac."

In addition, the Apple Music subscription service provides streaming access to more than 90 million songs, the Silicon Valley giant said. The iPod endured despite analyst worries that the release of the iPhone in 2007 would destroy demand, since the smartphones provided much more than just digital music. — AFP



CHEKKA, Lebanon: A Parliamentary election campaign billboard for Lebanese MP Sitrida Geagea of the Lebanese forces party is seen on the side of Tripoli-Beirut highway in the northern area of Chekka. —AFP

eligible voters plan to abstain, according to a survey last month of more than 4,600 voters by British charity Oxfam.

### Voter intimidation

Polling expert Kamal Feghali said many voters had hoped the newcomers would run "with a unified list and programme" but said that instead their competing electoral lists "will scatter the vote". While independents will likely do slightly better than in 2018, when only one of them won a seat, said Feghali, the winner once more is likely to be Hezbollah, Lebanon's biggest political and military force, and its allies.

Iran-backed Hezbollah, first formed as a resist-

ance force against neighbour Zionist entity, is now often described as a state within a state that is all-powerful in regions under its control. Its pre-election intimidation tactics are "salient", said Oxfam, warning that such behaviour tells voters "that change might be denied, and in turn might lead to either a reduction in turnout or a distortion in voting behaviour".

In east Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, three Shiite candidates were running on an anti-Hezbollah list but withdrew last month, despite the expiry of a legal deadline to do so. The move stripped the anti-Hezbollah list of essential Shiite representation and was widely seen by local media as a result of pressure by the powerful movement. —AFP

## Ecuador police: 200 inmates recaptured after prison massacre

**SANTO DOMINGO DE LOS COLORADOS:** Ecuadorian police on Tuesday said 200 convicts who escaped following a deadly prison riot have been recaptured in 24 hours, with 20 still at large. At least 44 inmates died after a fight broke out Monday between the rival Los Lobos and R7 gangs at Bellavista prison in Santo Domingo de los Colorados, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Quito.

Ten more were injured, according to police. Authorities had initially said that 108 prisoners got away. "A total of 220 citizens escaped yesterday and at this moment we have recaptured 200," said police chief of operations Geovanny Ponce, giving an update Tuesday.

He said the government was offering up to \$3,000 for information leading to the recapture of the remaining 20 fugitives. Soldiers were deployed to help search for escapees, and AFP reporters at saw security forces rounding up about 80 people believed to have been among those recaptured.

Distraught relatives of inmates waited for news outside the Bellavista prison on Tuesday. Ponce said 41 of the dead inmates had been identified so far, and two of them were Venezuelan.

## Al Jazeera journalist killed 'in cold blood'...

Continued from Page 1

Nablus, where an autopsy was to be carried out before her burial in her native Jerusalem. Al Jazeera said in a statement that "the (Zionist) occupation forces assassinated in cold blood Al Jazeera's correspondent in Palestine". It urged the international community to hold Zionist forces accountable for the "intentional targeting and killing".

The European Union urged an "independent" investigation into her death, while the United States' envoy to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called for the killing to be "transparently investigated". Asked about the Zionist entity's openness to an international investigation, army spokesman Amnon Shefler said the military's internal investigative systems were "robust" and that it would conduct its own probe. The Zionist entity has however publicly offered to participate in a joint investigation with the Palestinian Authority.

Zionist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett claimed it was "likely" that "armed Palestinians were responsible for the unfortunate death of the journalist". Zionist Foreign

## Final refrain for iPod as Apple...

Continued from Page 1

selected digital songs. Industry trackers and California-based Apple itself have long acknowledged that the do-it-all iPhone would eat away at sales of one-trick devices such as iPod MP3 players.

The trend toward streaming music services, including one by Apple, has made devices designed just for carrying digital tunes around less enticing for consumers. Apple said in a blog post that the current generation of iPods will only be available as long as current supplies last. "Music has always been part of our core at Apple, and bringing it to hundreds of millions of users in the way iPod did

## Three decades after Pablo Escobar's death, drugs ravage Medellin

**MEDELLIN, Colombia:** Three decades after cartel boss Pablo Escobar was shot dead by police on a rooftop in Medellin, the very city he had sought to uplift with drug money is being ravaged by it. Junkies frequent hundreds of sales points dotted around Colombia's second city, which has become the epicenter of the domestic drug trade.

"Easy access? Yes, absolutely. In Medellin you can find it anywhere. Even on the floor you find drugs," Manue Morales, an out-of-work engineer and chronic user of "basuco" — the cheapest drug on the market — told AFP. Basuco is derived from the coca leaf also used to make cocaine, and mixed with other low-grade substances.

His hands shaking, 32-year-old Morales inhaled a dose in a public park, using a pipe fashioned from a PVC tube, even as pedestrians and police milled around. "I am a bit nervous," he confessed. "The truth is that one is less cautious and it (the basuco) can cause you to do stupid things," said Morales, who lost his job due to drug use. —AFP



SANTO DOMINGO DE LOS COLORADOS: Handout photo released by the Ecuadorean Presidency of inmates being escorted as they are transferred from the Bellavista prison in Santo Domingo de los Tschilas, Ecuador, to other prisons, after a riot. —AFP

"We emphasize that the responsibility of the State for the security of all people in its custody creates a presumption of State responsibility for these deaths and call for a full investigation of these incidents." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also condemned the violence and urged the government to launch a "prompt, serious and impartial" investigation.

Nestled between the world's biggest cocaine producers, Colombia and Peru, Ecuador has seen a surge of violence blamed on fighting between rival drug groups. The country of 17.7 million people is popular with traffickers because of its porous borders, a dollarized economy and major seaports for export. —AFP

## Al Jazeera pays tearful tribute to Abu Akleh

**DOHA:** Al Jazeera's newsdesk told Shireen Abu Akleh they would keep a spot for her "at the top of the hour" after she said in an email she was going to cover a Zionist operation in the Palestinian town of Jenin. "But she never turned up," said Mohamed Moawad, the Arabic channel's head of output, fighting back tears as he told of the final contacts with the veteran journalist on a typically risky mission.

"The last communication was 20 minutes before this heinous crime happened." Moawad told AFP shortly after staff held their own broadcast tribute to the 51-year-old. "She sent an email that said 'Hi, there is a (Zionist) intervention in Jenin and I am heading there now. I am almost there. I will send you details'."

Instead of her live report from the raid, Al Jazeera staff were shaken to see social media images indicating she had been shot. Moawad said another journalist soon sent a message informing them she had died three kilometers from the edge of Jenin in the West Bank. She had been with four other journalists, all wearing blue press vests and helmets, according to the Al Jazeera chief.

The Qatari state-owned channel said Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American, had been killed "in cold blood" and demanded Zionist forces be held accountable. "We consider this something intentional because the bullet hit exactly the area below her ear where there is no cover," said Moawad, who added that "reckless" comments had been made in the Zionist entity about the killing.

Al Jazeera journalists shed tears during the minute when its broadcasts were silenced as a tribute to the journalist who joined the channel shortly after it opened in 1996. Many who had worked with Abu Akleh embraced in the news-



An image grab from video shows a reporter reacting as veteran Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh is seen on the ground after being shot in the face in Jenin on May 11, 2022. — AFP

room, clutching portraits of the journalist and sheets stating "Journalism is not a crime", as images showing the latest violence in the Palestinian territories flashed up on their work screens.

Abu Akleh - the second journalist hired by Al Jazeera in the Palestinian territories - became the 12th journalist from the channel to be killed on duty since it started broadcasting. "She was everywhere where there was a story. She has been everywhere to give voice to the voiceless," said Moawad. "There are so many videos showing Shireen getting attacked by (Zionist) forces, getting attacked by bullets and other stuff." Abu Akleh had never complained about her own safety though, he added. "She was always there covering the story without any kind of fear. We never assigned Shireen to do a story, she was just there. She showed up."

Hoda Abdel-Hamid, a senior correspondent at Al Jazeera, said Abu Akleh was "extremely brave". "But she was also a very experienced journalist, she was not one to take stupid risks for the hell of it," she told AFP from her mission in Ukraine. "I am pretty sure that today she was in a safe place, in a place that was for journalists and she was clearly marked. She wouldn't be jumping in the crossfire just for the hell of it. She wouldn't do that." — AFP

## International

# Cardinal, pop star among latest Hong Kong security arrests

Police have yet to issue a statement on the arrests

**HONG KONG:** An elderly Catholic cardinal critical of Beijing and a Cantonese pop star are among a group of veteran democracy advocates who have been arrested under Hong Kong's national security law, legal and police sources said Wednesday. Those arrested were all trustees of a now-disbanded fund that helped finance demonstrators detained during massive democracy protests that swept Hong Kong three years ago.



## Security law has crushed dissent

Retired cleric Cardinal Joseph Zen and singer Denise Ho were among those detained, a police source and a legal source confirmed to AFP. Zen, who recently turned 90, is a former bishop of Hong Kong and one of the most senior Catholic clerics in the Chinese business hub.

He has been critical of the Vatican's decision to reach a compromise with China over the appointment of bishops on the mainland and an advocate of Hong Kong's democracy movement. Ho is a popular local vocalist and an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ rights. Prominent cultural studies scholar Hui Po-keung was arrested at Hong Kong's airport on his way to take up an academic post in Europe on Tuesday, two legal sources previously confirmed to AFP.

Hui was arrested for "collusion with foreign forces", one source said, an offence under a security law that Beijing imposed on Hong Kong in response to



**HONG KONG:** File photo taken on August 18, 2021 shows (L-R) Cardinal Joseph Zen, barrister Margaret Ng, professor Hui Po-keung and singer Denise Ho attending a press conference at Salesian Missionary House in Hong Kong, to announce the closure of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, established to support democracy protesters. — AFP

the democracy protests. Three legal sources said veteran barrister Margaret Ng was also arrested. Police have yet to issue a statement on the arrests. The security law has crushed dissent in the once outspoken business hub and can carry up to life in jail.

Those arrested were among five trustees of the "612 Humanitarian Relief Fund", which helped arrested protesters pay their legal and medical bills. Another trustee, democracy activist Cyd Ho, has already been jailed for unauthorised assembly in a separate case.

The fund disbanded last year after the city's national security police demanded it hand over opera-

tional details including information about its donors and beneficiaries. Shortly before the fund closed in October, Hong Kong's Lingnan University said its contract with Hui had ended but declined to state a reason on privacy grounds.

Academics who played prominent roles in Hong Kong's now decimated democracy movement have often found themselves dropped by universities and are struggling to find work. A social commentator and prolific author, Hui taught for more than two decades at Lingnan University and was credited by former student leader Nathan Law with inspiring his political career. — AFP

## S Korea's president opens Blue House to the public

**SEOUL:** Thousands of South Koreans poured into the presidential Blue House in leafy northern Seoul on Wednesday, after President Yoon Suk-yeol made good on a campaign promise to return the once-fortified compound to the people.

The building, named for the approximately 150,000 hand-painted blue tiles that adorn its roof, has been home to South Korea's leaders since 1948, and was largely restricted to the public. That has changed since Yoon, a former top prosecutor who was sworn in on Tuesday, refused to move in, saying the hilltop headquarters - on a site once used by former colonial power Japan - fostered an "imperial" presidency and undermine communication with the public.

Instead, Yoon is working from the 10-storey defence ministry building - an undistinguished office block in downtown Seoul, hastily adorned with the presidential seal. Critics have slammed the move as a costly waste of time and money, which could also put the country's security in jeopardy at a time of high tensions with the nuclear-armed North.

But on opening day, South Koreans flocked to the 250,000-square-metre complex, which is flanked by mountains and nestled behind the royal Gyeongbokgung Palace. "It is an honour of my life to come here and actually see the presidential office," Choi Jung-bun, 70, told AFP as she ate a packed lunch by a stream in its garden.

"This is a deeply storied site that conjures up old Korean kings and modern-day presidents. I am sure it will become one of the major tourist attractions."

### Back to the people

According to officials, more than 25,000 people toured the complex on the first day of full opening, having signed up in advance. Visitors seemed thrilled to finally be allowed inside, with huge queues in front of the main building as people waited patiently to take photographs. That was despite

the fact that the building itself has not yet been opened to visitors over security concerns, for example over communications equipment that still needs to be removed. Up to 39,000 visitors per day will be allowed to visit the complex, officials said, during the first phase of the public opening, which runs until May 22.

In the past, the presidential office ran a much smaller tour program that allowed 1,500 visitors per day, with restrictions on many areas. However, the changes may not be permanent if the opposition has its way.

"When the Democratic Party wins the next presidency, we will go back to the Blue House," former party chairman Song Young-gil said last week in an interview with local media. But Cho Ok-kyung, a 61-year-old visitor from Bucheon, west of Seoul, said the compound had been returned to the people - and it should stay that way. "I'd like this place to keep open indefinitely so that future generations can enjoy it too."

### Bad feng shui?

Yoon's critics have said his desire to move the office was tied to his belief in feng shui, a traditional religious practice which stresses the importance of harmony between humans and nature. The former prosecutor has been dogged by accusations of ties to a shaman, which he has denied. The Blue House has long been rumoured to foster bad luck for its residents, given the assassination, impeachment, corruption trials and imprisonment that have befallen South Korean presidents. Yoon's vow that he would not spend a single day in the Blue House compound even drew criticism from his predecessor Moon Jae-in, who called the decision "dangerous" amid heightened tensions with North Korea.

"It is hard to understand how the decision was formulated to determine Yoon would not spend a day at the Blue House," Moon said last month. The move is also to blame for Yoon's record-low approval rating of just 41 percent, according to a recent Gallup poll.

Yoon started his term in office with a security briefing in an underground bunker, as he faces an increasingly belligerent Pyongyang. North Korea has conducted a record 15 weapons tests since January, including two launches just days before his inauguration. — AFP

## Solomons PM dismisses concerns over China maritime deal

**HONIARA, Solomon:** Solomon Islands' prime minister dismissed criticism of a new maritime investment deal with China on Wednesday, saying there was nothing "sinister" in the draft agreement. The new agreement, a copy of which has been leaked to the media, comes after a controversial security pact was signed last month.

The security pact gave Beijing a military foothold in the South Pacific, and sparked alarm in Australia and the United States. On Wednesday, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare shrugged off criticism about the separate leaked memorandum of understanding on maritime investment, describing it as a "normal bilateral development initiative" that is yet to be formalised.

"There is nothing sinister nor trivial about the Blue Economy Memorandum of Understanding," his office said in a statement. A day earlier, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison had expressed concern regarding the memorandum, which covers undersea cables, port wharves, shipbuilding and other areas.

Morrison said he was "very concerned, as many other Pacific leaders are, about the interference and intrusion of the Chinese Government into these types of arrangements". Solomon Islands' warming ties with China have been a key issue in Australia's election campaign since a draft of the Solomons security agreement with China was first leaked on social media in March.

That draft allowed for Chinese naval deployments in the Solomon Islands, eliciting a warning from the United States that it would "respond accordingly" if China installed a military base in the Pacific archipelago. In April, Solomon Islands PM Sogavare said that his government would not allow a Chinese military base to be built in his country "under its watch". The latest leaked maritime investment deal, dated just "2022", covered investment in wharves, shipbuilding and ship repair, offshore gas and oil exploration and other "blue economy" industries.

Sogavare's Wednesday statement said the memorandum of understanding was a broad document, which would be followed by a more detailed agreement. — AFP

## Myanmar charges central bank ex-deputy governor with corruption

**YANGON:** Myanmar's junta has charged a former central bank deputy governor with corruption, state media reported Wednesday, the latest figure close to Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted government to be prosecuted by the military. Trained in the United States and Britain, Bo Bo Nge was appointed in 2017 as liberalisation swept the Southeast Asian nation after the former junta relaxed its grip on power.

He was detained shortly after the coup last year as the military rounded up high-ranking members of Suu Kyi's civilian government as well as other officials and advisors. A corruption case was opened after several "complaints" against Bo Bo Nge were examined by the Anti-Corruption Commission, according to a report in the state-backed Global New Light of Myanmar.

They included failing to collect tax due on withdrawals of around \$1.4 million from an account held by officials from the Open Society Foundation and other actions that "caused losses to the government", it said.

A guilty verdict on the charge carries a maximum

## Australia's election battle gets personal

**SYDNEY:** Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison derided his Labor Party opponent Wednesday as an unreliable "loose unit" on the economy as he fought to catch up in the opinion polls 10 days from the federal election on May 21. In their third televised election debate, characterised as the "final showdown" before 17 million Australians cast their compulsory votes, Morrison and Labor's Anthony Albanese got personal.

At the outset of the campaign last month, Albanese forgot both the unemployment rate and the main lending rate. More recently, he apparently had difficulty explaining his party's disability policy. "He's a loose unit when it comes to the economy. He makes things up as he goes along," said Morrison using a slang term for someone who is unreliable.

Albanese hit back, accusing Morrison of shirking responsibility for the slow rollout of vaccines and rapid antigen tests in the Covid-19 pandemic, for his management of the 2019-2020 "Black Summer" bushfires, and this year's deadly east coast floods.

"Whenever this prime minister is confronted with any challenges, he blames the states, blames someone else consistently," he said. Albanese accused Morrison's conservative Liberal-National Party coalition of allowing climate change policy to drift. The prime minister has vowed to mine and export coal for as long as there are buyers, touted a "gas-fired recovery" from the pandemic, and resisted global calls to cut carbon emissions faster by 2030. "Climate change is real and it is here now. We see it with the bushfires and floods," Albanese told the Channel Seven-hosted debate. "Australia can be a renewable energy superpower for the world if we seize this opportunity."



**SYDNEY:** Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison (R) and the Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese (L) attend the second leaders' debate of the 2022 federal election campaign at the Nine studio in Sydney. — AFP

### 'In the mood to change'

The pair also sparred on a string of other policy disagreements: Morrison's failure to fulfil a three-year-old campaign promise to create a federal anti-corruption commission; Albanese's support for minimum wages to match inflation; and Labor's support for more funding for childcare. Despite the public wrangles, including in two previous election debates, the opinion polls have not budged much since Morrison called the election a month ago.

A weekend Newspoll gave Labor a 54-46 percent lead over Morrison's ruling coalition on a two-party basis. But few pundits are counting Morrison out. Three years ago, he defied a string of negative opinion polls to win what he termed a "miracle" election. Opinion polls in any case are a snapshot, not a prediction, cautioned Mark Kenny, professor at the Australian National University in Canberra. But "if I put my money on it, I think I'll probably go with what passes for empirical data that we do have at the moment, which suggests that Australians are in the mood to change the government. They've had enough of Morrison", he told AFP.

On the campaign stump, Morrison freely concedes: "You may not like me." He has pointed, however, to Australia's post-pandemic economic resurgence and low unemployment rate. Even on the economy, however, he has difficulties. Inflation is running hot at a 20-year high as prices soar at gas stations, in shops, and for housing. — AFP



**SEOUL:** Visitors line up to take photos in the Blue House compound, a day after it was opened to the public following a campaign promise by President Yoon Suk-yeol, in Seoul on May 11, 2022. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, MAY 12, 2022

## NIC profits jump 307% to reach KD 15.4m in first quarter of 2022

Earnings per share 19.3 fils • Assets grew 43.8% to nearly KD 328.6 million

KD 15.4 million net profits • 19.3 fils share dividend in first quarter • KD 19.1 million other comprehensive income  
KD 328.6 million company assets • KD 1.3 billion total managed assets • KD 251.3 total shareholder equity



Fahad Al-Mukhaizim

Exceptional results in the first quarter of the current year, supported by a balanced strategy that reacts positively with financial and economic indicators and achievement of outstanding and sustainable financial returns.



During the first quarter of 2022, the company began lead-managing Ali Alghanim and Sons Automotive Company's IPO in Kuwait as main coordinator and listing consultant on Bursa Kuwait.

- Other comprehensive income rose by 506 percent during the first quarter of this year.
- Total shareholder equity reached KD 251.3 million during the first quarter of 2022, an increase of 38.15 percent.

**KUWAIT:** National Investments Company (NIC) approved the financial results for the first quarter of 2022. It achieved a net profit of KD 15.4 million in the first quarter, an increase of 307 percent with earnings per share of 19.3 fils.

Chief Executive Officer of NIC Fahad Al-Mukhaizim said financial results during the first quarter of the current year were supported by a balanced strategy that reacts positively with economic and financial indicators, with outstanding and sustainable financial returns. The outstanding performance reflected in the distinguished performance of the team to grab available investment opportunities, which resulted in effective growth in operational investment operations, which led to the success of the company and achieving the ambitions of shareholders and customers.

Al-Mukhaizim said NIC registered a 43.8 percent growth in total company assets of nearly KD 328.6 million, compared to the same period in 2021 of KD 228.6 million. As for total equity of shareholders, it reached KD 251.3 million during the first quarter of the current year. Managed assets reached nearly KD 1.3 billion compared to the same period last year, when they reached KD 1.05 billion.

Other comprehensive income during the first quarter of the current year rose to KD 19.1 million compared to KD 3.2 million during the first quarter of 2021, a rise of 506 percent. Al-Mukhaizim revealed an outstanding increase that reached 68.8 percent in services, incentives and consultations, reaching KD 2.5 million compared to the same period of 2021 when it reached KD 1.5 million.

Meanwhile, Al-Mukhaizim declared the outstanding performance of NIC funds during the first quarter of the current year, as the fund of returns of oil industry and services reached 18.95 percent, Wataniya investment fund reached 14.06 percent, Al-Darij investment fund 12.54 percent, and Zajil fund

for services and communications reached 10.01 percent.

"With these cash dividends of over KD 11 million, we are the first company on the list of managers of investment shares funds at Bursa Kuwait that distributes profits following an international crisis, and achieving current competitive returns that reflect the successful strategy the company is using in managing its funds, and its keenness to achieve the best returns for unit holders who gave it confidence to manage their finances, as

cash profits were distributed to the company funds. Profits of Wataniya fund were at 5 percent of book value, at 50 fils per unit for 2021 (with a current return that reached 5.5 percent). As for Darij investment fund, cash dividends were distributed at 3 percent of the book value at 30 fils per unit for the second half of 2021 (with a current return that reached 6.2 percent), in addition to distributing cash dividends for Zajil services fund at 5 percent of book value at 50 fils of each unit for the second half

of 2021 (a current return that reached 4.5 percent).

Al-Mukhaizim said the performance of the wealth sector was positive during the first quarter of 2022 as the working team was able to achieve tangible results towards maximizing managed assets in the company through the expansion of the customer base and getting capital that targets unique investment opportunities. Efforts concentrated on reaching new groups of investors, especially institutional ones, through professionalism in

managing assets and various investments based on innovative products that are suitable for various groups of customers, with calculated risks.

Al-Mukhaizim said NIC worked on attracting notable investments as well as a number of contracts with major establishments to present consultative services, through the success of the banking investment sector team in investing in the infrastructure, credit and information technology sectors.

In the first quarter of this year, the team began with a strong group of operations including leading the underwriting of Ali Alghanim and Sons Automotive Company in Kuwait as a main coordinator, and as a consultant of listing and investing in the main market of Bursa Kuwait, and getting ready for another underwriting and listing operation, and many public-private operations including consultations presented to get a human resources company based in UAE.

The sector also signed contracts with several customers to present financial consultations that resulted in achieving considerable financial fees and commitment in the technology fund, blockchain fund, a new healthcare project, and three emerging companies in their first stages and a special credit fund, in addition to contracting a strong group of deals for the next quarter.

About the performance of the real estate investment sector of the company, Al-Mukhaizim spoke about the factors restricting the sector and supporting it with experienced competencies in managing real estate portfolios, besides working on developing the computer systems to increase customer satisfaction. The sector was able to achieve unprecedented occupancy rates at all real-estate levels after overcoming the coronavirus crisis and returning to the previous operational levels, in addition to launching ambitious plans to develop and market chalets of Wataniya park for the upcoming summer season.



Cash distributions were over KD 11 million to become the first company in the list of investment-fund managers at Bursa Kuwait that distributes cash profits following the international crisis.



## Elon Musk says he would lift Twitter ban on Trump

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Elon Musk said on Tuesday that as owner of Twitter he would lift the ban on Donald Trump, contending that kicking the former US president off the platform "alienated a large part of the country." Musk's endorsement of a Trump return to the global messaging platform triggered fears among activists that Musk would "open the floodgates of hate." "I would reverse the permanent ban," the billionaire said at a Financial Times conference, noting that he doesn't own Twitter yet, so "this is not like a thing that will definitely happen."

Trump has stated publicly that he would not come back to Twitter if permitted, opting instead to stick with his own social network, which has failed to gain traction. The Tesla chief's \$44-billion deal to buy Twitter must still get the backing of shareholders and regulators, but he has voiced enthusiasm for less content moderation and "time-outs" instead of bans.

Trump was booted from Twitter and other online

platforms after supporters fired up by his tweets and speech alleging election fraud attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 in a deadly bid to stop Joe Biden from being certified as the victor in the US presidential election. "I think that was a mistake because it alienated a large part of the country, and did not ultimately result in Donald Trump not having a voice," Musk said.

Musk maintained that permanent bans undermine trust in Twitter as an online town square where everyone can be heard. "Elon Musk would open the floodgates of hate and disinformation on Twitter," said Media Matters for America president Angelo Carusone.

"Whether Elon Musk is a fully red-pilled right-wing radical or just someone very interested in enabling right-wing extremists, the result is the same."

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), however, backed Musk's perspective. "Elon Musk's decision to re-platform President Trump is the right call," said organization director Anthony Romero. "Like it or not, president Trump is one of the most important political figures in this country, and the public has a strong interest in hearing his speech."

Romero pointed out that some of Trump's controversy causing tweets have wound up being evidence in lawsuits against the former president by the ACLU

and others.

Musk reasoned that permanent bans at Twitter should be rare, and reserved for accounts that are spam, scams or run by software "bots." "That doesn't mean that somebody gets to say whatever they want to say," Musk said. "If they say something that is illegal or otherwise just destructive to the world, then there should be a perhaps a timeout, a temporary suspension, or that particular tweet should be made invisible or have very limited attraction."

### Ad boycott?

Activist groups have called on Twitter advertisers to boycott the service if it opens the gates to abusive and misinformative posts with Musk as its owner. "Under Musk's management, Twitter risks becoming a cesspool of misinformation, with your brand attached," said an open letter signed by more than two dozen groups including Media Matters, Access Now and Ultraviolet.

Twitter makes most of its revenue from ads, and that could be jeopardized by advertisers' reaction to content posted on the platform, the San Francisco-based tech firm said in a filing with US regulators.

"We believe that our long-term success depends on our ability to improve the health of the public conversation on Twitter," the company said in a regulatory filing. Efforts toward that goal include fighting



ARLINGTON, US: In this file photo illustration, the Twitter account of US President Donald Trump is displayed on a mobile phone on August 10, 2020, in Arlington. — AFP

abuse, harassment, and spam, Twitter told regulators. "Elon Musk owes the world a better explanation of how the platform will deal with the likes of Trump than an edict that his ouster was wrong because it proved unpopular in some places," said Suzanne Nossel, chief of human rights nonprofit PEN America. The Knight Foundation said that a survey it commissioned found that only 41 percent of adults in the United States believe Trump was deprived of free expression rights by social media platforms that banned him. — AFP



## Business

# Ukraine says Russia halts gas supplies at key transit point

## Halt fuels fears Moscow's invasion could worsen an energy crisis in Europe

**KYIV, Ukraine:** Ukraine on Wednesday said Russia had halted gas supplies through a key transit hub in the east of the country, fuelling fears Moscow's invasion could worsen an energy crisis in Europe. Ukraine pipeline operator GTSOU said in a statement that Russian state energy giant Gazprom had "stopped supplying gas" to the key Sokhranivka transit point.

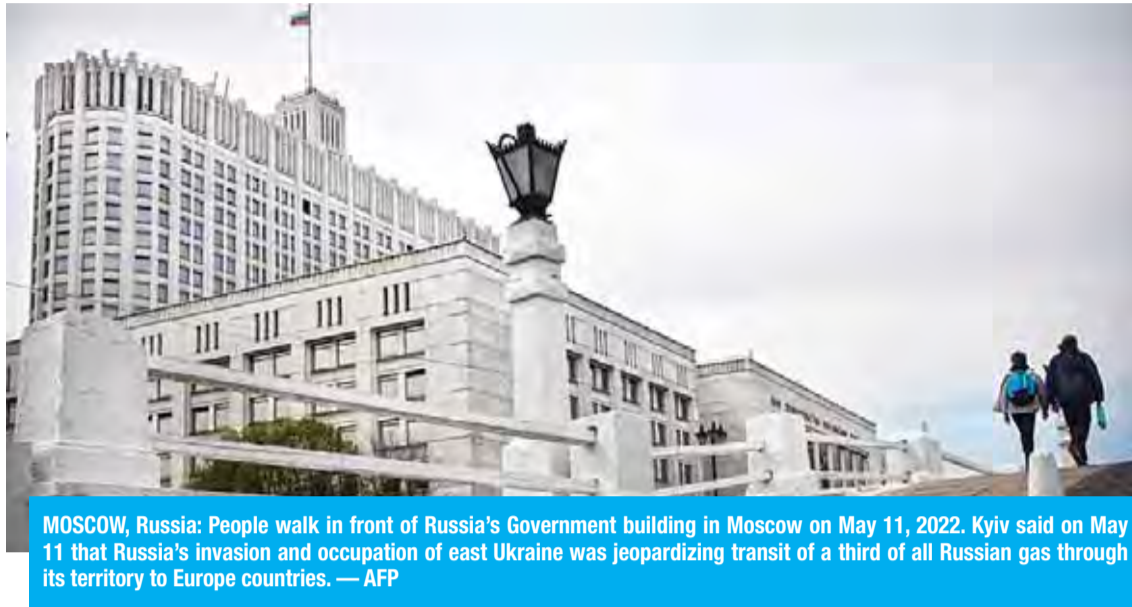
The claim came as GTSOU announced late Tuesday it was suspending flows through Sokhranivka citing interference by Russia's invading army. Also on Tuesday, Ukraine state energy company Naftogaz said it told Gazprom it was no longer responsible for transit of gas through territory occupied by Russian forces, volumes it said accounted for one-third of the total transiting Ukraine to Europe.

Kyiv's announcement has fuelled fears that Russia's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour could further push up prices at a time when they are already soaring, with Germany saying it was monitoring the situation "closely". "Gazprom turned off the tap" to Sokhranivka, GTSOU said on Wednesday.

The company also said Russia had redirected gas intended for transit through Ukraine to the breakaway republics held by pro-Russian separatists in the east. GTSOU had promised to temporarily reroute all supplies via another crossing point in the north, Sudzha, to "fulfill its transit obligations to European partners in full". Svitlana Zalisichuk, a top advisor at Ukraine state energy company Naftogaz, told AFP Russia had increased volumes through Sudzha by 15 percent but warned it was "not enough" to compensate for the drop through Sokhranivka.

### Berlin 'closely monitoring'

Figures released by GTSOU on Wednesday showed



MOSCOW, Russia: People walk in front of Russia's Government building in Moscow on May 11, 2022. Kyiv said on May 11 that Russia's invasion and occupation of east Ukraine was jeopardizing transit of a third of all Russian gas through its territory to Europe countries. — AFP

flows through Sokhranivka had dropped to zero. It said the amount of gas transiting Ukraine via these routes on Wednesday could fall by 18 percent, or 16 million cubic meters, compared to Tuesday. Russia's Gazprom denied there was a case for the Ukrainian operator to declare "force majeure" and said it was impossible to reroute all the supplies.

"It's a political game on their side. They will try to show us as irresponsible, but it is exactly the opposite," Zalisichuk told AFP. Gazprom told TASS news agency that supplies transiting Ukraine on Wednesday were at 72 million cubic meters in total, compared to 95.8 million cubic meters the day before.

In Berlin, a spokeswoman for the German economy ministry confirmed they were "monitoring the situation closely" and said "Germany's energy security currently continues to be guaranteed".

And the Kremlin insisted Russia "has always reliably fulfilled—and intends to fulfil—its contractual obligations". Ukraine is a major supply route for Russian gas to Europe and the two sides have kept flows going even after the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24. The European Union is scrambling to lessen its reliance on Russian energy supplies, but it has shied away from imposing sanctions on crucial gas flows. — AFP

## China's consumer inflation picks up in April

**BEIJING:** China's consumer inflation rose at its quickest pace in nearly half a year, official data showed Wednesday, reflecting the growing costs of the country's zero-COVID curbs and high commodity prices. The damage from Beijing's strict zero-COVID strategy has been increasingly reflected in economic data, as lockdowns in key cities such as Shanghai snarled supply chains and pushed up transportation prices. April's consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose more than expected at 2.1 percent on-year, picking up from levels seen the month before, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

This was due to "factors like the domestic epidemic and continued rise in international commodity prices," the bureau's senior statistician Dong Lijuan said in a



HANGZHOU, China: A customer shops for vegetables at a supermarket in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province on May 11, 2022. — AFP

statement. Since April, China's biggest city Shanghai had been almost entirely sealed off. Most of its 25 million residents have been confined to their homes, while goods piled up at its port as authorities rush to stamp out the worst COVID resurgence since the early days of the pandemic. Dong said that "due to the rise in logistics costs during the pandemic and increase in demand for stockpiling," prices of potatoes, eggs and fresh fruits

ticked up. The latest figures also showed that after four consecutive months of contraction, food prices overall rose for the first time on-year in April. Meanwhile, the producer price index (PPI) — which gauges the cost of goods at the factory gate — came in at 8.0 percent, higher than expected but down slightly from in March.

A key reason was that prices of commodities such as crude oil and non-ferrous metals remained at a high level, Dong said. Virus-related supply disruptions likely pushed up producer prices as well, said Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a recent report. But he added Wednesday that "the main source of higher prices continues to be oil, gas and iron ore," and that factory-gate prices of consumer durables and electronics were unchanged last month. "We think producer price inflation will continue to drop back over the coming quarters," he said.

April's weak economic data follows industry data released Tuesday that showed China saw its largest drop in car sales in two years—likely due to consumer sentiment battered by COVID restrictions. Vehicle sales plunged a steep 35 percent to about 1 million in April, according to China Passenger Car Association—a drop not seen since March 2020. — AFP

### NBK Economic Report

## Devaluation, war to slow Egypt growth

**KUWAIT:** Prospects for a continued, steady post-pandemic economic recovery in Egypt have been cast into doubt by a combination of the Ukraine war and sudden currency devaluation in March, which will push up prices, hit consumer spending and investment, reduce tourism and widen the fiscal and external deficits.

We expect Egypt's growth to be significantly reduced over coming quarters, slowing from a pandemic rebound-driven high of 8.3 percent y/y in Q21 to around 3 percent in 3Q22. Still, we expect a deep recession to be avoided. The economy's resilience has improved since the reform program that began 2017 — FX reserve levels are higher, inflation is well down from its highs and the fiscal deficit has narrowed — and the scale of the devaluation in the pound to date (15 percent) is much smaller than in 2016. Meanwhile, GCC countries have rallied to support Egypt with \$22 billion in investment and funding pledged and a new IMF program (perhaps worth \$7 billion) also looks likely. We expect growth to start recovering by the end of 2022 reverting to its pre-pandemic trend of around 4 percent by early 2023, assuming no major deterioration in the global economic picture and that the government remains committed to the economic reform process that slowed during the pandemic.

### Fiscal deficit

The above pressures will also interrupt the trend improvement in the fiscal deficit of recent years — albeit likely temporarily. Despite COVID, the deficit narrowed to 7.2 percent of GDP in FY20/21 thanks to cuts in the interest bill (due to lower interest rates). The deficit will widen again this year to 8.6 percent of GDP given fresh pressures on economic growth and spending, including from higher inflation and rising interest rates. Indeed, growth in spending (12 percent y/y) already exceeded revenues (9 percent) in February 2022. However, the deficit should be more stable in FY22/23 as commodity prices ease and the economy starts to recover.

Public debt stood at 87 percent of GDP in June 2020 and the devaluation will have increased external debt levels by around 3 percent of GDP in local currency terms. We expect the debt ratio to drift down over time, given high nominal GDP growth and the government's commitment to cut the fiscal deficit. This, together with a combination of higher interest rates, a solid FX reserve cushion, a more competitive exchange rate and external backing from the IMF should help underpin access to capital markets. However, relatively high debt levels and the large interest bill (which absorbs some 38 percent of

all government spending) will constrain the government's ability to redirect funds to priority causes including infrastructure and poverty alleviation.

### Drop in tourism revenue

The external position has been under pressure on a mix of the hit to tourism from COVID and the (previously) overvalued exchange rate. The current account deficit widened to 1.1 percent of GDP in FY20/21 amid a 51 percent plunge in export receipts from travel — previously worth around one-fifth of all trade income. This year the deficit will reach 2.9 percent of GDP with three additional factors weighing: depressed tourism due to the Ukraine war (Russia and Ukraine accounted for more than 30 percent of pre-crisis tourism to Egypt), plus the impact of both higher commodity prices and the cheaper currency on the import bill. A narrower deficit is expected in FY22/23 on import compression, an easing in commodity prices and improving tourism and trade supported by the cheaper pound.

The pound has been relatively steady at around EGP18.5/\$1 since its March drop. The currency looks better supported at this level, though some uncertainty surrounds the outlook. Futures markets suggest the pound could ease further over the coming year and the IMF may emphasize the need for currency flexibility as part of any deal. The central bank's net foreign reserves fell nearly 10 percent in March at the peak of the external pressures, but at \$37 billion remain more than double pre-2016 levels and comfortably enough to finance external debt maturities of \$7 billion this year.

### Rising interest rates

Inflation accelerated to a near-three year high of 13.1 percent y/y in April driven in particular by rising food costs (+26 percent) which are one-third of the CPI basket. We see inflation rising further over coming months on both high commodity prices and pass through from the weaker pound, peaking potentially above 15 percent in 3Q22 before falling back to within the central bank's current 5-9 percent target range mid-next year, helped also by tighter monetary policy. The bank raised the policy rate by 100 bps in March and at least a further 200 bps of hikes is expected this year.

In terms of risks, while pandemic concerns are fading, Egypt's economy would be hit by a prolonged war in Ukraine — which could jeopardize the external position — and by higher or more persistent inflation, which would worsen consumer incomes and economic growth and require even tighter monetary policy. Meanwhile, aggressive Fed policy tightening could hit in flows to emerging markets in general, causing financial volatility. Moreover, the weaker economy could further delay progress on the government's reform agenda, including key infrastructure projects, reducing public debt and increasing FDI. These remain critical to sustaining strong rates of growth over the longer term.

## Qatar Airways, Virgin Australia unveil partnership at ATM

**KUWAIT:** Qatar Airways, voted the 'World's Best Airline' at the 2021 Skytrax industry awards, and Australia's most loved carrier, Virgin Australia have today unveiled a new strategic partnership that will significantly expand both airlines' networks, lounges and loyalty programs. Commencing mid-year, the partnership will give travelers greater access, unparalleled customer experience and unique benefits when travelling between Australia and Qatar Airways' global network, with convenient transit options across Qatar Airways' Australian gateways and key Virgin Australia hubs, including Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. The strategic alliance will provide a critical trade and tourism boost for Australia, while opening a world of new travel opportunities for both airline's customers.

The partnership agreement was announced at the start of the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai, where Qatar Airways has a significant presence. Qatar Airways currently operates daily flights into Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, and Perth as well as three weekly flights into Adelaide continuing into Auckland, New Zealand. Thanks to the new codeshare agreement, Qatar Airways' passengers will be able to travel seamlessly to 35 destinations on Virgin Australia's extensive domestic network, including key popular Australian tourist destinations, including Cairns, Gold Coast, Alice Springs and Broome, on a single booking. Qatar Airways' passengers will also have access to Virgin Australia's recently relaunched short-haul international markets, including Fiji and Queenstown, New Zealand. Similarly, Virgin Australia customers and members of the airline's award-winning Velocity Frequent Flyer loyalty program, will be able to directly access Qatar Airways' route network of over 140 worldwide destinations, including the Middle East, Europe and Africa, via the airline's hub and Skytrax-rated 'World's Best Airport', Hamad International in Doha.

For Virgin Australia guests, access to Qatar Airways' extensive network provides one-stop connectivity to a wide range of destinations and the ability to book Qatar Airways flights through the Virgin Australia website. Qatar Airways serves 54 cities in Europe with over 600 flights per week, offering a huge range of new choices for Virgin Australia customers.

The strategic partnership will also include reciprocal loyalty benefits allowing Qatar Airways Privilege Club members to earn and redeem Avios when flying on Virgin Australia, with similar benefits for Velocity members when travelling on Qatar Airways' services. Privilege Club and Velocity members will also enjoy a wide range of other unique benefits, depending on status tier, such as complimentary lounge access, complimentary extra baggage allowance, priority check-in, priority boarding and priority baggage delivery when flying respectively on Virgin Australia and Qatar Airways. Qatar Airways Privilege Club recently enhanced its program through its partnership with Avios, significantly expanding accrual and redemption opportunities for its members.

The partnership with Virgin Australia builds on Qatar Airways' long-term commitment to connecting Australia to the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Qatar Airways was the only airline consistently operating international services to Australia, providing critical links for Australians to return home.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, Akbar Al-Baker said: "We have a strong, long-standing relationship with Australia and this agreement with Virgin Australia comes at a time when it is needed the most. This partnership will give Australian passengers access to the world that they have so acutely missed these past two years, to be able to reconnect with family and friends, and keep the wheels of trade moving. We hope many of them will stopover in Doha to enjoy the wonderful tourism industry that Qatar has to offer. For those travelling farther afield, they will benefit from the award-winning facilities of our hub, Hamad International Airport, enabling their onward journey. It also opens up the beautiful, cosmopolitan nation of Australia to our passengers flying in on Qatar Airways flights, after such a long, difficult time."

Virgin Australia Group Chief Executive Officer Jayne Hrdlicka said: "Today is more great news for Virgin Australia and Velocity Frequent Flyer members who are hungry to travel internationally. We are incredibly focused on creating great travel experiences and our new partnership with Qatar Airways will significantly expand Virgin Australia's footprint into the Middle East, Europe and Africa, offering hundreds more ways our guests can seamlessly see the world. Virgin Australia and Qatar Airways are both known for their award-winning service and joining forces means that together we are able to provide an incredible experience when travelling between Australia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa and beyond. Qatar Airways has been a very important partner to Australia during the pandemic, maintaining vital connectivity to the world in difficult circumstances. We are proud to have Qatar Airways join the Virgin Australia family and we look forward to welcoming their guests onboard Virgin Australia services mid-year."

Qatar Airways currently flies to over 140 destinations worldwide, connecting through its Doha hub, Hamad International Airport, currently named the 'Best Airport in the World' by Skytrax World Airport Awards 2021.



KUALA LUMPUR: Bank Negara Malaysia joins other central banks around the world in tightening monetary policy as the cost of everyday goods is pushed higher by supply chain problems and surging commodity prices.

## Malaysia central bank hikes rate to tame inflation

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's central bank raised its key interest rate on Wednesday for the first time since 2020, in a surprise move aimed at taming inflation. Bank Negara Malaysia joins other central banks around the world in tightening monetary policy as the cost of everyday goods is pushed higher by supply chain problems and surging commodity prices.

The bank lifted its main rate 25 basis points to two percent, despite most economists having predicted no change until later in the year. It was the first hike since July 2020, when rates were slashed to a historic low to combat the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. "Inflationary pressures have increased sharply due to a rise in commodity prices, strained supply chains and strong demand conditions, particularly in the US," the central bank said in a statement.

With life returning to normal as the pandemic abates, the Malaysian economy is now on a "firmer footing", giving policymakers room to start tightening policy to head off inflation, it said. Malaysia's headline inflation was 2.2 percent in March, lower than in many other countries, but food inflation jumped four percent and economists expect further increases. Fears are growing that inflation could accelerate further worldwide as China's pandemic lockdowns heighten pressure on global supply chains and the Ukraine war pushes up commodity prices. — AFP

## Business

# ECB signals rate hike as soon as July to combat inflation

## Eurozone's cheap money era coming to an end

**FRANKFURT:** European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde hinted Wednesday at a first interest rate hike in July to tackle soaring inflation, echoing the actions of other major central banks and heralding the end of the eurozone's cheap money era.

The ECB should end its bond-buying stimulus "early in the third quarter" and could raise interest rates "only a few weeks" later, Lagarde said in a speech in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana. The comment is the clearest sign yet from Lagarde that the ECB is ready to move on rates sooner rather later, as the institution trails rate hikes made by the US Federal Reserve and others to tame global inflation.

Any hike would be the ECB's first in over a decade and would lift rates from their current historically low levels. These include a minus 0.5 deposit rate which effectively charges banks to park their excess cash at the ECB overnight.

Inflation in the eurozone climbed to 7.5 percent in April, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the ECB's own two-percent target. The surge, driven in no small part by steep increases in prices for energy due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has strengthened calls for the ECB to follow its peers towards hikes.

ECB policymakers will decide their course of action in upcoming June 9 and July 21 meetings, with the July date now seen as the most likely opportunity for a rate announcement.

### Rate rise

At its last meeting in April, the ECB's governing council resolved to end its vast monthly bond purchases "in the third quarter". Over recent years,

the scheme has hoovered up billions of euros in government and corporate bonds each month to stoke economic growth and keep credit flowing in the 19-nation currency club. The ECB should draw a line under it "early" in the third quarter, which starts in July, Lagarde specified on Wednesday.

Ending net purchases under the program would open the door to an interest rate rise that could follow "only a few weeks" after, she said. After the initial move the process of monetary policy "normalization", taking interest rates out of negative territory, would be "gradual".

### July pressure

"To sum up Lagarde's speech: first rate hike on July 21," Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at ING bank, said on Twitter. Decisions by the Fed and the Bank of England to raise rates aggressively to counter inflation have added to the pressure on the ECB to act.

German central bank president Joachim Nagel said Tuesday he "will advocate a first step normalising ECB interest rates in July". The call made by the head of the traditionally conservative Bundesbank has been echoed by other members of the governing council.

On Wednesday, the head of the French central bank Francois Villeroy de Galhau also said the ECB would "progressively raise rates from the summer" to steer inflation towards the ECB's two-percent target. The central bank is set to ratchet up interest rates at a delicate moment for the economy.

The war in Ukraine has both pushed up prices and added to supply chain disruptions, putting further strain on households and businesses. In



**FRANKFURT:** European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde hinted Wednesday at a first interest rate hike in July to tackle soaring inflation.

response to the invasion, the European Union has sought to reduce its reliance on Russian energy imports and is in discussions over an embargo of Russian oil that would add to the economic stress. The ECB would raise its rates in July "followed by a return to zero in September" Gilles Moec, chief

economist at Axa insurance, told AFP.

But "between the war in Ukraine, a complicated coronavirus situation in China", which has seen a series of lockdowns and spillovers from rate hikes in the United States, the ECB will not be able to "pursue normalization easily", Moec said. —AFP

## Africa grapples with way forward on cybercrime

**ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast:** Cyber experts are urging Africa to up its game in the face of criminals targeting the continent's fast-growing internet economy with scams and theft. Countries south of the Sahara are some of the world's fastest-growing online markets—which makes them both attractive and vulnerable to cybercrime, say specialists. "The issue of cybersecurity has to be raised to the core duties of the state," Chadian economist Succes Masra said at a cyber conference in Abidjan, Ivory Coast's economic hub, which ended on Tuesday.

"If you do that, you will get follow-through. There's incomplete awareness about this problem, and we have to speed things up." Half a billion people in Africa are connected to the internet, according to Interpol—a figure that in raw numbers places the continent ahead of other regions such as South America or the Middle East.

There is plenty of room for growth, as more than 60 percent of the continent's population is still offline. Major attacks on the internet itself are very rare in Africa, the most spectacular being a brief takedown of the web across the West African state of Liberia in 2016.

Instead, say experts, fraud and theft are flourishing, inflicting an estimated economic cost of \$4 billion a year. "Less than five percent of the attacks which we have in Ivory Coast are pure attacks on computer systems," said Colonel Guelptchin Ouattara, in charge of the country's anti-cybercrime unit.

"Ninety-five percent come from online fraud or money transfers via a mobile, video blackmail, etcetera." Many Africans use their mobile phones to make instant transfers of money, often through shops, in order to avoid the expense and time of using a bank.

The trends in Africa are a lesson to the continent not to follow other parts of the world in how they tackle online crime, said Ouattara. "We have to shape our response to the local problem. You can't compare Africa with other parts of the world which have their own specificities, their own digital environment, their own risks," he said.

Several countries in Africa have already implemented a strategic plan for cybersecurity, setting up units with specialized investigators and launching awareness campaigns.

### Security 'reflex'

In Ivory Coast, for instance, the Platform for Fighting Cybercrime (PLCC) has 200,000 followers on its Facebook page, where it provides the public with tips and informs them of emerging threats and arrests. "Digital security has to become a reflex for the public, exactly the same as when you lock your door at night," said Ouattara. The software protection market is also booming.

According to the consultancy PWC, sales rose to \$2.32 billion in 2020 from \$1.33 billion in 2017. "There's an awareness and real demand," said Franck Kie, who organized the Cyber Africa Forum.

Seminars at the two-day event ranged from the risks to Africa's financial industries and e-commerce, to enhancing data protection and beefing up pan-African cooperation in fighting cybercrime. Around 20 companies promoted their products or services on the sidelines of the conference. —AFP

## The St Regis Kuwait unveils glamorous new guestrooms and opulent suites

**KUWAIT:** St Regis Hotels & Resorts is excited to announce the completion of the first phase of an extensive, three-phase transformation that will see two of the three towers currently occupied by Sheraton Kuwait Hotel reimagined under the iconic St. Regis brand. The first phase of the transformation introduces The St Regis Kuwait to the city with its collection of newly-debuted refurbished guestrooms and suites. The third tower will remain home to the historic Sheraton Kuwait Hotel. Both brands are part of Marriott Bonvoy, Marriott International's extraordinary portfolio of 30 hotel brands.

The 102 exquisitely appointed guestrooms and suites at The St Regis Kuwait feature timeless design and modern technology. All guestrooms and suites enjoy the signature St Regis Butler Service, providing around-the-clock anticipatory service that ensures every guest's stay is carefully considered.

The next two phases of the comprehensive transformation will include the property's public spaces, culinary offerings and recreational facilities. Plans also include an extensive makeover of the hotel's function spaces. The St Regis Kuwait will remain operational during this period. St Regis continues to



Fahed Abushaar



Opera suite

expand its renowned global portfolio by adding the sought-after address of Kuwait City. Following the full completion of its transformation in 2023, The St Regis Kuwait will usher in an elevated era of luxury as the capital city's newest best address, marked by the brand's celebrated traditions, bespoke service, rich heritage and glamorous design.

The St Regis Kuwait is steps away from the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center and the bustling business district, and a short drive away from the Al-Shaheed Park, the largest urban park in Kuwait. The hotel is approximately 15 minutes away from Kuwait International Airport and the Avenues Mall - one of the largest retail centers in the Middle East.

"We are delighted to complete phase one of The St Regis Kuwait which, upon completion, will redefine the luxury hospitality landscape in this destination," said Fahed Abushaar, Complex General Manager of The St Regis Kuwait, Sheraton Kuwait Hotel and Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait.

The new guestrooms and suites at The St Regis Kuwait are now available for booking. To celebrate the debut of the storied brand in Kuwait, The St Regis Kuwait is offering an exclusive accommodation package for guests which includes the brand's Afternoon Tea Ritual at the English Lounge, 20 percent savings on massage treatments, late checkout and more.

## Huawei launches Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Huawei Consumer Business Group announced Wednesday its next generation smartwatch - the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro series in Kuwait. On top of its stunning and premium design the smartwatch boasts a moon phase display, up-to 14 days long battery life, professional health management, all-new workout modes, in addition to convenient life assistant features.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro series is compatible with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices. The smartwatch is available in two variants - Titanium Edition and Ceramic Edition. Huawei's latest smartwatch will be available in Kuwait for pre-orders on the 12th of May, 2022. It will be available in retail on the 19th of May, 2022 on Huawei's official website and select retailers.

### Moon Phase collection

Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Premium design is inspired by nature, focusing on the beauty of nature and the integration of cutting-edge technologies. Its high-end design is complemented by a moon phase display; a signature

of classic and luxurious watches; that not only adds to premium look and feel of the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro series, but it also brings to users unique watch faces from which they can observe the different phases of the moon as it changes. Users can also choose different layouts showing tide times, constellation and more to master the elements as they explore outdoors.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Titanium Edition is equipped with a 1.43-inch AMOLED high-definition color display: It comes with a new look and feel with the integrated minimalist design, giving it a texture and appearance like an art piece.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Ceramic Edition - Huawei's first Ceramic watch comes with a 1.32-inch AMOLED HD color display. It incorporates the design elements of Eastern and Western aesthetics with perfect balance, interpreting the aesthetics that combine technology and elegance. The warm white and the sparkling gold and silver endow Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Ceramic Edition with quality and style. The ceramic made watch is soft and ele-



gant. It brings a soft natural gloss with excellent quality, highlighting its feminine and elegant features. It also features a new and exclusively designed flower dial with dynamic effects: the five different dial effects show various shapes of flower as time goes. The dynamic flower dial that changes with time embodies design ingenuity with artistry. The vivid blossoming of flowers not only symbolizes the passage of time in a fascinating way but also adds a fun twist in its presentation.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro

inherits the ultra-long battery life of the Huawei Watch GT Series. The enhanced battery architecture provides the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Titanium Edition with 14 days battery life and 7 days battery life in intense usage scenarios while the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Ceramic Edition comes with 7 days battery life in typical scenarios and 4 days battery life in heavy usage scenarios. The smartwatch supports the fast and convenient wireless fast charging. It only takes 10 minutes to charge for a full-day use (in typical scenarios).



These handout photos show a female giant freshwater stingray that was caught and released in the Mekong River in Cambodia's Stung Treng province. — AFP photos

## It was this big! Cambodian fishermen hook giant endangered stingray

Cambodian fishermen on the Mekong River got a shock when they inadvertently hooked an endangered giant freshwater stingray four meters long and weighing 180 kilos, scientists said on Wednesday. The female leviathan, one of Southeast Asia's largest and rarest species of fish, was caught by accident last week in Stung Treng province when it swallowed a

smaller fish that had taken a baited hook. An international team of experts on the US-funded Wonders of the Mekong project worked with the fishermen to unhook the ray before weighing and measuring it and returning it unharmed to the river. The giant Mekong is a crucial habitat for a vast array of species large and small, but project leader Zeb Hogan, a fish biologist from the University of Nevada, said

the river's underwater ecosystem was poorly understood.

"They are unseen worlds, underappreciated and out of sight," he said in a statement issued by his university. More than 1,000 fish species call the Mekong home and the stingray is not the only giant lurking in the muddy waters—the giant catfish and giant barb also reach up to three meters long and 270 kilos in

weight. The study group said in the statement that the remote location where the ray was caught has pools up to 80 meters deep and could harbor even bigger specimens.

But they also warned that underwater video footage showed plastic waste even in the deepest stretches of the Mekong, along with "ghost nets"—abandoned by fishers but still able to snare fish.

Environmentalists have long voiced concerns about dam building along the Mekong River that will destroy fish stocks. The famous waterway starts in China and twists south through parts of Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam, feeding 60 million people through its basin and tributaries. — AFP



In this file photo taken on May 11, 1997 Chess enthusiasts watch World Chess champion Garry Kasparov on a television monitor as he holds his head in his hands at the start of the sixth and final match May 11, 1997 against IBM's Deep Blue computer in New York. — AFP photos

## The 1997 chess game that thrust AI into the spotlight

With his hand pushed firmly into his cheek and his eyes fixed on the table, Garry Kasparov shot a final dark glance at the chessboard before storming out of the room: the king of chess had just been beaten by a computer. May 11, 1997 was a watershed for the relationship between man and machine, when the artificial intelligence (AI) supercomputer Deep Blue finally achieved what developers had been promising for decades.



In this file photo taken on May 07, 1997 World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov (left) makes a move on May 1997 in New York during his fourth game against the IBM Deep Blue chess computer.

It was an "incredible" moment, AI expert Philippe Rolet told AFP, even if the enduring technological impact was not so huge. "Deep Blue's victory made people realize that machines could be as strong as humans, even on their territory," he said. Developers at IBM, the US firm that made Deep Blue, were ecstatic with the victory but quickly refocused on the wider significance.

"This is not about man versus machine. This is really about how we, humans, use technology to solve difficult problems," said Deep Blue team chief Chung-Jen Tan after the match, listing possible benefits from financial analysis to weather forecasting. Even Chung would have struggled to comprehend how central AI has now become—finding applications in almost every field of human existence. "AI has exploded over

the last 10 years or so," UCLA computer science professor Richard Korf told AFP. "We're now doing things that used to be impossible."

### 'One man cracked'

After his defeat, Kasparov, who is still widely regarded as the greatest chess player of all time, was furious. He hinted there had been unfair practices, denied he had really lost and concluded that nothing at all had been proved about the power of computers. He explained that the match could be seen as "one man, the best player in the world, (who) has cracked under pressure". The computer was beatable, he argued, because it had too many weak points.

Nowadays, the best computers will always beat even the strongest human chess players. AI-powered machines have mastered every game going and now have much bigger worlds to conquer. Korf cites notable advances in facial recognition that have helped make self-driving cars a reality.

Yann LeCun, head of AI research at Meta/Facebook, told AFP there had been "absolutely incredible progress" in recent years. LeCun, one of the founding fathers of modern AI, lists among the achievements of today's computers an ability "to translate any language into any language in a set of 200 languages" or "to have a single neural network that understands 100 languages". It is a far cry from 1997, when Facebook didn't even exist.

### Machines 'not the danger'

Experts agree that the Kasparov match was important as a symbol but left little in the way of a technical legacy. "There was nothing revolutionary in the design of Deep Blue," said Korf, describing it as an evolution of methods that had been around since the 1950s. "It was also a piece of dedicated hardware designed just to play chess." Facebook, Google and other tech firms have pushed AI in all sorts of other directions.

They have fuelled increasingly powerful AI machines with unimaginable amounts of data from their users, serving up remorselessly targeted content and advertising and forging trillion-dollar companies in the process. AI technology now helps to decide anything from the temperature of a room to the price of vehicle insurance. — AFP

## In Kyiv, boxing gyms offer chance to ease war stress

The sound of hip hop mixes with the dull thud of fists walloping heavy bags as a group of Ukrainian boxers unleash combinations, burning off weeks of pent up stress. "With the curfew in the city and restrictions on movement, we needed some place to blow off steam and discharge emotional tension," said Oleksandr, a 38-year-old employee of the International Red Cross in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv who did not give his family name.

"Naturally, this helps a lot," he added after wrapping up a workout involving pad work, running and several rounds hammering away at a punching bag. Weeks after Russian forces retreated from Kyiv's suburbs, the city is slowly returning to life, where nearly two-thirds of the capital's residents have returned following the outbreak of the war. Restaurants are reopening and pavement cafes are once again attracting customers with the arrival of a late spring, where many appear to be ignoring the occasional air raid sirens echoing through the city.

Gyms have also begun to reopen, among them the All Stars Boxing Club in downtown Kyiv. At All Stars, trainers put boxing enthusiasts, fitness fanatics, and



Amateur boxers train at the All Stars Boxing Club in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

newcomers through their paces—jumping rope, doing crunches and sparring.

For the past two decades, Ukraine has maintained a dominant presence in the boxing world, with their fighters gaining a reputation for speed, movement, and fighting IQ—skills that also appear to have been adopted on the battlefield. Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko along with his brother Wladimir held a range of heavyweight titles for years, turning the pair into superstars in Ukraine and beyond. That fame also helped drive forward Vitali's successful political career.

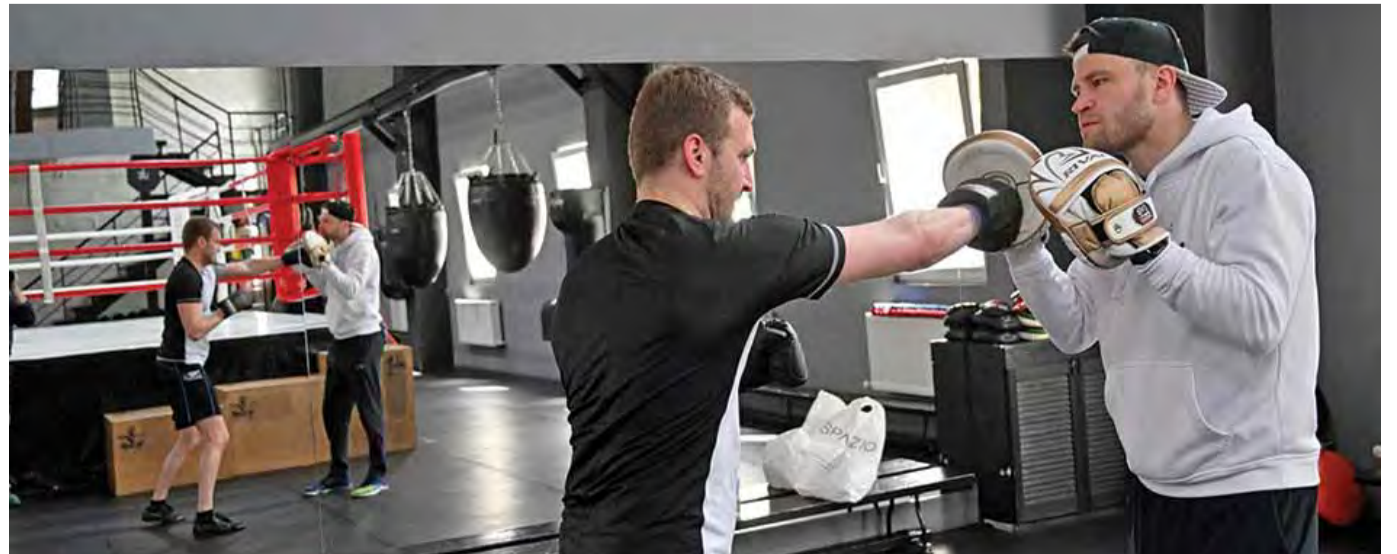
Oleksandr Usyk—the world's unified heavyweight champion—briefly hung up his gloves in February to join the territorial defence forces before returning to train for a highly-anticipated rematch against Britain's star boxer Anthony Joshua this summer.

### Stress buster

"Certainly these boxers motivate me, but I am not training to become a profes-

sional, but rather to stay fit," said Vladyslav, a 35-year-old real estate investor. "Sports helps me to stay fit, both mentally and physically, and helps overcome stress," he told AFP. And it is the same for many others at All Stars, where boxing offers a way to stay in shape while also helping manage the heavy bouts of anxiety and stress that come with life during wartime.

"Under these circumstances, sports is the only activity where one can really engage and make good use of himself," said Igor, a 35-year-old civil servant. He comes from Donetsk in the eastern Donbas region which lived through the outbreak of a Moscow-backed insurgency in 2014 that served as a years-long prelude to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that began in February. "It's deja vu, kind of. Sports helps," Igor told AFP when asked how he was holding up. "One of the advantages of boxing is that it keeps your mind clear," added Oleksandr. "All thoughts go away, it helps to reboot." — AFP



Photos show amateur boxers training at the All Stars Boxing Club in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. — AFP photos



India's music director Roopkumar Rathod (left) pays respect during the funeral ceremony of legendary Indian composer and santoor player Shivkumar Sharma, in Mumbai.



Policemen and family members take part in the funeral ceremony of legendary Indian composer and santoor player Shivkumar Sharma, in Mumbai on Wednesday. — AFP photos



Bollywood actors Amitabh Bachchan (left) and Jaya Bachchan (second left) pay their respects during the funeral.



Bollywood actress Jaya Bachchan (left) consoles Manorma Sharma, widow of legendary Indian composer and santoor player Pandit Shivkumar Sharma.



India's tabla player Zakir Hussain pays respect during the funeral.

## Santoor legend Shivkumar Sharma is dead

The world of Indian music lost one of its legends on Tuesday as eminent santoor maestro Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, 84, passed away in Mumbai. He was cremated with state honors on Wednesday. Sharma had been suffering from kidney-related ailments for the past six months and was on dialysis. He passed away due to a cardiac arrest. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he was not seen regularly at musical events for the last couple of

years. However, he was due to perform in Bhopal next week, family sources said. He is survived by wife Manorama and sons Rahul, also a santoor player, and Rohit.

Sharma has been credited with popularizing the santoor, a little-known folk instrument from Jammu and Kashmir, and giving it classical status in Indian music. He received the Padmashri in 1991 and the prestigious Padma Vibhushan in 2001 for his contributions

to Indian music. Born in Jammu, Sharma began learning the santoor at the age of 13. His first public performance was in Mumbai in 1955. He collaborated with flute legend Hariprasad Chaurasia and guitarist Brij Bhushan Kabra in 1967 to produce the acclaimed concept album 'Call of the Valley'. Under the name "Shiv-Hari", Sharma also composed music for several critically acclaimed films such as Silsila, Lamhe, Chandni and Darr, along with Chaurasia.

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray declared a state funeral for Sharma on Wednesday afternoon. Top national leaders paid tribute to the santoor legend on Tuesday. "Our cultural world is poorer with the demise of Pandit Shivkumar Sharma Ji," tweeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "He popularized the santoor at a global level. His music will continue to enthral coming generations. I fondly remember my interactions with him. Condolences to

his family and admirers. Om Shanti," the PM tweeted.

Sarod player Amjad Ali Khan tweeted: "The passing away of Pandit Shivkumar Sharma Ji marks the end of an era. He was the pioneer of santoor and his contribution is unparalleled. For me, it's a personal loss and I will miss him no end. May his soul rest in peace. His music lives on forever! Om Shanti!"—Agencies

## Tokyo's stylish toilets inspire director Wim Wenders

From American road trips to modern dance and the pope, German director Wim Wenders' films are nothing if not eclectic, and his latest inspiration is Tokyo's public toilets. The giant of European cinema is making a film about an urban renewal project in which top architects are transforming 17 dingy downtown loos into works of art. They include one toilet with colorful see-through cubicles that turn opaque when the door is locked, and another with wooden panels by Olympic Stadium designer Kengo Kuma.

All of the eye-catching new facilities in the capital's Shibuya district are free, wheelchair-accessible and kept sparklingly clean by a team of maintenance workers. "There is something very Japanese about the idea, about the whole setting. And I almost think it's a utopian idea," Wenders said at a press conference on Wednesday. "Because a toilet is a place where everybody is the same. There's no rich and poor, no old and young, everybody's part of humanity," Wenders, 76, has built a cult following with his arthouse films including



German director Wim Wenders (left) and Japanese actor Koji Yakusho pose during "The Tokyo Toilet art project with Wim Wenders" event in Tokyo on May 11, 2022, to announce launching a film about an urban renewal project involving top architects to renovate toilets in downtown Shibuya. — AFP

"Wings of Desire", "Buena Vista Social Club" and "Paris, Texas".

The director said he was approached by the organizers of the renovation project, called "The Tokyo Toilet", who inspired him to make the film featuring four short stories and starring actor Koji Yakusho as a cleaner. "I love architecture. In another life, I'd certainly want to be an architect," Wenders said. He said he is particularly happy to be working with renowned architect Tadao Ando, 80, whose gleaming circular toilet has thin slats that let in fresh air as people wash their hands.

"I was so glad when I saw his toilet the other day, and saw how he worked with the light... I thought, 'this is a precious

place.'" It is not Wenders' first time in Japan: his 1985 film "Tokyo-Ga" is a homage to the city of cinematic master Yasujiro Ozu, and he made a documentary in the late 1980s about fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto.

So far, 12 of Tokyo's 17 new toilets have been finished and are in use, mostly in parks and next to stations. Ando told reporters that in many countries, "public toilets are not considered something beautiful." "So, I thought that these magnificent toilets could convey a sense of Japan's beauty to people from around the world." — AFP

## Templeton prize-winning physicist pushes back against anti-intellectualism

Frank Wilczek, the Nobel-winning theoretical physicist whose research transformed humanity's understanding of the fundamental forces of nature, was announced Wednesday as the winner of the prestigious 2022 Templeton Prize. The 70-year-old told AFP he saw the award as a testament to the inspiring power of science, at a time when scientists themselves are increasingly under fire by anti-intellectual elements in society. "In the United States, where I live, it's in our face in recent years, and a whole political party is dedicated towards it. It's very unfortunate," the MIT professor said. "These people are saying, 'Oh, I can find my own information on the internet.' There wouldn't be an internet without understanding quantum mechanics and science, and all the hard work that engineers have put into this!"

Such designers and builders of complex systems, Wilczek said, "should get a certain amount of credibility from that: they build bridges that don't fall down usually, and vaccines that work." But he acknowledged some alienation was due to "perceived arrogance" by certain members of the scientific community, who he said must earn their credibility through patience, tolerance and honesty.

Valued at more than \$1.3 million, the Templeton Prize is one of the world's largest annual individual awards, honoring those who explore the deepest questions of the universe and humankind's place within it. Past laureates include Mother Teresa and Jane Goodall.

"Throughout Dr Wilczek's philosophical reflections, there is a spiritual quality to his ideas," said Heather Templeton Dill, president of the John Templeton Foundation, in a statement. "By uncovering a remarkable order in the natural world, Dr. Wilczek has come to appreciate different ways of thinking about reality, and through his written work, he has invited all of us to join him in the quest for understanding."

### Demystifying dark matter

Wilczek's achievements in physics include an explanation for one of the four fundamental forces of nature: the so-called "strong interaction" between elementary particles called quarks for which he and two others won the 2004 Nobel prize in physics. He also proposed a lead-

ing explanation for dark matter, which is believed to constitute 80 percent of the matter of the universe, though its nature is not yet known.

More than four decades ago, Wilczek suggested that a type of subatomic particle called an "axion" was responsible for the mysterious matter-but it is only recently that experiments have come closer to confirming their existence, thanks to advances in technology.



Frank Wilczek, the Nobel-winning theoretical physicist.

If these experiments succeed, "we would make our understanding of fundamental laws considerably more beautiful. And it would also confirm that the universe is comprehensible," he said. In 2020, French scientists confirmed the existence of another particle that Wilczek named in the 1980s: the "anyon," which can maintain a form of memory of their interactions with one another.

Microsoft is investing in this curiosity of theoretical physics to develop the next generation of quantum computing, which Wilczek says could revolutionize that nascent field. "Without denigrating the existing platform (of quantum computing), it's like having vacuum tubes and then having transistors," he said, recalling the technology leap responsible for today's computer chips.

Beyond his research, Wilczek is known for his public engagement through his talks and popular books, including "A Beautiful Question" and "The Lightness of Being," as well as columns for The Wall Street Journal. Bridging the gap between science and the public is vital, he said, "especially for scientists who do research that's curiosity driven and has no obvious applications." "What they're producing is a cultural product, and it should be brought into the culture." — AFP



A man walks out a public toilet designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando in Shibuya neighborhood in Tokyo.

Lifestyle | Features



Hero Animatronic Gizmo puppet from the 1990 film "Gremlins 2: The New Batch" is displayed at Propstore on May 9, 2022 in Valencia, California before auction next month. — AFP photos



A hand-drawn Brian Bolland "Batman: The Killing Joke" cover is displayed at Propstore in Valencia, California before auction next month.



Marty McFly's hoverboard from the 1989 film "Back To The Future Part II" is displayed at Propstore.

# For sale: DeLorean, low mileage, but plenty of years on the clock



Propstore Entertainment Memorabilia Live Auction

US actor Dan Aykroyd's costume from the 1989 film "Ghostbusters II" is displayed at Propstore in Valencia.

When this baby hits 88 miles per hour... it's probably not going to take you Back to the Future, but it might just transport a dedicated film buff to weekend runaround heaven. The wing-doored DeLorean, with an "OUTATIME" license plate and a mock-up flux capacitor, is among a host of movie memorabilia up for auction in California next month.

But unlike Thor's Hammer, Obi Wan Kenobi's lightsaber or Wilson the spiky-haired volleyball-cum-friend from "Castaway," which are also on the block, the DeLorean doesn't just have to sit on display: you can actually drive it. "This DeLorean is fully operational, registered and insured with... current mileage of 22,532," says the auction catalog published by movie specialists Propstore.

"As this is a functioning vehicle, a legal transfer of title will need to take place before delivery can be arranged." The car, which was used for events promoting Robert Zemeckis's "Back to the Future" trilogy, is expected to shift for between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

Anyone after a slightly less Earth-bound vehicle might want to consider



Propstore vice-president of business development and marketing Chuck Costas sits in a lit-up full size DeLorean Time machine replica vehicle used for Universal Studios promotional events from the 1985-1990 "Back to the Future" trilogy of films at Propstore.

splashing out up to \$1 million on an X-Wing that took part in the attack on the Death Star at the end of the original "Star Wars." "We were able to match it to a scene where the Red leader goes down,

so you actually see this particular one on screen," said Chuck Costas, Propstore vice-president.

The catch is that it's only around two feet (60 centimeters) long—a little small for

a stormtrooper, as the saying goes. Other cinematic goodies expected to be snapped up by film fans include Indiana Jones's grail diary (up to \$80,000), an expletive-laden wallet wielded by Samuel L. Jackson in "Pulp Fiction" (\$50,000), Dan Aykroyd's "Ghostbusters" costume (\$35,000), and boxing shorts worn by Will Smith in biopic "Ali" (\$2,500).

An animatronic Gizmo used in the filming of "Gremlins 2" is probably the cutest lot available, with an expected hammer price of up to \$120,000. Just don't feed it after midnight. "Many of the objects come from collectors, but also from the studios themselves, or they may have belonged to people who actually worked on the filming of the movies at the time," said Costas.

"We have things that are in the hundreds of dollars all the way to hundreds of thousands of dollars. So there's always something from your favorite movie that's in your price range." The auction takes place online and live in Valencia, near Los Angeles from June 21 to 24. — AFP



Chuck Noland's distressed Wilson volleyball from the 2000 film 'Castaway' starring Tom Hanks is displayed at Propstore.



A photomatched 1976 Pyro X-Wing Starfighter model miniature from the 1977 film 'Star Wars: A New Hope' is displayed at Propstore.



Boxing shorts worn by actor Will Smith who played Muhammad Ali in the 2001 film "Ali" are displayed at Propstore.



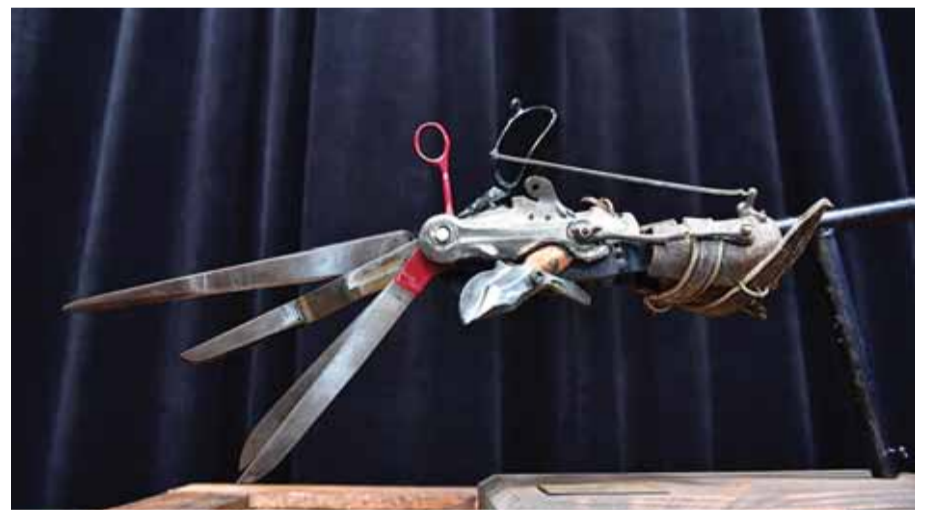
The Stunt Mjolnir Hammer used by Australian actor Chris Hemsworth in the 2011 film "Thor" is displayed at Propstore.



The Protruding Glove and Sweater worn by Freddy Krueger, played by Robert Englund in the 2003 film "Freddy vs. Jason" is displayed at Propstore.



Obi-Wan Kenobi's Lightsaber hilt with short blade from the 1999 film "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace" is displayed at Propstore.



The insert hand used by US actor Johnny Depp in the 1990 film "Edward Scissorhands" is displayed at Propstore.

## Iran archaeologists oppose bill allowing antiquities trade

Iranian archaeology professors have published an open letter calling on parliament to step back from a draft law that would allow trade in antiquities, Iranian media reported Wednesday. "A group of archaeology professors from across the country called for the withdrawal of a bill that would allow the trade of ancient artefacts," the ISNA news agency reported.

According to the news agency, 46 out of 290 MPs proposed the draft law earlier this week, dubbed the "optimal utiliza-

tion of ancient objects and treasures". Lawmakers said they hope to turn Iran into a "regional centre" for antiquities trade, aiming to prevent the "cheap smuggling of national heritage", ISNA said, citing the text of the draft.

Iranian media regularly report arrests of individuals accused of smuggling artefacts out of the country. In their letter, the professors strongly criticized the MPs for proposing the bill "without any consultation with official archaeological institutions". "Not only does this plan not prevent the destruction of heritage and unprofessional excavations, it legally authorizes looters to destroy our heritage," the letter warned. Iran is home to 26 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and 53 other sites on the body's tentative list. —AFP

## Mike Tyson to face no charges over plane fracas

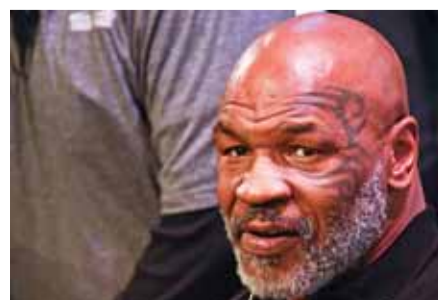
Former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson will not face criminal charges over repeatedly punching a fellow plane passenger, a prosecutor in California said Tuesday. Cell phone footage showed Tyson leaning over the back of his seat and delivering a flurry of blows to the man, who appeared to be left with bruises and some bleeding after the April 20 incident. Iron Mike was initially friendly to the passenger

and his friend when they boarded the flight from San Francisco to Florida, but snapped after the man wouldn't stop provoking him, the TMZ entertainment website said.

San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe told AFP there would be no charges against the former fighter. We have reviewed the police reports of the San Francisco Police Department

and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office and have viewed the various videos collected by law enforcement from others on the airplane, Wagstaffe said. Our decision is that we will not file any charges against Mr Tyson based on the circumstances surrounding the confrontation.

These include the conduct of the victim leading up to the incident, the interaction between Mr Tyson and the victim, as well as the requests of both the victim and Mr Tyson that no charges be filed in this case. Considered one of the best heavyweights of all time, Tyson is also known for his erratic behavior, which included infamously biting off a piece of Evander Holyfield's ear in a 1997 bout. Tyson was convicted in 1992 of rape, and jailed for three years. In 2007 he admitted to a cocaine addiction. —AFP



## Sports

# Djokovic, Jabeur progress as back injury stops Raducanu

## Jabeur cruises into the second round

**ROME:** Novak Djokovic's love affair with Rome continued as the five-time champion picked up his 60th victory at the Italian Open with a 6-3, 6-2 success over Aslan Karatsev on Tuesday. Ons Jabeur eased into the second round with a straight sets win over Sorana Cirstea but US Open champion Emma Raducanu was forced to retire from her first round against Bianca Andreescu, still struggling with a back injury she picked up in Madrid last week.

World number one Djokovic has never lost before the quarter-finals at the tournament and is now just three victories shy of joining the 1,000 match-wins club. "He probably has the biggest calf we have in tennis. Very strong guy, just solid from the baseline," Djokovic said of the 35th-ranked Karatsev. "You never know with him. If he's feeling the ball, he can be very dangerous because he stays so close to the line, puts pressure on his opponents."

Karatsev committed 36 unforced errors during the match and Djokovic capitalized. "I'll take this win for sure. It's a straight-sets win against a quality opponent," continued the Serb. Djokovic, who is in his record-extending 369th week at the top of the rankings, must reach at least the semi-finals in Rome to hold onto the number one spot, and avoid being overtaken by Daniil Medvedev. In the last 16, Djokovic will face compatriot Laslo Djere or three-time major champion Stan Wawrinka.

Grigor Dimitrov and Stefanos Tsitsipas will square off for the second time in seven days after the Bulgarian moved past American qualifier Brandon Nakashima 6-3, 6-4 in first round action on Tuesday. Argentina's Diego Schwartzman saved two match points before seeing off Miomir

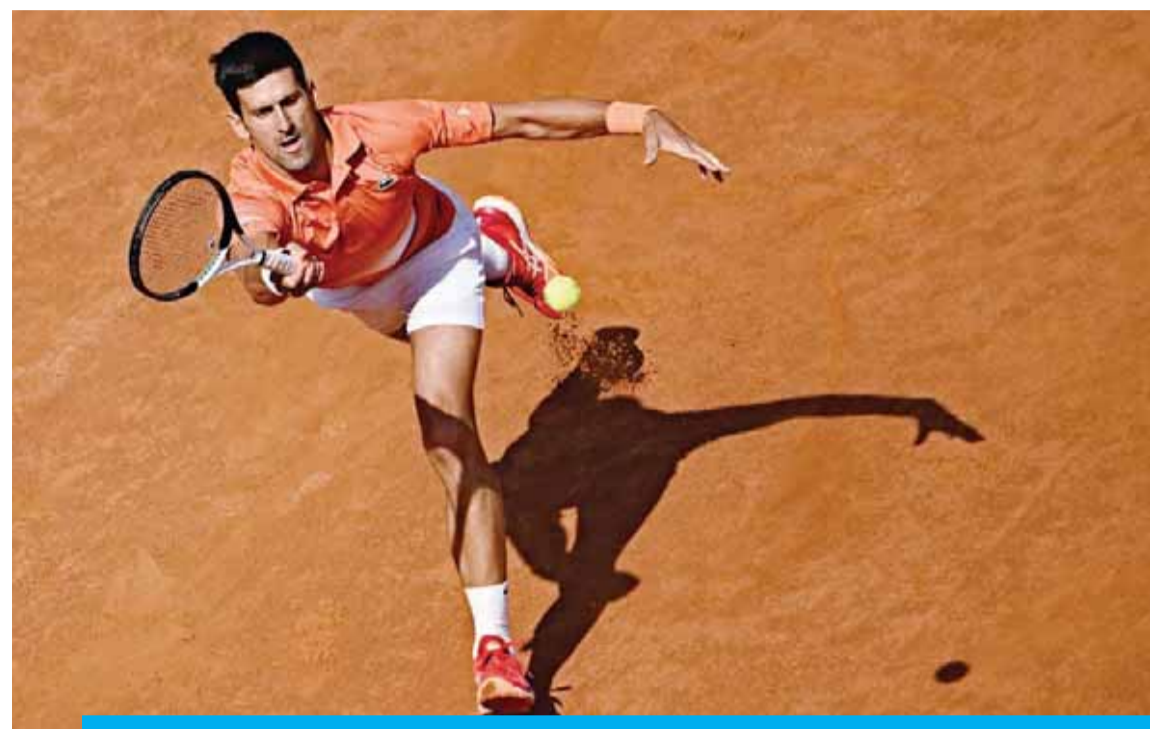
Kecmanovic 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (7/3) result while British ninth seed Cameron Norrie saved 4 break points in his 6-4, 6-4 success over local wildcard Luca Nardi. He will play former US Open champion Marin Cilic next.

### Raducanu retires

Raducanu's retirement marked a disappointing end to a highly-anticipated clash with Andreescu, another US Open champion. Andreescu was up a set and a break, 6-2, 2-1, on Raducanu before the British 10th seed made the call to end the match. After dropping serve twice in the opening set to trail Andreescu 2-5, Raducanu took an off-court medical timeout. It was not enough, though, and she had to pull out of the contest four games later.

"I'm definitely disappointed with how today went. But I guess I wanted to give it a try," said the 19-year-old Raducanu. "I never really knew how bad it was until I kind of went out there. For me, I'm still learning when it's right to push my body and push through it, and when it's not." A back injury also accounted for Spaniard Sara Sorribes Tormo who was leading Nuria Parrizas Diaz 6-1, 4-3 when she had to retire. Parrizas Diaz and Andreescu will now meet in the second round.

Ninth seed Jabeur claimed her first victory in three meetings with Romanian Sorana Cirstea 6-0, 7-6 (7/1), just three days after she lifted the biggest trophy of her career in Madrid. On Saturday the Tunisian made history when she became the first Arab or African woman to win a WTA 1000 title. Jabeur won the first eight games of the match and looked on her way to a routine victory when she was serving for a place in the second round at 6-0, 5-2. But Cirstea had other



**ROME:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns to Russia's Aslan Karatsev during their first round match at the ATP Rome Open tennis tournament on May 10, 2022. —AFP

ideas and clawed her way back to level the set at 5-5 and force a tiebreak.

Jabeur steadied the ship in the breaker and booked a second-round date with Ajla Tomljanovic. Runner-up to Jabeur in Madrid, 13th seed Jessica Pegula squeezed past world number

25 Liudmila Samsonova 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 to set up a last-32 showdown with in-form Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina. Former French Open champion and number 11 seed Jelena Ostapenko was sent packing by American qualifier Lauren Davis 6-2, 6-3 in just one hour and 10 minutes. —AFP

## 'Ruthless' Gujarat thrash Lucknow to book IPL play-off

**PUNE:** Afghanistan's Rashid Khan claimed four wickets as Gujarat Titans became the first team to qualify for the IPL play-offs with a 62-run thrashing of Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday. Indian opener Shubman Gill made 63 off 49 deliveries to steer Gujarat to 144 for four after electing to bat first on what seemed like a tough pitch to score in Pune. Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid then returned figures of 4-24 — his best in IPL — to dismiss the opposition for 82 in 13.5 overs as Gujarat, in their debut season, bounced back from two losses to top the 10-team IPL.

Hardik said they learnt from being complacent in their previous loss to Mumbai Indians by five runs. "In the last game we thought the game was already over before it was over. That was the learning which we took," said Hardik. "Even in this game when they were eight down, I said, 'Let's be ruthless. This game is beautiful. If it's not over, it's not over. If they're down, let's keep them down, get this done and relax post-game.'"

Both Gujarat-owned by global capital venture fund CVC Capital-and Lucknow are new additions to the IPL this season. Gujarat reclaim the top spot from Lucknow who slip to second but are still in with a strong chance of making the play-offs. The top four teams will make the play-offs starting May 24. Gill set up victory after he lifted Gujarat from 51-3 to build key partnerships including a 52-run fourth-wicket stand with David Miller (26) and 41 unbroken for the fifth with Rahul Tewatia (22 not out).

Mohsin Khan had removed opener Wriddhiman Saha for five before Avesh Khan caused further trouble by sending back Australia's Matthew Wade, for 10, and Hardik, for 11. Gill smashed seven boundaries and Miller hit the only six of the innings to guide Gujarat to a total that looked under-par but proved enough for victory. "Coming into the season, not many people gave us a chance or thought we'd qualify but here we are sitting on top of the table so it feels pretty good," said man of the match Gill.

Lucknow made a mess of their tricky chase after they fell to 33-3 with opener Quinton de Kock (11) and skipper KL Rahul (eight) back in the dug out. Wickets kept tumbling and Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis was out after a mix up with Deepak Hooda who made a valiant 27 before falling to Rashid's leg-spin. Left-arm spinner Sai Kishore took two wickets before Rashid wrapped up the innings. —AFP

## Japan heavyweights in shock badminton defeats in Thailand

**BANGKOK:** It was a day of upsets at Thailand's Thomas and Uber Cup Wednesday with badminton world number one Akane Yamaguchi suffering a stun-

## Thailand's women cricketers look past WCup heartache

**BANGKOK:** In a country where a Muay Thai right hook is more familiar than a batter's hook shot, Thailand's pioneering women cricketers are winning hearts with smiles, dance moves-and skill. In contrast to Asian powerhouses India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, where the game has deep historical roots going back to British imperial rule, cricket remains in its infancy in Thailand and is still virtually unknown.

Thailand qualified for the 2020 Women's T20 World Cup in Australia, where the hosts beat India in the final, but further progress is being hampered by minimal exposure on TV and lack of access to equipment. They have suffered heartbreak too. Thailand were on course to reach the 50-over World Cup in New Zealand in March-April, but saw their dream shattered when the qualifying tournament was abandoned because of the pandemic.

None of it helps when trying to raise awareness of cricket in Thailand. All-rounder Chanida Suttthiruang played in the T20 World Cup, where Thailand failed to win in four games and bowed out in the group stage, and says that even her own family struggle to grasp the sport. "Most people in Thailand associate cricket with hockey. My parents don't understand what cricket is," the 28-year-old farmer's daughter told AFP.

### Making their mark

At early morning training on the outskirts of Bangkok, Natthakan Chantam is all smiles as a bowling machine spits 100kph (60mph) deliveries at her. "I love the celebrations when you score a run or get someone out... there are celebrations in

every moment of the game," the 26-year-old opener, Thailand's top run-scorer at the T20 World Cup, told AFP.

"I think that's the charm of cricket." Thailand made their international debut in 2007 but have drastically improved in the past three years, said their Indian head coach Harshal Pathak. "We like to play cricket with an aggressive brand... there's an intent in everything—the way we bat, the way we field, the way we bowl. There's a businesslike attitude," he told AFP.

"The girls want to make a mark for themselves." He praised the team's spin attack and said fielding was another strength, with batting slowly developing. "We're at a stage where we are mastering how to complete games and how to build innings," he said. The country's cricket association started offering full- and part-time contracts about 10 years ago, which stopped a talent drain caused by women from poorer rural backgrounds being unable to afford to play.

### 'We felt empty'

But their biggest recent setback was the failure to reach the 50-over Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand, the jewel in the sport's international calendar. Thailand won three out of four matches but the November-December qualifying series in Zimbabwe was abandoned because of the Omicron variant emerging in southern Africa. The three remaining World Cup places were handed out based on one-day international rankings, meaning Bangladesh, Pakistan and the West Indies qualified instead.

"We felt so empty," Suttthiruang said. "One minute we were celebrating a win and then a minute later we were told we were disqualified and we had to rush to the airport to get back to Thailand because of Omicron." The team also missed out on a place in the latest ICC Women's Championship, denying them a chance to test themselves regularly against top sides. "It sets them

pink jersey," he added.

This was the seventh time the Giro has climbed Etna and the 25-year-old Kamna can add this famous victory to his mountain stage win on the Tour de France in 2020. "Lopez had some kind of problem on the last corner and I just about got it. Now I can continue this Giro with confidence," Kamna said. After a three-day stay in Hungary, the Giro peloton had a rude awakening on its arrival in Italy as a 14-rider escape group tore away early on the 170km ride from Avola to Etna.

Among the potential contenders for the overall title, the 2017 Giro winner Tom Dumoulin dropped time on the final climb as British outfit Ineos set a blistering pace up the 1,892m summit. "I can't explain it, but it was unpleasant to be alone on the climb," said Dumoulin of Jumbo. Another rider who failed to produce was Italian veteran double Giro winner Vincenzo Nibali, who was dropped in the final kilometers.

Overnight leader Mathieu van der Poel made no effort to defend his lead on the climb, but had earlier attempted a long range solo escape. Astana's Colombian climber Miguel Angel Lopez withdrew early in the stage on a day

ning defeat at the hands of a teenage rookie, while in the men's competition Kento Momota was also out-classed. Indonesia's Bilqis Prasista, 18, saw off Japan's world champion Yamaguchi 21-19, 21-19 in 35 minutes at Bangkok's Impact Arena. But Japan roared back to beat the Indonesians 4-1 and top Group A. Both teams have qualified for the quarter-finals of the women's Uber Cup.

"It's unbelievable. I didn't expect I'd beat the world number one but I had enough self-confidence that my best would get me something," said Prasista, ranked

333rd in the world. A disappointed Yamaguchi said the drift in the arena had made it difficult to control the shuttlecock. "I'm the only reason I lost. I didn't control the match well enough," the 24-year-old told reporters.

In the men's game second-ranked Momota, also from Japan, was upstaged by Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, who is sixth in the world. Momota — who has suffered a run of bad form since a career-threatening car crash in January 2020 — struggled to keep pace in the first game, losing 17-21. Lee kept him scoreless for 11 points in the second game, ultimately snatching victory 21-8



**BANGKOK:** Chanida Suttthiruang of Thailand's women's national cricket team prepares to play a shot during a training session in Bangkok. —AFP

back by three years," women's cricket historian Raf Nicholson, from Bournemouth University in England, told AFP. She said the Thai team needed to play against top-10 nations to take their game to the next level, rather than beating lower-tier teams. The team could become a model for other nations which have little cricketing history but are keen to develop the game, she said. "Thailand is an example to any country without a long history of cricket that if you invest enough and are committed enough, good things will happen," she said.

### 'How cool is this?'

The team now have their sights set on qualifying for the next T20 World Cup in South Africa in February next year. Whatever happens, former Australian captain turned commentator Lisa Sthalekar said they will continue to win hearts with their captivating smiles, on-field dancing and traditional bowling. "They played in a spirit... reminded you of when you first started playing the game," Sthalekar said. "It wasn't: 'I'm in a T20 World Cup, it's do or die, we have to win.'" "It's like: 'How cool is this?'" —AFP



**NICOLOSI:** Team Bora's German rider Lennard Kamna celebrates as he crosses the finish line, ahead of Team Trek's Spanish rider Juan Pedro Lopez (left), to win the 4th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2022 cycling race on May 10, 2022. —AFP

marked by a motorbike crash that brought a clutch of riders tumbling to the tarmac. Wednesday's stage 5 is also in Sicily, running from Catania to Messina with a mountain to climb early on, making another escape a strong possibility. —AFP

in a swift 46 minutes. "My movement was quite slow today," a devastated Momota told reporters.

Meanwhile, top-ranked Viktor Axelsen came back from an early injury scare to win his marathon 73-minute match against China's Guang Zu Lu 17-21, 21-10, 21-09. Both Axelsen and Lu — who is ranked 25th in the world — took dramatic tumbles in the opening four rallies of the first game because the court was not mopped properly. "The floor was really slippery. I'm pretty frustrated with the court," Axelsen said. —AFP

Sports

# Liverpool still chasing Man City like 'mad' in title race

## City stay top on goal difference

**BIRMINGHAM:** Liverpool are still "chasing like mad" after Manchester City at the top of the Premier League, said Jurgen Klopp after coming from a goal down to beat Aston Villa 2-1 on Tuesday. The top two are now level on points, but City stay top on goal difference and have a game in hand away to Wolves on Wednesday.

Liverpool could ill-afford another slip up after being held 1-1 at home by Tottenham at the weekend and got off to the worst possible start when Douglas Luiz fired Villa in front after three minutes. But Joel Matip quickly levelled and Sadio Mane's fine header 25 minutes from time kept the Reds in contention for a historic quadruple of trophies. "We are still chasing like mad," said Klopp. "We just know we have to win, that didn't change and now we have to recover to play the FA Cup final. There is no mercy."

However, victory came at a cost as Fabinho limped off with a muscle injury that makes him a major doubt for both Saturday's FA Cup final and the Champions League final against Real Madrid on May 28. "He felt a muscle, not too much," added

Klopp. "He is quite positive but I'm not sure what I can make of that to be honest." With one eye on Wembley, Klopp rolled the dice with his team selection as Mohamed Salah and Thiago Alcantara were left on the bench, while there was no place in the squad for Andy Robertson.

The visitors looked like a much-changed side as Villa sprang out of the traps and caught them cold. Alisson Becker had already denied Ollie Watkins by the time Steven Gerrard's men took the lead on three minutes. Luiz's header was parried by Alisson, but only back into the path of his Brazilian international teammate to hammer the rebound high into the net. Villa won this fixture 7-2 last season, but Liverpool this time bounced straight back from the early blow of conceding.

The hosts did not deal with a free-kick into the box and the ball eventually broke for Virgil van Dijk to square for his centre-back partner Matip to apply the finishing touch. Chances continued to come at both ends in a frantic first half. Mane headed inches wide and Naby Keita missed his kick

with the goal gaping for Liverpool, while, at the other end, Danny Ings just failed to keep his header down from Lucas Digne's inviting cross.

### Mane header

Liverpool's heavy schedule began to show physically when Fabinho limped off with a hamstring injury midway through the first half. However, Liverpool went through the gears in the second period to show the gulf in class between the sides.

"We've got to take the big moments we created in the game," said Gerrard. "I'm frustrated we didn't score more than once. "We were ambitious, brave and courageous against one of the best teams in the world." Luis Diaz's arrival in January has played a huge part in keeping Klopp's men in contention for four trophies. The Colombian created the winner as he teased Tyrone Mings before delivering a pinpoint cross for Mane to head in his 22nd goal of the season.

There were still nervy moments for Liverpool to see out in the final quarter as Villa sought to expose their high line. Twice



**BIRMINGHAM:** Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (left) vies with Aston Villa's Brazilian midfielder Douglas Luiz during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Liverpool on May 10, 2022. —AFP

Ings failed to capitalize when played through on goal before being flagged off-side when he did finally put the ball in the net. But Liverpool held on and will hope Gerrard can finally come to their rescue in a

title race. Gerrard famously never won a league title during his decorated playing career at Anfield, but will take Villa to face City at the Etihad on the final day of the season. —AFP



Saudi women's team



Oman's shooting team

## Over 1,700 athletes to compete in 3rd Gulf Games

**KUWAIT:** The Third Gulf Games will start on Friday and will continue till May 31. Over 1,700 athletes will compete in 16 games. The organizing committee held a meeting which was chaired by State Minister for National Assembly Affairs and State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajjhi in the presence of the Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Olympic Committee (KOC) Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KOC Board Member, Chairman of Sports Committee Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Nawaf, Deputy Director General of Public Authority for Sport Dr Saqer Al-Mulla and KOC Secretary Hussein Al-Musallam.

The committee discussed all final details ahead of the Games and welcomed all the participants and guests. Meanwhile, some teams and delegates have

arrived. Saudi women's Futsal team and Oman's Shooting teams were among the teams that arrived. Others will arrive according to the competition's sequence in the games which will start with the women's athletics - followed by the men's Futsal games and Shooting competition.

Member of Saudi Arabian Football Federation, Director of Women's Football Department Lamyaa Bin Bahayan said the Saudi women's team is seeking for positive results, adding that the aim is to present a level that reflects the development of women's football in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region.

Meanwhile, the General Supervisor of the Women's National Teams Aliya Al-Rasheed said preparation for this event is according to the plans of the technical department. "It was done in three stages - starting with performance trials to select the best players for the national team. The second was the Riyadh and Jeddah stage during the month of Ramadan and finally it was the camping season in Riyadh.

### Athletics team returns

Meanwhile, Kuwait Athletics National Team will

return from Turkey today, where they trained for 20 days. The delegation was headed by treasurer, Faisal Al-Dasam. Assistant Secretary and Chairman of Teams Committee Manea Al-Ajmisis said the camp achieved majority of their goals, adding that the men's team will continue their training at Ahmad Al-Rashdan tracks.

### Fencing targets gold

Technical Director of fencing teams Abdelkareem Al-Shamlan said Kuwait's ambition is to win gold and search for a new leadership. He said Kuwait teams are ready for the competition. He said while the Foil and Epee are getting ready for a local training camp, the Sabre team is in a training camp in Italy during which they will participate in the world championship that will take place in Rome from May 19 to May 21.

### Table Tennis training

Technical Director of Table Tennis Sabri Al-Ali said the national team will continue their training mornings and evenings at Salmiya Sports Club.



## USA staging first Rugby World Cup a 'game-changer'

**LONDON:** The United States staging a first Rugby World Cup would be a "game-changer" for the sport in the country, according to Eagles international Nick Civetta. World Rugby is set to announce the destination of five World Cups following a vote of its ruling council in Dublin on Thursday, with the US in line to host both the 2031 men's and 2033 women's editions.

New Zealand is set to stage this year's COVID-delayed women's World Cup, with the 2023 men's tournament taking place in France. England are the favorites to put on the 2025 World Cup, with Australia lined up as the venue for the 2027 men's World Cup and the women's showpiece two years later.

But all these countries are established rugby union nations, whereas the 15-a-side code is an emerging game in a US market still dominated by the native North American sports of American football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey. "In the long term, obviously, it would be massive to get the World Cup," Civetta, one of three American internationals in the Oxford team that beat arch-rivals Cambridge in the University match at Twickenham in April, told Britain's Press Association.

Club rugby in the US has expanded with the creation of Major League Rugby (MLR), a competition featuring the likes of former England captain Chris Robshaw. "The MLR is growing, the quality of play is increasing every week and the visibility," said Civetta. "If we're able to get the World Cup in the US, it would be a game-changer for the finances of the game," he added, citing the "fantastic" impact on Japan, another emerging rugby nation, in staging the 2019 World Cup.

For former Newcastle and Doncaster lock Civetta, 32, the more immediate task is to help the United States, whose men's side went two years without a Test due to the coronavirus pandemic, qualify for next year's World Cup in France. The Eagles face Chile in a two-legged qualifier in July to decide who will play at France 2023, with Civetta saying: "We are massively looking forward to the opportunity to qualify this summer and there is a huge amount of energy that will go into that." —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kalfan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24817464
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401
Kaizen center	25716707		
Rawda	22517733		
Adaliya	22517144		

### Clinics

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, Gangadhar, S/o Pushpan, holder of Indian Passport No. K8035271, issued in Kuwait on 08/06/2013 & Civil ID No. 282031302552, have changed my name from Gangadhar to Gangadhara Poojary in all my dealings and documents. I will be known by name of Gangadhara (given name) and Poojary (surname). (C 1446) 10-5-22

I MURTUZA (current name as in Passport), holder of Indian

Passport Number: M2309863, having permanent address VPO GALIYAKOT, DUNGARPUR DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN, INDIA - 314026 (State, Country and Pincode), and residing in Kuwait at present, do hereby declare that I change my name to MURTUZA (Given Name) SINGAPUR (Surname) for all purposes, and that I undertake to effect the change in all my official documents. (C 1447) 10-5-22

OLD NAME: MUSTAFA ALI, NEW NAME: MUSTAFA AMJERAWALA, NEW ADDRESS: 251 MASAKIN E SAIFIA, BIJALPUR, INDORE, M.P. (C #1448) 12-5-22

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MIAMI: Paul Reed #44 of the Philadelphia 76ers blocks a shot by Caleb Martin #16 of the Miami Heat during the second half in Game Five of the Eastern Conference Semifinals at FTX Arena on May 10, 2022. —AFP

## Miami, Phoenix back on track

### Heat thrash Philadelphia 76ers 120-85

MIAMI: Top seeds Miami and Phoenix moved to within one win of the NBA conference finals on Tuesday after scoring blowout victories against Philadelphia and Dallas. In Miami, Jimmy Butler scored 23 points in a balanced offensive effort as the Heat thrashed the Philadelphia 76ers 120-85 to seize control of their best-of-seven Eastern Conference playoff series.

It was a similar story in Phoenix, where the Suns overwhelmed the Mavericks to score a 110-80 win in the Western Conference playoffs. Both Miami and Phoenix now lead their respective series 3-2, needing just one win from their final two games to advance to the conference finals. Dallas had roared back into contention to level the series at 2-2 on Sunday after dropping games one and two in Phoenix last week. But normal service resumed as Phoenix reasserted themselves emphatically in front of their home fans on Tuesday.

Devin Booker led the Phoenix scoring with 28 points while Deandre Ayton had 20 points with nine rebounds. Dallas had led by as much as eight points during an even first half that saw the Suns lead by three at the break. But Phoenix erupted in

the third quarter, outscoring Dallas by 33-14 to take a stranglehold on the contest. Luka Doncic led the Mavericks scorers with 28 points and 11 rebounds with Jalen Brunson providing support with 21 points.

#### Sixers outplayed

In the Eastern Conference, Miami look poised to punch their ticket to the next round after dominating a subdued Philadelphia. Few would bet against Miami closing out the series in game six on Thursday against a Philadelphia team who were outplayed in every department.

Butler was one of seven Miami players who finished in double figures, with Max Strus contributing 19 points and 10 rebounds and Gabe Vincent adding 15 points. Victor Oladipo added 13 off the bench while Bam Adebayo had 12. Philadelphia meanwhile struggled to get going at any stage, with Joel Embiid, wearing a protective facemask once more to shield a fractured orbital bone, clearly not firing on all cylinders. Embiid finished with 17 points to lead the Sixers scoring, while James Harden had just 14. Overall Philadelphia

shot just 31 of 85 from the field.

"We did what we were supposed to do once again, we won at home," Butler said. "We're a different team when we make shots. But I don't like that, I want us to get stops no matter what and then worry about making shots." Asked what it will take to clinch the series in game six on Thursday, Butler replied: "Us to continue to play basketball the right way, us to get stops and not rely on making shots. 'I promise you if we don't give a damn about making shots and just concentrate on defense, we will win.'"

Sixers coach Doc Rivers was at a loss to explain his team's failure to show up. "They were just so much more engaged, more physical," Rivers said of Miami. "There's a lot of disappointment from all of us tonight. 'We played at a snail's pace, had just 85 shots, turned the ball over. Everything they did tonight was harder and better than us. 'Their energy was better, their toughness was better.' Asked what aspects of the game had gone wrong, Rivers replied: "I'll have to watch the tape or burn the tape. Probably watch it because I have to, and then I'll burn it. 'But we'll be ready next game because we have to be.' —AFP

### Barcelona win overshadowed by Araujo injury

MADRID: Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice as Barcelona tightened their grip on second place in La Liga on Tuesday with a 3-1 win at home to Celta Vigo. But Barca's victory was overshadowed by a nasty head injury to defender Ronald Araujo, who had to be taken away in an ambulance in the 64th minute of the match.

Araujo was lifted into the ambulance on a stretcher, wearing a neck brace. Barcelona confirmed the 23-year-old "suffered a concussion and has been taken to the hospital to undergo further testing". After the game, Barca coach Xavi Hernandez said: "The doctor has told us he is conscious. He will spend the night in hospital but he is out of danger. 'The doctor said we shouldn't worry, that he will spend the night in hospital as a precaution, nothing more.'"

Araujo's injury came after he and Gavi banged heads challenging for the same ball. Araujo stumbled on for a few seconds before dropping to the floor as a concerned Iago Aspas and Eric Garcia called urgently for the medics. The Uruguayan was put into the recovery position and after a few minutes, he was lifted into an ambulance that had driven onto the pitch.

Aubameyang's double either side of half-time came after Memphis Depay had opened the scoring at Camp Nou. Celta pulled one back through Aspas but any hopes of a comeback were dashed when Jeison Murillo was sent off just before the hour. "We were effective but we didn't play well," said Xavi. "It was simpler against 10 men but we



BARCELONA: Barcelona's players stand near the ambulance during the evacuation of Uruguayan defender Ronald Araujo after an injury, during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and RC Celta de Vigo on May 10, 2022. —AFP

struggled against 11."

Barca move seven points ahead of Sevilla and eight in front of Atletico Madrid, with Sevilla and Atletico playing each other at the Wanda Metropolitan on Sunday.

Real Madrid, who have already been crowned champions, sit nine points clear of Xavi Hernandez's side at the top of the table, with a game in hand. Securing qualification for next season's Champions League last weekend means Xavi's primary objective has already been achieved but the club's dire financial situation means the team can still not afford to let up. Every place towards the top of La Liga is worth around seven million euros while qualifying for the four-team Spanish Super Cup by finishing in the top two is worth another eight million euros to the Catalans.

#### Electric Aubameyang

They should have the runners-up spot sewn up after another victory that owed much to Aubameyang, the 32-year-old scoring his 12th and 13th goals since joining Barcelona from Arsenal in January. Aubameyang's electric early form has slowed a little in recent weeks but it is hard to think of a Barca player who has made a bigger contribution to their resurgence in the second half of the season. Depay's game-time has suffered as a result of Aubameyang's form but they both started against Celta and it was Depay who gave the hosts the lead in the 30th minute, sweeping in after a superb run down the right by Ousmane Dembele. Depay then turned provider for Aubameyang's first as he latched onto Jordi Alba's through ball and crossed for his Gabonese teammate to finish on the turn four minutes before half-time. —AFP



### Qatar announces first arrests for fake WCup merchandise

DOHA: Qatari authorities said Tuesday they had arrested five people for marketing counterfeit World Cup products, as migrant workers flocked to catch a glimpse of the tournament trophy. The five were detained by the Gulf state's cyber crimes police "for promoting the sale of clothes bearing the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 logo without obtaining prior approval from FIFA," the interior ministry said in a statement.

FIFA is world football's governing body and Qatar will host the World Cup later this year. Authorities in December raided a factory making perfume that was to be put in World Cup logo branded bottles, without arresting anyone. There is no official perfume. The arrests declared on Tuesday are therefore the first to be announced in relation to World Cup counterfeiting in Qatar.

Acting on a tip off about a social media account selling t-shirts and hats bearing the World Cup symbol, police seized items. The unnamed suspects "confessed to the charges against them when presented with the evidence" and they will be referred to prosecutors, the statement added. FIFA has sent out a "friendly reminder" in phone text messages to Qatari numbers to dissuade the illegal use of the tournament emblem and the World Cup. — AFP