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# Qatar Amir blames Zionist entity for Al Jazeera journalist's death

## Qatar, EU push stalled nuclear talks as Sheikh Tamim visits Iran

### Amir heads to Italy on private visit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah headed on Thursday to Italy on a private visit. HH the Amir was seen off at the airport by HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzuq Al-Ghanem, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior state officials. — KUNA

TEHRAN: The Amir of Qatar on Thursday accused the Zionist entity over the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during a Zionist army raid in the occupied West Bank. Abu Akleh was "killed by the (Zionist) occupation forces", Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said at a joint news conference in Tehran with Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi. "We must hold the perpetrators of this heinous crime accountable," the Qatari leader added.

Abu Akleh, a 51-year-old Palestinian-American, was shot dead on Wednesday as she covered the Zionist military operation in the Jenin refugee camp. The Qatar-based pan-Arab television channel charged that Zionist forces had killed her deliberately "in cold blood". Zionist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had said Wednesday it was "likely" Abu Akleh was killed by stray Palestinian gunfire, but Defense Minister Benny Gantz later conceded it could have been "the Palestinians who shot her" or fire from "our side".

Calls have mounted around the world for an independent investigation into the shooting. But the Palestinians have turned down a Zionist offer to carry out a joint probe, saying they would investigate alone and share their findings. The Iranian president also implicated the Zionist entity, the sworn enemy of the Islamic republic. "We are certain that these crimes cannot bring security to the Zionist regime. To the contrary, they will only increase popular anger" towards the Zionist entity, Raisi said.

Sheikh Tamim met Raisi in Tehran as an EU envoy held a second day of meetings with Iran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri in the Iranian capital. The meetings come as talks between world powers and Iran on

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TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi welcomes Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani at the presidential palace on May 12, 2022. — AFP

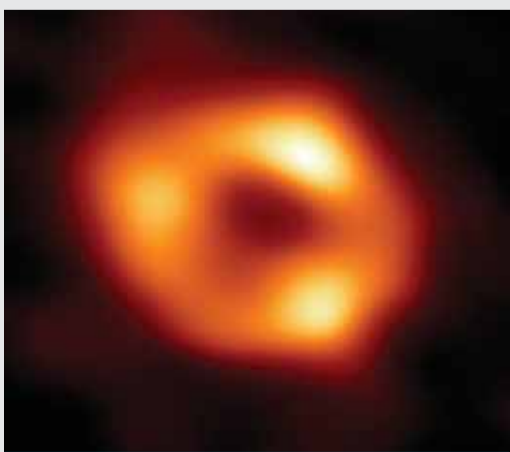
## First image of Milky Way black hole unveiled

PARIS: An international team of astronomers on Thursday unveiled the first image of a supermassive black hole at the center of our own Milky Way galaxy - a cosmic body known as Sagittarius A\*.

The image - produced by a global team of scientists known as the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) Collaboration - is the first, direct visual confirmation of the presence of this invisible object, and comes three years after the very first image of a black hole from a distant galaxy.

"For decades, we have known about a compact object that is at the heart of our galaxy that is four million times more massive than our Sun," Harvard University astronomer Sara Issaoun told a press conference in Garching, Germany, held simultaneously with other media events around the world. "Today, right this moment, we have direct evidence that this object is a black hole."

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This handout image released by the European Southern Observatory on May 12, 2022 shows the first image of Sagittarius A\*, the supermassive black hole at the center of our Milky Way galaxy. — AFP

## Palestinians honor slain journalist, reject joint probe

RAMALLAH: Thousands of Palestinians on Thursday honored Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh across the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem, a day after she was shot dead during a Zionist army raid. The Zionist entity and the Palestinians have traded blame over the killing of Palestinian-American Abu Akleh, 51, a veteran of the Qatar-based network's Arabic service, during clashes in the Jenin refugee camp.

The United States, European Union and United Nations have backed calls for a full investigation into what Al Jazeera labelled a deliberate killing "in cold blood", but the Palestinian Authority (PA) has rejected holding a joint probe with the Zionist entity.

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## US mourns million COVID dead; 2m deaths in Europe

NEW YORK: The United States has crossed the threshold of one million deaths from COVID-19, the White House said on Thursday, as the nation seeks to turn the page on the pandemic despite threats of another surge. "Today, we mark a tragic milestone," President Joe Biden said in a statement that acknowledged the "unrelenting" pain of bereaved families, and urged Americans to remain vigilant as cases tick back up.

"One million empty chairs around the dinner table," Biden said. "Each an irreplaceable loss. Each leaving behind a family, a community, and a nation forever changed." Biden's announcement came as he chaired a global virtual COVID summit, taking place as Europe also passed two million Covid deaths, focused on efforts to bring the pandemic under control worldwide and prepare for future health emergencies.

The US leader came to the summit hobbled by Congress' failure to approve \$22.5 billion in continued emergency COVID funding, including for the interna-



RAMALLAH: Palestinian honor guard carry the coffin of veteran Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh following a state funeral at the presidential headquarters on May 12, 2022. — AFP

tional supply of vaccines, and he warned it was "critical" for lawmakers to keep financing testing, vaccines and treatments.

Meanwhile, the number of people who have died from COVID-19 in Europe, the long-time epicenter of the pandemic, has passed two million, the World Health Organization (WHO) said Thursday. "A devastating milestone has passed as reported confirmed COVID-19 deaths from countries in the WHO European Region

Continued on Page 6



APPLE VALLEY, California: In this file photo taken on Jan 11, 2021, a nurse tends to a COVID-19 patient in the ICU at Providence St Mary Medical Center. — AFP

## US parents in panic over baby formula shortage

WASHINGTON: It's a nightmare for parents. The United States is in the grip of a severe shortage of baby formula - with a mass product recall aggravating pandemic supply chain woes - sending families on sometimes desperate hunts for the vital supplies. And it has been going on for months, according to Sara Khan, the mother of three children aged 10, seven and six months. "I've known about this issue for almost seven months," she told AFP. "This did not happen overnight."

Khan described the struggle to find just a few bottles of formula, and the distress at being faced with empty shelves at pharmacy chains CVS and Walgreens or supermarket Target, whether in Washington or the surrounding area. She has

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## Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah headed on Thursday to Italy on a private visit. His Highness the Amir was seen off at the airport by His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanim, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior state officials. —KUNA

## Saudis, Bahrainis, Kuwaitis in UK electronic visa waivers

LONDON: The British government announced Wednesday that Saudi and Bahraini nationals would be included in the electronic visa waiver status scheme applied on GCC countries including Kuwait. A statement by the UK's Home Office said that decision would be effective on June 1, allowing citizens from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to obtain a visa via an online waiver valid up to six months.

The waiver would be obtained online prior to entry to the UK, added the statement, noting that the procedures such as interviews, sending passports to the UK embassy, and biometric data would be annulled. A yet-to-be-specified small fee is required for such waiver, indicated the office. On the subject, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss affirmed that the step aimed at bolstering ties with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. "Our friendships with both countries are of great importance, built on shared priorities such as trade, investment and security," said Truss.

In another development, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjar met on Wednesday in Marrakech, Morocco, on the sidelines of the global coalition against the so-called Islamic State (IS) ministerial meeting. The two officials discussed ways to enhance bilateral ties in all possible domains and also touched upon recent regional and international developments. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister also met Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares in Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco. The meeting tackled bilateral relations of both countries. —KUNA

## Palestine Embassy opens a condolence register

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the state of Palestine to Kuwait expressed its greetings to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all diplomatic & consular missions and international organizations accredited in the State of Kuwait, and to local and International Media. The Embassy will open a condolences book on Sunday 15/05/2022 (from 10:00 AM - 14:00 PM) for the Veteran Palestinian Martyr Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh who was executed by Zionist occupation forces on Wednesday 11/05/2022 while she was covering the raid in Jenin Refugee Camp. Embassy building is in Bayan, Block 13, Street 7, Villa 24.

## Education minister stresses importance of cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Education Minister and Minister of Higher Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf has stressed the importance of cooperation between educational institutions in order to offer scholarships that meet needs of the workforce. Al-Mudhaf made remarks while chairing a coordination meeting between the ministry and higher educational and higher education institutions regarding scholarships in Kuwait and

## Arab League affirms giving great priority to disaster risk reduction

CAIRO: The Arab League affirmed on Thursday that its member states give great priority to disaster risk reduction through the implementation of the work program - the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction - approved by the Arab League. This came in a speech by the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit delivered on his behalf by the Director of the Department of Housing, Water Resources and Disaster Reduction, Dr Jamal El-Din Jaballah before the work of the first ministerial meeting of Arab ministers.

The work is to provide the necessary capabilities to confront disasters if they occur - noting that "a collective Arab mechanism of solidarity and cooperation will be established when disasters occur in the Arab countries - providing material and financial assistance to

disaster-affected countries, whether inside or outside the Arab region."

He expressed hope that the first ministerial meeting would be a "real start" for the implementation of the Arab plan for disaster reduction approved by the Arab Summit. He called on the concerned national authorities to expedite the implementation of this plan to reduce disaster risks and confront challenges, indicating that the meeting discussed a number of "important" items related to monitoring natural disasters, as well as following up on the provisions of the Arab strategy for disaster risk reduction.

He also referred to the preparation of the global forum for disaster risk reduction and defining Arab and regional emergency plans for disaster risk reduction - pointing out that this ministerial session "is being held

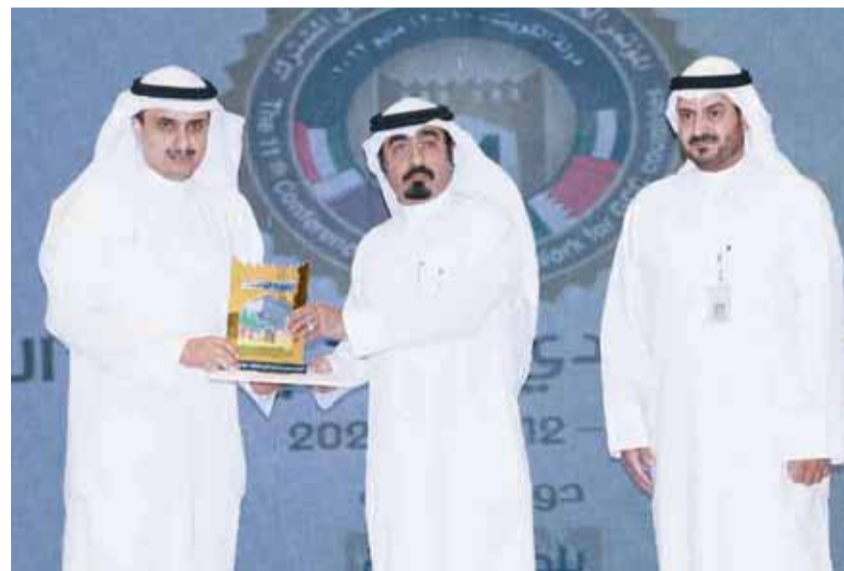


Head of Kuwait's delegation to the meeting, Deputy Permanent Representative at the Arab League, Falah Al-Mutairi.

in light of major repercussions facing the Arab region, climate and environmental changes and serious disasters that have greatly contributed to increasing rates of desertification, forest fires, water scarcity and other natural variables."

He also referred to humanitarian disasters such as armed conflicts that affected the Middle East and North Africa region "as the Arab region is considered one of the most

affected regions due to these changes." The Kuwaiti delegation to the meeting was headed by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the State to the League of Arab States, Counselor Falah Al-Mutairi. Representatives of Arab countries and a number of Arab, regional and international organizations specialized in the field of disaster reduction and minimizing their effects will participate in the meeting. —KUNA



## Gulf conference recommends adopting twin town models

KUWAIT: Participants at the 11th session of the Joint Gulf Municipal Work Conference have recommended the adoption of latest digital models in twin towns in some Gulf council countries. The conference, hosted by Kuwait over three days and sponsored by Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Communication and Information Technology, Dr Rana Al-Fares, under the slogan of "smart municipality," concluded its activities Thursday.

The conference highlighted the necessity of establishing a central body which specialized in civil information systems, to unify digital lan-

guage and connect concerned bodies with the municipality. It also called for increasing training courses to develop national cadres, exchange expertise and to encourage the use of platforms and smart applications to further facilitate procedures.

Additionally, the conference promoted a platform to observe and control sanitation services, and another platform for food safety to review the work of companies and ensure the highest quality. On the issue of voluntary work, it urged supporting the efforts of municipalities and concerned organizations to further voluntary humanitarian activities.

The conference called for boosting citizens' involvement in the development journey, and moti-



Ahmad Al-Manfouhi



vate the youth to contribute to servicing the community. Municipality General Director, Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, stated to the press after the concluding ceremony that the recommendations will be referred to GCC ministerial meeting scheduled to be held in September. Al-Manfouhi also commented that they are working on digitalizing the work of the municipality, especially relating to permits, indicating that 40 percent of permits can be issued in the same day. —KUNA

abroad for the year 2022-23.

Al-Mudhaf stated that the main goal is to expand scholarships in order to meet needs of the market with qualified students who would contribute to achieving Kuwait 2035 vision. This annual meeting takes place before announcing high schools' results in order to know the number of Kuwaiti students expected to graduate this year, he added.

The Minister assured that each student will have the opportunity to have a scholarship. He said that the goal is to expand the specializations in the process of admission and scholarships and reduce acceptance and scholarship in specialties that are less needed in the labor market. The aim is to prepare outstanding graduates for competitive market both locally and globally. —KUNA



Local

# Kuwait restaurants hike prices as Russia-Ukraine war rages

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Some restaurants in Kuwait hiked their prices recently, claiming that prices of commodities have increased amid the war in Ukraine, especially of wheat and cooking oil. But according to the Consumer Protection Association (CPA), a restaurant is only allowed to increase prices equivalent to the increase in the price of a commodity.

"Restaurants are allowed to increase prices of certain dishes in case the prices of raw materials they use in this dish have increased. So for instance if the price of oil rises by 20 percent, they can only increase the price of fries by 20 percent (from say 500 fils to 600 fils). But if the restaurant hikes prices higher than this rate, they can be penalized," President of CPA Mishal Al-Manea told Kuwait Times.

The exception is for sandwiches whose prices have been fixed since the 1980s. These include falafel (100 fils) and omelet (120 fils) sandwiches. "These sandwiches should maintain their price regardless of any increase in the prices of raw materials. But the restaurant is allowed to sell a special form of these sandwiches with more stuffings, such as super falafel or extra omelet, but is obliged to provide the basic sandwich," explained Manea.

The classification of a restaurant's commercial license dictates any changes in its activity or meals. "For instance, a snack restaurant is not allowed to remove the falafel or omelet sandwich from their menu. But if the restaurant's license is a general one, they can stop selling these sandwiches. The restaurant can also change their concept without the ministry's approval, for example, from Arabic to Chinese cuisine," he said.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has a special department for evaluating and inspecting prices at restaurants. "The inspectors working in this department go on regular inspections in all governorates and do price surveys of the menus of restaurants. If the restaurant raises prices based on the increase in prices of commodities, and the price of a commodity drops, then the restaurant is obliged to drop their prices too," stressed Manea. Some restaurants have found a trick to bypass the law. Instead of raising prices, they have changed the meal or sandwich to a smaller size. It's a way to



Mishal Al-Manea



Union of consumer co-operative societies headquarters.

hold on to their customers by showing they haven't increased their prices.

The inspectors also monitor prices at supermarkets and co-ops. "At the co-ops, the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies monitors prices, which should be unified at all co-ops. But traders are demanding liberalization. The ministry has proposed an alternative solution to protect the

consumer against any price hikes - the suppliers will be allowed to display their goods without paying the extra fee they are paying now to the co-ops. They will also be relieved from the obligation of giving freebies to the co-op.

This will relieve the trader of extra expenses and will balance the increase of prices in the countries of origin," Manea told Kuwait Times.

## MoH launches new health services for the bedridden

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed has announced the launch of a new service for the bedridden that includes home visits part of integrated multiple health care services within the framework of achieving goals of the development plan of New Kuwait Vision 2035. Al-Saeed affirmed in a press statement, Thursday, the new service aimed at achieving the objectives of sustainable development, and is based on the ministry's keenness to ensure that everyone leads a healthy life.

The service will include periodic medical assessments to follow up on patients with chronic conditions, review medicines and treatments, provide oral and dental services, physiotherapy, and nutrition, noted Al-Saeed. He praised the role of the Central Administration of Primary Health Care for launching

the new service, noting that health care centers are the first line of defense for the health system.

In a similar statement, Director of the Central Department of Primary Health Care Dr Alia Al-Dhubaib said teams would pay the home visit consisting of a family doctor, dentist, physiotherapist, pharmacist, nurse, laboratory technician and nutrition specialist.

Dr Al-Dhubaib said that obtaining the service is either by applying through the website or by requesting the service through the health center according to the area of residence. The preparations for providing this service are completed, and it is limited to periodic visits and not emergency cases, she added, stressing the ministry's keenness to provide the service with the best quality standards. —KUNA

## 'Basic course in Environment Information'

**KUWAIT:** Director of Public Relations and Information Department at the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikha Al-Ibrahim said EPA plans to hold a training course on Environment Information in Cooperation with Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) under the patronage of EPA Chairman and Director General Sheikh Abdallah Al-Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, adding that the environment media in Kuwait and Arab World is in need of development and to move towards professionalism. She said this training course is titled the

"Basic Course in Environment information", and will continue for five days from May 15th until May 19th, at EPA building in Shuwaikh and will include various media subjects such as preparing the news item, journalistic information in service the environment in addition to the art of writing the environmental story.

She said, among the course's goals is to enhance the competence of EPA'S PR employees' government departments and NGOs, by qualifying specialized media journalists in the environmental field, who have enough knowledge of environment science in addition to professionalism in media in general.

Al-Ibrahim said, this training course comes with EPA'S keenness to cooperate with various organizations, including NGOs in order to develop work regarding the protection of environment and develop the environmental issue in various fields. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** File photo captures a sudden dust storm that dropped visibility under 500 meters. The Meteorological Department has predicted that the weather would witness active northwesterly winds with dust storm. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Meteorological Department predicts dusty, hot weather

**KUWAIT :** The Meteorological Department has predicted that the weather would witness active

northwesterly winds, sometimes reaching the edge of the storm, causing dust and significantly reducing horizontal visibility starting in the morning tomorrow, until the day after tomorrow. The sea waves will rise above six feet, and the intensity will gradually decrease, starting from Saturday night. The expected minimum temperature is between 20 and 23 degrees Celsius, and the sea will be light to moderate, rising later, and the wave height between 2 and 6 feet. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Society of Engineers honors the winners of the fourth edition of its photography competition. The ceremony included a special honor for the creative Kuwaiti photographer Majid Al Zaabi, who won the award for the best wildlife picture in the world last year by the British Museum of Nature History, topping the cover of the museum's annual edition with his winning picture of the meditating gorilla (Kapandi). —AFP

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# Kuwait domestic inflation increased by 4.36 percent

## Kuwait oil price down 21 cents

**KUWAIT:** Consumers Price Index (CPI) increased in Kuwait by 4.36 percent in March 2022 on annual basis compared with the same period in 2021, said the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) on Thursday. A statement by CSB, obtained by KUNA, revealed that the CPI increased monthly to 124.4 by 0.24 percent, because of high prices of major groups in the movement of the indices.

The statement provided the annual price movement for March 2022, saying that food and beverages increased by 7.18 percent from the numbers from March of 2021. It added that cigarettes and tobacco stood still at 135.0 points. Clothing and footwear prices increased by 6.13 percent, while housing services went up by 2.26 percent.

The CSB revealed that Furnishing and Equipment

Household maintenance went up by 2.19 percent, adding that Health increased by 1.78 percent. Transport increased by 4.82 percent, communication by 2.39 percent, recreation and culture by 3.37 percent, and Education by 18.95 percent, said the CSB. Restaurants and Hotels went up by 2.85 percent, Services and Miscellaneous goods at 3.59 percent.

Meanwhile, Kuwait oil price down 21 cents on Wednesday to \$112.21 pb, a decrease from \$112.42 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) reported on Thursday. The price of the OPEC crudes increased by 84 cents to settle on \$109.02 per barrel on Wednesday compared to \$108.18 pb last Tuesday. According to OPEC bulletin, the average oil price of the OPEC basket in 2021 was at \$9.89 per barrel.

OPEC said that the prices of crude oil, including OPEC crudes, in March increased by \$20 per barrel for the third month in a row based on the escalating geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe and fears of possible major shortage in oil supplies. The oil futures contracts prices witnessed high fluctuations due to the uncertain short-term expectations of oil supply and demand, noting that the price of OPEC Reference basket increased by \$19.53 to settle at \$113.48 per barrel. Ministers of energy in OPEC+ alliance concluded in the 28th meeting held on March 31st to continue increasing oil supplies by 432,000 bpd during the upcoming month of June. OPEC+ countries were able to restore output of two thirds of production that stopped during the first stages of Coronavirus (COVID-19). —KUNA

### News in brief



#### Kuwait, Turkey, Mauritania FMs meet

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met Wednesday with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. The meeting came on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the global coalition against the so-called Islamic State (IS) that kicked off earlier in the Moroccan City of Marrakech, with the participation of more than 80 countries. The meeting discussed the strong bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and ways to develop them, as well as the latest developments on the regional and international levels. Also, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met with Mauritanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Mauritians Abroad Mohammad Salem Ould Marzouk. They discussed the strong bilateral relations between the two friendly countries. —KUNA



#### KAFCO receives award

**KUWAIT:** The General Manager of Kuwait Aircraft Refueling Company (KAFCO) Masha Al-Tanib announced that the company has received the International Safety Award for the protection of its employees. Al-Tanib said in a press release on Thursday that KAFCO's award is in recognition of its commitment to maintaining the health and safety of employees and workplaces during 2021. KAFCO is accordingly one of 204 organizations that have won the Merit Award. At the 2022 International Safety Awards, the British Safety Council's international awards sector in its 64th year honored organizations across the globe who provided evidence to independent bodies of their commitment to preventing work injuries and work-related ill health during the previous year. —KUNA

#### Custodianship of Holy Sites

**CAIRO:** The Arab Parliament Speaker Adel Al-Asoomi affirmed on Thursday the Parliament's full support regarding the Jordanian Hashemite Custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian Holy Sites. In a statement, Al-Asoomi reaffirmed that the signed agreement between the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Jordanian King Abdullah II in March of 2013 was to defend Jerusalem and its holy sites. He also noted Jordan's efforts in taking care of the reconstruction and restoration work in Jerusalem to maintain the Arab Islamic identity, as well as supporting the role of Jordanian Awaqaf Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Holy Places in protecting Al-Aqsa Mosque from the occupation forces and settlers. Al-Asoomi called on the international community to respect the agreement of the Hashemite Custodianship of Jerusalem's Holy Sites. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait-US Military Commission discussed the most common topics and ways to develop and strengthen their forces at the 14th session in Washington DC. The Commission tackled most important topics of common interest and appropriate ways to develop and strengthen their mission, the Kuwaiti Joint Military Commission said in a press release on Thursday.

Li Gen Khalid Saleh Al-Sabah led the Kuwaiti army delegation participating in this session,

while the US side was represented by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Eastern affairs. The Ministry added that it welcomed the visit of the Chief of Staff and the accompanying delegation. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Commerce and Industry Ministry closed several automotive oil changing shops for selling oils that do not meet the specifications - causing damage to the vehicles. The closure was made following consumers' complaints about the damage of their vehicles when they changed the oil in some shops. The ministry took several samples to test at the Industry Public Authority laboratories and found out they do not meet the specifications.



Russians fleeing Putin face lukewarm welcome in France

N Korea fires missile after COVID cases prompt Kim to order lockdown

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COLOMBO: People buy vegetables at a market after authorities relaxed the ongoing curfew for a few hours in Colombo on May 12, 2022. — AFP

## Crisis-hit Sri Lanka appoints new PM

Ranil Wickremesinghe to replace president's brother

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's embattled president swore in a new prime minister Thursday to replace his brother, who was banned from leaving the country after his supporters launched violent attacks on a protest against the nation's economic crisis. The new premier, Ranil Wickremesinghe, has already served in the office five times-but it remains unclear if he will be able to get any legislation through parliament.

The 73-year-old will be tasked with navigating Sri Lanka through the worst economic downturn in its history as an independent nation, with months of shortages and blackouts inflaming public anger.

"A cabinet is likely to be appointed tomorrow," Sudewa Hettiarachchi, a spokesman for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, told AFP. In a televised address to the nation on Wednesday night, Rajapaksa stopped short of yielding to weeks of nationwide protests calling for him to resign. But in a bid to win over opposition lawmakers demanding he quit, Rajapaksa, 72, pledged to give up most of his executive powers and set up a new cabinet this week.

Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president's brother, resigned as prime minister on Monday after his supporters attacked anti-government demonstrators

who had been protesting peacefully for weeks.

This marked a turning point and unleashed several days of chaos and violence in which at least nine people were killed and over 200 injured, with dozens of Rajapaksa loyalist homes set on fire.

On Thursday, a court banned Mahinda, his politician son Namal, and more than a dozen allies from leaving the country after ordering an investigation into the violence. "Congratulations to the newly appointed Prime Minister," Mahinda tweeted from the Trincomalee naval base on the country's east coast, where he took refuge after fleeing the capital Colombo. "I wish you all the best as you navigate these troubled times." Security forces patrolling in armored personnel carriers with orders to shoot looters on sight have largely restored order.

A curfew was lifted Thursday morning-only to be reimposed after a six-hour break allowing Sri Lanka's 22 million people to stock up on essentials.

### 'Collapse beyond redemption'

Sri Lankans have suffered months of severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine-as well as long power cuts-after the country burnt through foreign cur-

rency reserves needed to pay for vital imports.

The central bank chief warned Wednesday that the economy would "collapse beyond redemption" unless a new government was urgently appointed. Wickremesinghe is seen as a pro-West free-market reformist, potentially making bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and others smoother. With many from Rajapaksa's party having defected in recent months, no group in the 225-member assembly has an absolute majority, making parliamentary approval of the unity government's legislation potentially tricky.

It also remains to be seen whether a new cabinet will be enough to calm public anger if Rajapaksa continues to resist calls for his resignation.

"What he has done is despicable, he has brought all of us to this state of hunger and poverty," Abu Nawaz, a small business owner in Colombo, told AFP. "What is the point of keeping him as the president?" he added. "Will this end our miseries?"

Wickremesinghe had already been working closely with Rajapaksa before his appointment to shake up the finance ministry and the central bank with sweeping policy changes, an official close to their



COLOMBO: In this file photo taken on August 02, 2020, United National Party (UNP) party leader Ranil Wickremesinghe waves to supporters during the party's final campaign rally ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Colombo. — AFP

discussions told AFP. The central bank almost doubled key interest rates and announced a default on Sri Lanka's \$51-billion external debt as part of the policy shift, officials said. —AFP

## Finland poised for NATO membership

HELSINKI: Finland on Thursday took a step towards fast-track membership of NATO, triggering a warning from the Kremlin, as the war in Ukraine throttled supplies of Russian gas to Europe.

"Finland must apply for NATO membership without delay," President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin announced in a statement in Helsinki. "NATO membership would strengthen Finland's security," they said. "As a member of NATO, Finland would strengthen the entire defense alliance."

But Russia warned Finnish membership of NATO would "definitely" be seen as a threat. "The expansion of NATO and the approach of the alliance to our borders does not make the world and our continent more stable and secure," spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. In launching the invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin cited in part what he called the threat to Russia from NATO, which expanded eastwards after the Cold War. Finland's embrace of the alliance was ruled out as recently as January, for the country has been a declared neutral in East-West crises for decades.

But the February 24 invasion shocked the Nordic country. It shares a 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) border with Russia and its past is studded with conflict with its giant neighbor. The Atlantic alliance has already declared it will warmly embrace two countries with rich pockets and advanced militaries. Finland's entry will be "smooth and swift," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg promised on Thursday. A special committee will announce Finland's formal decision on a membership bid on Sunday. Sweden, another neutral state, is widely expected to follow its neighbour.



KANKAANPAA, Finland: Picture taken on May 4, 2022 shows a Leopard battle tank of the Armored Brigade during the Arrow 22 exercise at the Niinisalo garrison in Kankaanpaa, western Finland. — AFP

### Russian gas

Fears grew meanwhile of the broader economic impact from the crisis. Russian energy giant Gazprom said that gas transiting to Ukraine to Europe dropped by a third after Kyiv suspended supplies through a key route. Germany said Wednesday that it saw a 25 percent drop in supplies of Russian gas flowing through Ukraine.

Ukraine is a major supply route for Russian gas to Europe and the two sides have kept flows going despite the conflict. The European Union's heavy reliance on Russian gas has made it reluctant to add these imports to a list of economic sanctions that have started to take a toll on Moscow's foreign exchange reserves. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in a rhetorical blast from Tokyo, said Russia "is today the most direct threat to the world

order with the barbaric war against Ukraine".

Moscow has focused on eastern and southern Ukraine since it failed to take Kyiv in the first weeks of its campaign. Ukraine's presidency said shelling continued throughout the Lugansk region-part of the eastern Donbas where Ukrainian forces are mounting a fierce defense against Russian forces and Kremlin-backed separatists. Russian troops are trying to take complete control of Rubizhne, block a key highway between Lysychansk and Bakhmut highway and seize Severodonetsk, the office said. In the northeastern region of Chernigiv three people were killed and 12 others wounded on Thursday in a strike on the town of Novgorod-Siversky, an emergency services spokesman said. Across Ukraine, lives have been turned upside down, forcing millions to make anguished choices of how to respond. —AFP

Department number three Victoria Nuland replacing him at a meeting in Morocco on defeating the Islamic State group and at a meeting of Group of Seven foreign ministers in northern Germany.

Blinken was set Thursday to resume public appearances with a meeting with Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai on the sidelines of a US-ASEAN Summit in Washington. Blinken last year scrapped a stop in Thailand after a COVID outbreak within his traveling party.

Also on Thursday, Blinken will participate-virtually-in a summit convened by President Joe Biden on fighting COVID. —AFP

## Blinken ends quarantine, will head to Europe

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday ended a weeklong quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19 and will travel to Europe this weekend, the State Department announced. The top US diplomat will leave

## Zionists push plans for nearly 4,500 W Bank settler homes

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity advanced plans on Thursday for 4,427 housing units for Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank, a non-governmental organization said. The Civil Administration's high planning committee gave final approval to 2,791 units and initial endorsement for another 1,636 units, said Peace Now, an organization that closely monitors Zionist settlement building.

"This is bad news for Zionists and deepens the occupation, making it harder to achieve future peace," Hagit Ofran of Peace Now said. The report of further expansion comes amid heightened tensions in the West Bank, one day after veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was shot dead during a Zionist army raid in clashes in the Jenin refugee camp. The United States has said it "strongly" opposes such new construction in the West Bank.

Zionists seized the West Bank and nearly 700,000 Zionists have moved into settlements that most of the international community regard as illegal. Last week, US State Department deputy spokeswoman Jalina Porter referred to Thursday's planning meeting, stressing that "Zionists program of expanding settlements deeply damages the prospect for a two-state solution." The housing plans are scattered throughout a large swathe of the West Bank known as Area C, where Zionist entity exercises military and planning control.

Zionists' settlement expansion in the West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem has continued under every Zionist entity since 1967. However, construction accelerated in the last few years under former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with a significant boom during former president Donald Trump's US administration, which Palestinians accused of egregious pro-Zionist bias.

While Prime Minister Naftali Bennett ousted Netanyahu, leading an ideologically diverse coalition, he is the former head of a settler lobby group and opposes Palestinian statehood. "It's disappointing that this government that promised change is following similar policies to the government of Netanyahu," said Ofran. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, a member of Bennett's right-wing Yamina party, said the news Thursday was a "day of celebration for the settler movement." —AFP

## International

# Russians fleeing Putin face lukewarm welcome in France

## Ukrainian refugees are welcomed with open arms

**PARIS:** Artyom Kotsenko's world collapsed when Russia invaded Ukraine. Born to a Ukrainian father and a Russian mother in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, he lived in Russia for most of his life. "I was crushed. I could not live or breathe," the 50-year-old artist and graphic designer, who is a Russian national, told AFP in Paris.

A week after President Vladimir Putin sent troops to pro-Western Ukraine, Kotsenko left behind his old life in Saint Petersburg and went to Helsinki. From there he made his way to Paris, which he says "healed his wounds". "I stopped feeling like I was suffocating, like I was dying every day. I was able to breathe again," he said in the 13th district of Paris where pro-Ukrainian graffiti adorns the streets.

But much to Kotsenko's disappointment, Paris appeared indifferent to his plight.

Kotsenko, who worked at Saint Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum, the Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theater and the Higher School of Economics, realized he could not get a job in France. He wanted to draw on his extensive teaching experience to work with the children of Ukrainian refugees but found out that those jobs were reserved for EU citizens. "This is strange. This has to change because there are a lot of people like me and there is work for us," he said.

### Political exiles

French President Emmanuel Macron has led diplomatic outreach to the Kremlin over the war in Ukraine, and Ukrainian refugees are welcomed with open arms in France. But Russians fleeing Putin's regime realise they are left to their own fate in one of the wealthiest EU countries.

Since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, tens of thousands of Russians have fled the country in protest over Putin's policies and out of fear for their children's future. Observers point out that most of Russia's new political exiles are liberal-leaning well-educated professionals in their prime.

Some even draw parallels with the departure of intellectual elites from Soviet Russia in 1922 in a phenomenon that has come to be known as the "Philosophers' Ships". Some leading Western democracies have indicated their willingness to tap into the professional knowledge and experience fleeing Russians have to offer. German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said in early May that Berlin might simplify visa procedures and help find jobs for Russians fleeing Putin's regime.

"We want them to be aware that we could really

use them," he told reporters. US officials are also considering ways to lure highly educated anti-Kremlin Russians. The French interior ministry did not respond to a request for comment.



**PARIS:** This undated image Courtesy of the Kashnitsky Family shows Daniel Kashnitsky, 41-year-old public health specialist, and his wife Natalya in France. —AFP

Many political emigres say France should do the same. "If people seek an opportunity to move here, you need to support them," said Daniel Kashnitsky, a 41-year-old Muscovite, pointing to France's notorious bureaucratic hurdles. He, his wife and their four children-two of them adopted-applied for asylum in France in April and met with AFP in the 18th district of Paris. After a long day at the prefecture the children appeared exhausted. "We have nowhere to live," said Kashnitsky's 38-year-old wife Natalya. "It's stressful." The family arrived in Paris more than a month after the war in Ukraine broke out. A public health specialist who previously lived in Sweden, Lithuania and Zionist entity, Kashnitsky said he did not want to leave his "beloved" Moscow. The war changed everything. First, Kashnitsky staged an anti-war protest in central Moscow and spent a night in jail. He also gave interviews to Swedish media. Then he realized it was time to leave. "It was important to me to take the kids out," Kashnitsky told AFP, adding that his eldest son was turning 18 in May and could be drafted. —AFP

## 'We don't matter': Fuming at Kyiv under Russian bombs

**KYIV:** The pudgy Ukrainian policeman taking pasta and bread to villagers trapped under bombs on the eastern front sometimes feels like he is entering enemy territory. Vladyslav Kopatskiy pulls the groceries from the back of his car and casts a quick glance at the horizon for signs of smoke from incoming Russian shells.

He then enters homes where his humanitarian mission is often greeted with misgivings-or worse. Many residents of this frontline village of Novomykolaivka and other areas of Ukraine's war-torn east are believed to back the Russians. And others who were brought up with Soviet propaganda-often older people-simply have a deeply-engrained mistrust of any Ukrainian in authority, which can be particularly dangerous in places near the front.

The 24-year-old lists cases of locals arrested on suspicion of giving away coordinates of Ukrainian missile systems and rear bases that then come under Russian attack. "Unfortunately, this happens," he said after coming out of a hut where a family has spent the past three days hiding in a makeshift cellar from Russian shellfire and bombing raids. "We try to talk to them, explain things to them, but people who have a Soviet upbringing are not easy to convince. They have one point of view and they stick to it." That view-instilled through Kremlin propaganda that portrays Ukrainians as neo-Nazis who take orders from Washington-makes Kopatskiy into a potential target in such frontline villages.

Soldiers who come in closest contact with Ukrainians still clinging onto their homes in the war zone estimate that between 30 and 45 percent support the invading Russians. "They give the Russians our coordinates. That is certain," a soldier who uses the nom de guerre Zastava said during a brief break from five days of hard battle at the front.

"I remember one old man came to check us out and then we were immediately hit," he told

AFP. Fortunately everyone survived. "The older ones-they do not want to support us."

The Donbas war zone is heavily populated by Russian speakers who can trace their roots back to families sent in by the Kremlin to dilute Ukraine's nationalist strains after World War II.



**NOVOMYKOLAIVKA, Ukraine:** Twenty-five-year-old son of Andriy Oleynik stays at his room as his family lives inside a house with all windows sealed in Novomykolaivka, eastern Ukraine, on May 11, 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

They live side-by-side with Ukrainian speakers with older ties to the region-and a longer memory of Kremlin repressions dating back to the times of Joseph Stalin. "We have villages next to each other where one supports the Ukrainians and one supports the Russians," Zastava said.

But Novomykolaivka native Andriy Oleynik has little patience for history lessons or debates about Ukraine's linguistic divide. The wheelchair-bound 48-year-old has spent the past week listening in the dark to screaming war planes and bursting shells scattering shrapnel across surrounding farms. His shed was destroyed and his level of anger at both Moscow and Kyiv for failing to negotiate a truce has ratcheted up another notch. The air in his wooden house feels heavy because all the windows have been shuttered for weeks to limit the dangers posed by exploding glass. —AFP

## Qatar Amir blames Zionist entity for ...

Continued from Page 1

restoring a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major world powers, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, have been on a pause since mid-March.

The JCPOA was torpedoed in 2018 by then US president Donald Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the deal and impose a punishing sanctions regime. Qatar, a close US ally, has added the Iran nuclear dispute to its list of diplomatic hotspots where it has taken a behind-the-scenes mediation role.

"Regarding the negotiations taking place in Vienna, Qatar always looks at them positively," Sheikh Tamim said during the joint news conference with Raisi, adding that "the only solution to any disagreement is by peaceful means and dialogue". "We are, God willing, pushing all the parties towards" reaching an agreement that is "fair" for everyone, said the Qatari Amir.

## US mourns million COVID dead...

Continued from Page 1

have exceeded more than 2 million people," the UN health agency said in a statement. The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries and regions, including several in central Asia. According to the health body, 2,002,058 people have died from COVID out of the 218,225,294 registered cases in the region.

America recorded its first COVID-19 death, on the West Coast, in early Feb 2020. By the next month, the virus was ravaging New York and the White House was predicting up to 240,000 deaths nationwide. But those projections were way off. Even in New York - the hard-hit early epicenter of America's COVID crisis - the million death milestone was difficult to comprehend.

## First image of Milky Way black...

Continued from Page 1

Black holes are regions of space where the pull of gravity is so intense that nothing can escape, including light. The image thus depicts not the black hole itself, because it is completely dark, but the glowing gas that encircles the phenomenon in a bright ring of bending light. As seen from Earth, it appears the same size as a donut on the surface of the Moon, Issaoun explained.

"These unprecedented observations have greatly

Raisi did not raise the nuclear issue during the news conference, but he cautioned against the meddling of any foreign country in the region. "Any interference of western and foreign countries in the region not only can't ensure security but will also be harmful to regional security," he said.

The Amir's one-day visit came as the EU's nuclear talks coordinator, Enrique Mora, continued discussions with Bagheri in Tehran, state news agency IRNA reported. An EU spokesman said Mora was seeking to rescue the nuclear deal. "It's in the interest and it's the role of the coordinator actually to do everything he can in order to save this agreement," said Peter Stano. Mora "is in Tehran exactly to move these talks forward, to be able to go back to Vienna and to conclude them in a positive way," he added.

Among the key sticking points in the negotiations is Tehran's demand for the United States to remove Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from a designated list of terror groups. IRNA said "unfreezing Iran's assets, cooperation in holding the 2022 World Cup, pursuing prisoner exchanges and cooperation in the field of energy" were also on the agenda of the Amir's visit. —AFP

"It's unfathomable," Diana Berrent, one of the first people in New York state to catch COVID-19, said of the toll that far exceeds epidemiologists' worst predictions. Back in spring 2020, New York City hospitals and morgues overflowed, and the sound of ambulance sirens rang down empty streets as then-president Donald Trump responded chaotically in Washington.

Two years on, and life in the Big Apple is largely back to normal as residents attempt to put the collective trauma of the virus that has killed 40,000 New Yorkers behind them. Broadway stage lights are once again illuminated, yellow taxis clog main avenues and bars in business districts hum with post-work chatter.

"Without a doubt you feel the energy of the people that are on the streets. It's been a long time coming," Alfred Cerullo, president of a business improvement group in Midtown Manhattan, told AFP. New York's rebound has been aided by its high inoculation numbers - about 88 percent of adults are fully vaccinated, a rate that was boosted by mandates, including for indoor activities like dining. —AFP

improved our understanding of what happens at the very center of our galaxy," EHT project scientist Geoffrey Bower, of Taiwan's Academia Sinica, said in a statement. The research results are published in The Astrophysical Journal Letters.

Sagittarius A\* - abbreviated to Sgr A\*, and pronounced "sadge-ay-star" - owes its name to its detection in the direction of the constellation Sagittarius. Located 27,000 light years from Earth, its existence has been assumed since 1974, with the detection of an unusual radio source at the center of the galaxy.

In the 1990s, astronomers mapped the orbits of the brightest stars near the center of the Milky Way, confirming the presence of a supermassive compact object there - work that led to the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physics. Though the presence of a black hole was thought to be the only plausible explanation, the new image provides

## Palestinians honor slain journalist...

Continued from Page 1

In a sign of Abu Akleh's stature among Palestinians, she received what was described as a full state memorial at the Ramallah compound of President Mahmoud Abbas. Thousands lined the streets as her coffin, draped in the Palestinian flag, was driven through the West Bank city. Many held flowers, wreaths and pictures of Abu Akleh, who has been widely hailed for her bravery and professionalism through her coverage of the conflict. "This crime should not go unpunished," said Abbas, adding that the PA held the Zionist entity "completely responsible" for her death, and had "refused and rejected" a Zionist proposal for a joint investigation. Zionist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had said Wednesday it was "likely" Abu Akleh was killed by stray Palestinian gunfire - but Defense Minister Benny Gantz later conceded that it could have been "the Palestinians who shot her" or fire from "our side".

Bennett on Thursday accused the PA of blocking Zionist entity from accessing "the basic findings" that would be necessary in order to reach the truth, and

warned them not to "taint the investigative process." Draped in a Palestinian scarf, Tariq Ahmed, 45, described the death as a "tragedy for all the nation", comparing his grief to that he felt at the funeral of iconic Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. "I have not felt this pain since Arafat died," Ahmed said. Another mourner, 45-year-old Hadil Hamdan, said that "Shireen was part of our lives", adding that "her voice entered every home, and her loss is a wound in our hearts". Abu Akleh, a Christian born in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, is scheduled to be buried in the city on Friday. As her coffin began its journey to Jerusalem to the drumbeat of a marching band, crowds chanted slogans demanding an end to Palestinian security cooperation with the Zionist entity.

The Zionist entity had publicly called for a joint probe and stressed the need for Palestinian authorities to hand over the fatal bullet for forensic examination. The European Union has urged an "independent" probe while the United States demanded the killing be "transparently investigated", calls echoed by UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet. But senior PA official Hussein Al-Sheikh, a close Abbas confidant, said the Palestinian "investigation would be completed independently". He added that Abu Akleh's family, the United States, Qatar and "all official authorities" would be informed of the results. —AFP

## US parents in panic over baby...

Continued from Page 1

gotten by thanks to family and friends, who send her bottles of formula from Boston, New York and Baltimore when they find them. "It's horrible, terrifying," she said, adding that she even ordered formula from Germany.

The situation took a major turn for the worse on February 17 when, after the death of two infants, manufacturer Abbott announced a "voluntary recall" for formula made at its factory in Michigan - including Similac, a brand used by millions of American families. A subsequent investigation cleared the formula, but production has yet to resume, exacerbating already

ongoing scarcity caused by supply chain problems and labor shortages. According to the data collection agency Dataassembly, 43 percent of the usual formula supply was out of stock, up 10 percent from the April average.

San Diego, California resident Olivia Espinosa said: "There's nothing on the shelves." Espinosa and her husband Steve Hohman have two young children. One of them, Maya, is only three weeks old and is lactose intolerant. "We have to go just with a plant-based formula because we can't try anything else," said Hohman.

Normally, hospitals and pediatricians give parents formula samples to figure out which one works best for their child. But few have any left to give. Hohman said it was frustrating that his daughter cannot try other formulas that might be more nutritious for her. Espinosa said the shortage has been "extremely frustrating and especially with a newborn, somebody who is requiring... very specific food right now." —AFP

the first direct visual proof. Capturing images of such a faraway object required linking eight giant radio observatories across the planet to form a single "Earth-sized" virtual telescope called the EHT. "The EHT can see three million times sharper than the human eye," German scientist Thomas Krichbaum of the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy told reporters.

"So, when you are sitting in a Munich beer garden, for example, one could see the bubbles in a glass of beer in New York." The EHT gazed at Sgr A\* across multiple nights for many hours in a row - a similar idea to long-exposure photography and the same process used to produce the first image of a black hole, released in 2019. That black hole is called M87\* because it is in the Messier 87 galaxy. The two black holes bear striking similarities, despite the fact that Sgr A\* is 2,000 times smaller than M87\*. "Close to the

edge of these black holes, they look amazingly similar," said Sera Markoff, co-chair of the EHT Science Council, and a professor at the University of Amsterdam. Both behaved as predicted by Einstein's 1915 theory of General Relativity, which holds that the force of gravity results from the curvature of space and time, and cosmic objects change this geometry. Despite the fact Sgr A\* is much closer to us, imaging it presented unique challenges. Gas in the vicinity of both black holes moves at the same speed, close to the speed of light. But while it took days and weeks to orbit the larger M87\*, it completed rounds of Sgr A\* in just minutes. The brightness and pattern of the gas around Sgr A\* changed rapidly as the team observed it, "a bit like trying to take a clear picture of a puppy quickly chasing its tail," said EHT scientist Chi-kwan Chan of the University of Arizona. —AFP

## International

# North Korea fires missile after COVID cases prompt Kim to order lockdown

## Kim Jong Un appears in a mask on TV for first time to order nationwide lockdowns

**PYONGYANG:** North Korea confirmed its first-ever COVID cases Thursday and declared a "serious emergency", with leader Kim Jong Un appearing in a mask on television for the first time to order nationwide lockdowns.

Hours after the shock announcement—the first time the nuclear-armed country has ever admitted to a case of COVID-19 — Seoul's military said it had detected three short-range ballistic missiles fired from near Pyongyang. The launch, one of more than a dozen sanctions-busting weapons tests so far this year, comes shortly after Washington warned that Kim's regime could test a nuke any day, with satellite images indicating fresh activity at nuclear sites.

Earlier Thursday, North Korea said it had moved into "maximum emergency epidemic prevention system" after patients sick with fever in Pyongyang tested positive for the "Omicron BA.2 variant" of COVID-19. Kim, wearing a mask on state television for the first time, oversaw an emergency politburo meeting to discuss the outbreak and "called on all the cities and counties of the whole country to thoroughly lock down their areas."

Kim told the meeting that the goal was to "quickly cure the infections in order to eradicate the source of the virus spread," KCNA said, without specifying how many COVID infections had been detected.

North Korea's crumbling health infrastructure would struggle to deal with a major outbreak, with its 25 million people not vaccinated, experts say. By following its admission of COVID cases with a missile test, North Korea is signalling "coronavirus control and its pursuit of national defense are two separate things," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies said.

"It is now reasonable to assume it could also con-



SEOUL: Visitors use binoculars to look towards the North Korean side of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) from the Odusan Unification Tower in Paju on May 12, 2022. — AFP

duct a nuclear test with Kim Jong Un's greenlight at any moment," he added.

### No vaccines

"For Pyongyang to publicly admit Omicron cases, the public health situation must be serious," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul said. "Pyongyang will likely double down on lockdowns, even though the failure of China's zero-COVID strategy suggests that approach won't work against the Omicron variant."

North Korea has turned down offers of vaccinations from the World Health Organization, China, and

Russia. Accepting vaccines through the WHO's Covax scheme "requires transparency over how vaccines are distributed," Go Myong-hyun, researcher at the Asian Institute for Policy Studies told AFP.

"That's why North Korea rejected it," Go said. North Korea is surrounded by countries that have battled-or are still fighting to control-significant Omicron-fueled outbreaks.

South Korea, which has high rates of vaccination, has recently eased almost all Covid-19 restrictions, with cases sharply down after a spike in March. Neighboring China, the world's only major economy to still maintain a zero-COVID policy, is battling multiple

Omicron outbreaks. Major Chinese cities, including the financial capital Shanghai, have been under strict lockdowns for weeks. China said Thursday it was "ready to provide full support and assistance to North Korea in its fight against the epidemic," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said. It appears North Korea will try to avoid China's strict measures, which have seen millions of people locked into their apartments for several weeks, including in Beijing, said Cheong Seong-chang of the Sejong Institute.

But even less harsh measures would create a "severe food shortage and the same chaos China is now facing," he said. Seoul-based specialist site NK News reported that areas of Pyongyang had already been locked down for two days, with reports of panic-buying.

### Nuke test?

South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol, who was sworn in Tuesday, has vowed to get tough with Pyongyang, after five years of failed diplomacy. After high-profile talks collapsed in 2019, North Korea has doubled-down on weapons testing, conducting a blitz of launches so far this year, including intercontinental ballistic missiles. Satellite imagery indicates North Korea is preparing to conduct a nuclear test, and the United States has warned this could come as soon as this month.

But the COVID-19 outbreak could potentially disrupt their military program, analysts said. "There is a possibility of delaying the nuclear test in order to focus on overcoming the coronavirus," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP. But he said if public fears over an outbreak were to spread, Kim might go ahead with a test "to divert this fear to another place". — AFP

## China defends Hong Kong cardinal's arrest

**BEIJING:** China on Thursday defended the arrest of a 90-year-old Catholic cardinal under Hong Kong's national security law, a move that triggered international outrage and deepened concerns over Beijing's crackdown on freedoms in the financial hub. Retired cardinal Joseph Zen, one of the most senior Catholic clerics in Asia, was among a group of veteran democracy advocates arrested Wednesday for "colluding with foreign forces".

Pop singer Denise Ho, veteran barrister Margaret Ng and prominent cultural studies scholar Hui Po-keung were also arrested, the latter as he attempted to fly to Europe to take up an academic post.

Cyd Ho, a democracy activist currently in jail over a previous protest conviction, was arrested on Thursday. "The persons concerned are suspected of conspiracy to collude with foreign countries or foreign forces to endanger national security—an act of severe nature," Beijing's foreign ministry office in Hong Kong said. Hong Kong's government said the religious background of those arrested was "completely irrelevant" and that "no one can enjoy a privilege above the law".

The five were detained for being trustees of a now-dissolved defense fund that helped pay legal and medical costs for those arrested during the huge and sometimes violent democracy protests three years ago. China responded with a broad campaign to crush the movement and transform the city so that it more closely resembles the authoritarian mainland.

Zen and his colleagues, who were released on bail late Wednesday, join more than 180 Hong Kongers arrested to date under the security law imposed to stop the protests.

### 'Deeply troubling'

Criticism came from Western nations who have accused China of eviscerating the freedoms it once promised Hong Kong. The United States, which has sanctioned key Chinese officials over the crackdown, called on Beijing to "cease targeting Hong Kong's advocates". British foreign office minister James Cleverly told parliament on Thursday the arrests were "unacceptable". Canadian foreign minister Melanie Joly called the arrests "deeply troubling".

## Chinese COVID testing firm probed after reports of false results

**BEIJING:** A COVID-19 testing firm in Shanghai is being investigated by city officials after reports that residents were given false-positive results that landed them in harsh state quarantine.

The city has been under lockdown for weeks as China enforces a zero-COVID policy through shutdowns, mass testing and tight restrictions on movement—with everyone who tests positive being sent to a government isolation centre, even those without symptoms. Numerous Shanghai residents wrote on the Twitter-like Weibo platform this week that they received false-positive results from Zhongke Runda, which operates three testing centers in the financial hub of 25 million.

The group's parent company, Shanghai Runda Medical Technology, said in a stock filing Wednesday that reports about false positives have "casts doubt on the accuracy of Zhongke Runda's lab nucleic acid testing data" and an investigation is being held. The group's shares have slid since the reports first started on Monday.

Shanghai health authorities said they had declared an investigation into an unspecified "third-party testing organization" in response to online comments about test results.

One woman said her daughter got a positive result after a Runda test and was sent to a quarantine facility with bad conditions. "On May 7, my exam-prepping daughter who has barely left the house tested false positive," the Weibo user wrote.

Her whole family were "thrown into a scary-looking quarantine centre" where the lights were on 24 hours a day and there was no medical care, she said. Residents who test positive face extended stays in crowded facilities. In some cases, entire buildings are sent into quarantine if one resident tests positive.

Another resident, who initially received a false-positive test from Runda, said they later tested positive after spending four days in quarantine. As fears mount a lockdown may be imposed in the capital. Beijing officials on Monday said that they were investigating issues with an unspecified number of testing institutions, including inaccuracies.

At least 15 major cities across China now require residents to get COVID-19 tests every two to seven days, according to research firm Soochow Securities. Nomura economists estimate that regular mass testing could cost as much as 1.8 per cent of China's GDP. — AFP

## Grandchild or \$650,000: Indian couple sues son

**DEHRADUN, India:** An Indian couple are taking their son to court demanding that he and his wife produce either a grandchild within a year or cough up almost \$650,000. Sanjeev and Sadhana Prasad say that they exhausted their savings raising and educating their pilot son and paying for a lavish wedding. Now they want payback.

"My son has been married for six years but they are still not planning a baby. At least if we have a grandchild to spend time with, our pain will become bearable," the couple said in their petition filed with a court in Haridwar last week. The compensation they are demanding — 50 million rupees—includes the cost of a wedding reception in a five-star hotel, a luxury car worth \$80,000 and paying for the couple's honeymoon abroad, the Times of India reported Thursday.

The parents also forked out \$65,000 to get their son trained as a pilot in the United States only for him to return to India unemployed, the paper said. "We

## US, China congratulate Marcos for election win

**MANILA:** The United States and China have congratulated Ferdinand Marcos Jr on his win in the Philippine presidential election, as the superpowers jostle to have the strongest ties with the Southeast Asian nation. Marcos, the son and namesake of the late Philippine dictator, secured more than half of the votes in Monday's poll to win the presidency by a wide margin and cap a remarkable comeback for his family.

He and running mate Sara Duterte, who also won the vice presidential race in a landslide, have embraced key policies of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, including his position on China.

The elder Duterte sought to pivot away from the United States, the Philippines' former colonial master, towards China since taking power in 2016 — and appeared reluctant to confront Beijing over territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Even before Marcos declared victory, the US and Chinese presidents were quick off the mark to start building a personal relationship seen as strategically vital by both rivals.

In a phone call Wednesday, Chinese President Xi Jinping told Marcos the two countries had been "partners through thick and thin", Chinese state television reported Thursday.

"I attach great importance to the development of China-Philippines relations and am willing to establish



Sanjeev and Sadhana Prasad

also had to take a loan to build our house and now we are going through a lot of financial hardships. Mentally too we are quite disturbed because we are living alone," the couple said in their petition. The couple's lawyer Arvind Kumar said the petition will be taken up for hearing by the court in northern India on May 17.

India has a strong joint family system with many generations including grandparents, nephews, aunts and uncles often living in the same household. However, in recent years the trend has shifted, with young couples preferring to move away from their parents or siblings, and wives—such as in this case—opting to work rather than focus on having children and staying at home. — AFP

a good working relationship with President-elect Marcos, adhere to good neighbourliness and friendship," Xi said.

### 'Friend, ally, partner'

The United States said it will seek close security ties with the Philippines under Marcos, but made clear it would raise human rights. In a phone call, US President Joe Biden congratulated Marcos and said he wanted to expand cooperation on a range of issues, including climate change and "respect for human rights". Marcos said Thursday he had assured Biden that the Philippines "always held the United States in high regard as a friend, an ally, and a partner".

Marcos also invited Biden to his June 30 inauguration, but did not say if the US leader had accepted. The United States has a complex relationship with the Philippines—and the Marcos family.

After ruling the former US colony for two decades with the support of the United States, which saw him as a Cold War ally, Marcos senior went into exile in Hawaii in the face of mass protests and with the nudging of Washington in 1986.

As regional tensions remain high, Washington is keen to preserve its security alliance with Manila that includes a mutual defense treaty and permission for the US military to store defence equipment and supplies on several Philippine bases. But Marcos's spokesman Vic Rodriguez warned a US contempt of court judgement against the younger Marcos could "affect" the relationship.

The decades-old issue relates to the family's failure to pay compensation to thousands of victims of human rights abuses during Marcos senior's regime.—AFP



MANILA, Philippines: Presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr greets supporters as he arrives at the campaign headquarters in Manila. — AFP

FRIDAY, MAY 13, 2022

# Business

## Saudi Aramco dethrones Apple as world's most valuable company

Aramco valued at \$2.42 trillion while Apple value drops to \$2.37 trillion

**RIYADH:** Saudi Aramco on Wednesday dethroned Apple as the world's most valuable company as surging oil prices drove up shares and tech stocks slumped. The Saudi Arabian national petroleum and natural gas company, billed as the largest oil producing company in the world, was valued at \$2.42 trillion based on the price of its shares at close of market.

Apple, meanwhile, has seen its share price drop over the past month and was valued at \$2.37 trillion when official trading ended on Wednesday. The sinking share price came despite Apple reporting better-than-expected profits in the first three months of this year amid strong consumer demand.

But, Apple warned that the China COVID-19 lockdown and ongoing supply chain woes would dent June quarter results by \$4 to \$8 billion. "Supply constraints caused by Covid-related disruptions and industry-wide silicon shortages are impacting our ability to meet customer demand for our products," Chief Financial Officer Luca Maestri said on a conference call with analysts.

The results looked good following stumbles by some Big Tech peers as growth from the stay-at-home demand amid the pandemic slows and companies confront rising operating and labor costs.

Oil giant Saudi Aramco recently reported a 124

percent net profit surge for last year, hours after Yemeni rebels attacked its facilities causing a "temporary" drop in production. As the world economy started to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, "Aramco's net income increased by 124 percent to \$110.0 billion in 2021, compared to \$49.0 billion in 2020," the company said.

The kingdom, one of the world's top crude exporters, has been under pressure to raise output as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent sanctions against Moscow have roiled global energy markets. Aramco president and CEO Amin Nasser cautioned that the company's outlook remained uncertain due in part to "geopolitical factors".

"We continue to make progress on increasing our crude oil production capacity, executing our gas expansion program and increasing our liquids to chemicals capacity," Nasser said.

On the results, for 2021, he acknowledged that "economic conditions have improved considerably". A strong rebound last year saw demand for oil increase and prices recover from their 2020 lows. Inflation could cause a drop in consumption, reducing demand for oil, while tech shares could continue to be dragged down by investor concerns over company costs, interest rate rises and supply chain woes. —AFP



**RIYADH:** The Saudi Arabian national petroleum and natural gas company, billed as the largest oil producing company in the world, was valued at \$2.42 trillion based on the price of its shares at close of market on Tuesday.

## Google making smartwatch in 'ambient' computing push

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Google on Wednesday said it is strapping a smartwatch onto its Pixel hardware line as part of an "ambient computing" vision to make its services available anywhere at any time. The Alphabet-owned internet titan used its annual developers conference to showcase a Pixel line expanding to include a smartwatch and tablet as well as upgraded earbuds and a more affordable version of its flagship smartphone. Backed up by artificial intelligence, cloud computing and sophisticated custom mobile chips, the family of gadgets is intended to work seamlessly together, Google senior vice president of hardware and services Rick Osterloh said during a briefing.

"All these things work in concert on our vision of ambient computing," Osterloh said. "Providing the help people need, whenever they need it." The Pixel Watch will be released late this year, along with a new premium Pixel 7 smartphone, with pricing and other details to be disclosed closer to launch, Google said.

The first Pixel smartwatch designed and built by Google will integrate health features from Fitbit, which Alphabet bought in a \$2.1 billion deal that closed last year, and take on market leading Apple Watch. "It just takes time to integrate a company with all the technology and people that Fitbit has," Osterloh said of the Pixel smartwatch timing.

There will be a version of the Pixel Watch that

syncs to Android-powered smartphones and one that has its own wireless internet connectivity, the internet giant said.

Google is also working on a Pixel tablet computer expected to be released next year, figuring there is an interest in large screen mobile devices even if that overall market has been lackluster.

"We've got a lot going on in the Pixel pipeline and it represents investments across all different kinds of technologies," Osterloh said. A smaller version of the Pixel 6 smartphone released by Google late last year will hit shelves on July 28 at a price of \$449, along with new Pixel Buds Pro ear pieces priced at \$199. While smartphones powered by Google's free Android operating software dominate the global market, the Silicon Valley company's Pixel models have amassed scant share.

"We're really investing a lot and expanding the mobile part of our vision," Osterloh said. "It's like an iceberg and that you didn't see a lot of what was happening underneath but now you can really see all these things coming to the surface."

### Software smarts

Alphabet chief Sundar Pichai provided a peek of augmented reality glasses that Google is working on, providing few details but demonstrating how they could translate conversations in real time, showing wearers transcriptions. "All of this work is in service of a timeless mission to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," Pichai said of what Google shared during a 2-hour presentation before a live audience in a concert venue near the company's Silicon Valley headquarters. Google's hardware announcements were backed by a slew of enhancements to software powering its core search service, artificial intelligence capabilities, and Android mobile devices.

Improvements included enabling artificial intelli-



**SAN FRANCISCO:** This image courtesy of Google, shows a smart watch as part of the company's Pixel line. Google on May 11, 2022, said it is strapping a smartwatch onto its Pixel hardware line as part of an "ambient computing" vision to make its services available anywhere at any time. —AFP

gence to converse with people more naturally, and to "read" through pages of documents or messages and provide people with insightful, terse summaries of their contents. An enhancement to search lets images captured by smartphone cameras and queries uttered by users be combined to allow, for example, someone to ask Google to scan a market shelf to find a top-rated brand of nutless chocolate, demonstrations showed.

And a new Google Wallet being rolled out in the weeks ahead is being designed to one day replace real-world billfolds, right down to holding digital versions of driver licenses. —AFP

## Iraq strikes deal with Iran to secure summer gas imports

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq has agreed to pay \$1.6 billion in debt to Iran by June 1 to secure a steady gas supply for power generation through the summer, its electricity minister said. Chronic underinvestment through decades of war and sanctions has left Iraq dependent on imports from its eastern neighbor for a third of its gas needs.

But US sanctions on Iranian oil and gas have complicated Iraq's payments for the imports, leaving it in heavy arrears and prompting Iran to respond by periodically switching off the taps. The result has been extended power cuts across much of the country, particularly during the summer, when temperatures routinely reach 52 degrees Celsius (126 degrees Fahrenheit) sending demand for refrigeration and air conditioning soaring.

"We have reached agreement on supply in sufficient quantities. We have agreed on 50 million cubic metres (per day) during the four summer months," acting electricity minister Adel Karim told state television late Wednesday. During winter, Iraq will import between 10 million and 20 million cubic meters per day of Iranian gas, he added.

"They agreed to supply us with the gas but they had conditions. They are demanding... \$1.6 billion," Karim said, adding the payment will have to be made "by the start of June". The figure represents Iraq's arrears for 2020, which have yet to be settled because of the arcane payment method Iraq is obliged to use to comply with an exemption from US sanctions on Iran. —AFP

## UK recession risk gathers pace as economy shrinks

**LONDON:** Britain's economy shrank in March on fallout from soaring inflation, increasing the prospect of the country falling into recession. Official first-quarter data on Thursday showed that following solid output in January, the UK economy posted zero growth the following month and contracted by 0.1 percent in March.

It comes after the Bank of England (BoE) last week warned that Britain risks falling into recession with UK inflation expected to top 10 percent, a four-decade high, by the end of the year. Consumer prices are surging worldwide on supply strains as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns—and in the wake of the Ukraine war that is aggravating already high energy costs.

Britain's economy grew 0.8 percent overall in the January-March period, the slowest quarterly growth for a year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. It compared with gross domestic product expansion of 1.3 percent in the fourth quarter of last year.

### 'Russia disruption'

Responding to Thursday's data, finance minister Rishi Sunak said Britain's economic recovery from the pandemic was "being disrupted by (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's barbaric invasion of Ukraine and other global challenges". Sunak, however, added in a statement that UK "growth in the



**LONDON, United Kingdom:** A pedestrian passes a closed-down shop, advertised 'to-let' in London on May 12, 2022. Britain's economy shrank in March on fallout from soaring inflation, increasing the prospect of the country falling into recession. — AFP

first few months of the year was strong, faster than the US, Germany and Italy".

The UK economy grew for a fourth quarter in a row, and is above pre-pandemic levels.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he expected British growth to "return very strongly in the next couple of years". In an interview with LBC radio, he also refused to rule out a windfall tax on energy companies as surging oil and gas prices hit households hard. "We'll have to look at it," said Johnson despite repeating his displeasure at such a levy.

"I don't like them... I don't think they're the right way forward," he said, adding that a windfall tax on the likes of BP and Shell would deter them from investing in greener energy. Johnson's comments came one week after his Conservative party lost control of key councils in local elections—an outcome blamed in part on the cost-of-living crisis.

Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS, said declining output in the services and production sectors resulted in overall growth contracting in March. —AFP

## Lebanon jobless rate almost triples since crisis

**BEIRUT:** The official unemployment rate in crisis-hit Lebanon jumped almost three-fold to reach 29.6 percent at the start of the year, a joint survey by the UN and the government said Thursday.

"Lebanon's unemployment rate increased from 11.4 percent in 2018-2019 to 29.6 percent in January 2022, indicating that almost one third of the active labor force was unemployed in January 2022," it said. After years of corrupt practices and financial mismanagement, Lebanon's economy collapsed two years ago, stripping the national currency of 95 percent of its value and sending poverty rates soaring.

The rare survey released by Lebanon's Central Administration of Statistics and the International Labor Organization, a UN agency, said the informal economy accounted for around 30 percent of employment. It said one of the most alarming findings was the huge growth in "underutilized labor" from 16.2 percent in 2018-2019 to 50.1 percent in January 2022, referring to people available to work more hours than they do. The issue of unemployment has not featured prominently in the campaigns led by the main parties fielding candidates in Sunday's parliamentary election.

In its initial rescue deal reached with the government last month, the International Monetary Fund urged Lebanon to reform its bloated public sector, which employs around a quarter of the working population. —AFP



Business

# Russian isolation won't spark 'acute' oil supply crunch: IEA

## Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine down by almost a third

PARIS: Russia's growing isolation will not create an "acute" global oil supply crunch as production from other countries is rising and demand from China is falling, the International Energy Agency said Thursday. The IEA, which has previously warned that Moscow's invasion of Ukraine could spark a global supply "shock", said EU and G7 plans to ban Russian oil imports would "accelerate the reorientation of trade flows" and force Russia to slash production.

"Even so, steadily rising output elsewhere, coupled with slower demand growth, especially in China, is expected to fend off an acute supply deficit in the near term," the agency, which advises developed countries, said in a monthly report. After supply fell by nearly one million barrels per day in April, losses could widen to three million barrels per day in the second half of the year, the agency said.

The United States and other rich nations decided to tap their emergency oil reserves in a bid to tame crude prices. Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24 sent oil prices soaring, but a strict COVID lockdown in China, the world's biggest importer of crude, has since weighed on demand. The IEA said "steadily rising" output from the United States and Middle Eastern members of the OPEC+ oil cartel will help offset losses from Russia. Excluding Russia, world oil output is set to grow by 3.1 million barrels per day from May through December, it said.

World oil demand growth, meanwhile, is forecast to slow to 1.9 million barrels per day in the second quarter, more than half the pace from the first three months of the year. But it is expected to grow again from April

to August as driving and jet fuel consumption pick up during the holiday season. Demand for 2022 is expected to reach 99.4 million barrels per day, an increase of 1.8 million barrels per day.

The OPEC oil cartel also cut its demand forecast on Thursday, saying it expects an increase of 3.4 million barrels per day to an average of 100.3 million for 2022, which is 100,000 barrels above pre-pandemic demand in 2019. Russian gas transiting via Ukraine to Europe dropped by a third Thursday after Kyiv suspended supplies through a key route, Russian energy giant Gazprom said. Ukraine's pipeline operator GTSOU said that it was halting gas transport at the Sokhranyvka transit point from Wednesday as Russian occupying forces now in control were interfering with operations.

The move comes as Russia's military campaign in pro-Western Ukraine enters its third month.

Gazprom told the Interfax news agency that supplies transiting Ukraine on Thursday were at 50.6 million cubic meters in total, compared to 72 million cubic meters the day before. Ukraine's GTSOU on its website provided slightly different figures, saying 53 million cubic meters were flowing through Ukraine, compared to 73 million cubic meters the day before. 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. Germany said Wednesday that it saw a 25 percent drop in supplies of Russian gas flowing through Ukraine. The drop in Russian natural gas deliveries via Ukraine has fuelled fears that already high gas prices in Europe will climb even further with the fall in supplies. —AFP



## How Sri Lanka's economy went into a tailspin

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is suffering its worst economic crisis since its independence from Britain in 1948. Months of lengthy blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines have infuriated the public, with huge protests demanding the government's resignation turning violent this week. AFP reviews the origins of the snowballing economic calamity in the South Asian island nation:

### White elephants

Sri Lanka has spent big on questionable infrastructure projects backed by Chinese loans that added to its already unsustainable debt. In southern Hambantota district, a massive deep-sea port hemorrhaged money from the moment it began operations, losing \$300 million in six years. Nearby are other Chinese-backed extravaganzas: a huge conference centre, largely unused since it opened, and a \$200 million airport that at one point was unable to earn enough money to pay its electricity bill.

The projects were pushed by the powerful Rajapaksa family, which has dominated Sri Lanka's politics for much of the past two decades.

### Unsustainable tax cuts

President Mahinda Rajapaksa was voted out of office in 2015 partly due to a backlash against his government's infrastructure drive, which was mired in graft claims. His younger brother Gotabaya succeeded him four years later, promising economic relief and tough action on terrorism after the island's deadly 2019 Easter Sunday attacks. Days after taking office, Gotabaya appointed Mahinda prime minister and unveiled the biggest tax cuts in Sri Lanka's history, worsening chronic budget deficits. Ratings agencies soon downgraded the country out of concern that the public debt was spiraling out of control, making it harder for the government to secure new loans.

### Pandemic hit

The tax cuts were spectacularly ill-timed: just a few

months later, the coronavirus began spreading around the world. International tourist arrivals dropped to zero and remittances from Sri Lankans working abroad dried up—two economic pillars the government relied upon to service its debt.

Without these sources of overseas cash, the Rajapaksa administration began using its stockpiles of foreign exchange to make loan repayments.

### Fertilizer ban

Sri Lanka was soon burning through its foreign reserves at an alarming rate, prompting authorities in 2021 to ban several imports including critically-important agricultural chemicals farmers need to grow their crops. The government sold this policy as part of an effort for Sri Lanka to become the world's first completely organic farming nation, but its effects were disastrous.

As much as a third of the country's agricultural fields were left fallow by farmers and the resulting drop in yields hit the production of tea—a vital export earner. The policy was eventually abandoned at the end of 2021 after protests from agricultural workers and skyrocketing food prices.

### Shortages and blackouts

By late 2021, Sri Lanka's reserves had shrunk to \$2.7 billion, down from \$7.5 billion when Rajapaksa took office two years earlier. Traders began struggling to source foreign currency to buy imported goods. Food staples such as rice, lentils, sugar and milk powder began disappearing from shelves, forcing supermarkets to ration them. Then gas stations started running out of petrol and kerosene, and utilities could not purchase enough oil to meet the demand for electricity. Long queues now form each day around the country by people waiting hours to buy scant supplies of fuel, while blackouts keep much of the capital Colombo in darkness each night.

### Debt and default

President Rajapaksa appointed a new central bank chief in April, who soon announced that Sri Lanka would default on its \$51 billion foreign debt to save money for essential imports. The move failed to shore up Sri Lanka's deteriorating finances, and it only had around \$50 million in useable foreign exchange at the start of May. The country is now in negotiations for an International Monetary Fund bailout. —AFP



# KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 12 MAY 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,078	1,030	1,079	1,026	53	25,149,014	-45	-4.19%	3.31%	1,030	1,055	20.5	2.09	2.9%	1.24
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	363	347	385	345	40	39,363,187	-15	-4.14%	24.37%	346	364	26.4	1.67	1.9%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	249	233	249	229	20	20,849,864	-15	-6.05%	6.88%	230	233	25.2	1.04	1.7%	1.00
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	305	285	307	280	27	19,249,811	-20	-6.56%	13.55%	283	292	20.6	1.27	1.7%	1.03
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	995	925	996	908	88	57,057,334	-70	-7.04%	11.18%	917	932	32.1	4.04	1.3%	1.39
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	942	855	965	841	124	6,214,736	-89	-9.41%	8.23%	847	862	65.9	5.67	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	430	385	433	385	48	17,966,625	-43	-10.05%	75.80%	384	405	13.8	1.56	11.7%	1.27
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	197	177	198	172	26	24,913,368	-20	-10.15%	24.65%	172	183	64.9	1.48	2.6%	0.62
252	Al Intiaj Investment	Financial Services	122	113	123	107	16	14,394,976	-10	-8.13%	-4.24%	112	117	NM	0.68	7.5%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	170	164	173	161	12	23,145,369	-6	-3.53%	-8.38%	158	166	24.9	1.21	1.7%	0.96
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	838	749	838	728	110	5,240,548	-78	-9.43%	-5.55%	730	755	15.8	1.66	1.9%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	316	299	323	290	33	110,529,970	-17	-5.38%	5.65%	296	316	5.4	1.08	4.0%	1.43
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,770	1,645	1,770	1,470	300	2,668,683	-129	-7.27%	88.86%	1,630	1,750	21.5	1.52	3.6%	0.95
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	1,034	1,020	1,125	1,009	116	7,760,108	-10	-0.97%	19.72%	1,019	1,083	28.3	2.25	5.2%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	375	372	382	371	11	2,550,725	-6	-1.59%	7.20%	371	379	34.3	1.01	4.1%	0.74
603	Agility	Industrials	1,263	1,096	1,265	1,075	190	29,120,358	-164	-13.02%	15.98%	1,092	1,111	2.5	1.21	1.7%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	682	608	685	601	84	37,497,495	-74	-10.85%	2.18%	607	626	14.2	2.21	3.8%	1.33
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,351	3,100	3,358	3,074	284	1,413,540	-287	-8.47%	-3.85%	3,100	3,170	6.1	2.87	12.8%	0.51
642	ALAFSCO	Industrials	217	205	217	195	22	6,631,551	-11	-5.09%	-5.96%	195	212	NM	0.70	0.0%	0.87
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,918	1,800	1,924	1,800	124	1,385,156	-131	-6.78%	39.53%	1,780	1,820	55.9	13.16	1.8%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	316	287	316	285	31	98,985,251	-29	-9.18%	3.24%	287	296	17.4	2.37	3.8%	1.16
821	Warba Bank	Banking	281	273	289	268	21	49,823,534	-8	-2.85%	-0.36%	269	275	34.2	1.85	0.0%	0.98
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	584	566	588	560	28	2,324,631	-20	-3.41%	-3.90%	565	570	21.4	1.61	2.7%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	453	420	462	415	47	12,589,064	-33	-7.28%	2.30%	410	428	63.9	1.72	2.4%	0.50
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	222	215	222	215	7	6,223,462	-7	-3.15%	-5.70%	215	220	17.5	4.05	4.2%	0.53
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,625	2,470	2,625	2,470	155	599,947	-135	-5.18%	22.28%	2,439	2,483	31.2	8.18	2.6%	0.66

\* As of end of week closing

## Business

# UK oil capital tackles energy transition, up to a point

## Johnson promises to make Britain the 'Saudi Arabia' of wind power

**ABERDEEN:** In Aberdeen, northeast Scotland, offshore wind turbines, the extension to the city's port, and hydrogen buses are clear evidence of the move to green energy. But old habits die hard in the Granite City, which was built on the back of profits of oil and gas piped from the often turbulent waters off its shores.

Mention the energy transition and the response is of a "renewables boom", never a decline in the drilling for hydrocarbons. That looks likely to be the case for as long as oil and gas remains in the ageing North Sea fields. Just a few months ago, the UK, which wants to become carbon neutral by 2050, hosted the world at the UN climate change conference COP26 in Glasgow.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to make the country the "Saudi Arabia" of wind power. The price of energy has since taken off, especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, sending bills soaring and leaving many householders struggling to make ends meet. Disruptions in the delivery of Russian gas to places such as Poland and Bulgaria have also seen the security of energy supplies become a top priority. Downing Street has published a new strategy which continues to advocate the development of renewable energies. But it also calls for investment in North Sea oil and gas.

### Security

Deirdre Michie, chief executive of lobby group Offshore Energies UK, said the move was welcome and a "positive reinforcement" of the role the sector plays in both energy security and the energy transition. "Even before the energy strategy we absolutely believed that security of energy supply and the energy transition go hand in hand," she told AFP. John Underhill, a professor in geoscience and energy transition at the University of Aberdeen, is in no doubt there has been a revival

of interest in oil and gas—even in fields considered "sub-commercial". The Cambo oil field, off Shetland in Scotland's far north, now looks set to be developed, despite fierce opposition from environmentalists which caused Shell to pull out and work to be suspended. Underhill said people have started to think about where the energy comes from, and about "the role oil and gas plays in the UK and the wider community."

In Aberdeen, local officials are in lockstep with industry. Jenny Laing, who stepped down as leader of Aberdeen City Council last week, said: "With the local authorities in the last 10 years we've invested heavily in renewable energy sources... "But we do that in tandem with making sure we're supporting the oil and gas sector. We realize people will be relying on fossil fuel for a number of years to come."

For Laing, and for Michie, geopolitical unpredictability means it's better to rely on oil and gas brought up from beneath British waters than more polluting energy from Russia or elsewhere.

### Expediency

For Aberdeen and the surrounding area, economic expediency trumps everything.

Most locals either work in the industry or know someone who does. Britons have abiding memories of the devastating impact of Margaret Thatcher's abrupt closure of coal mines and steel plants in the 1980s. And while the price of crude has spiraled to more than \$100 a barrel since Russia's invasion, Aberdeen and its environs are still recovering from 2014 when prices went the other way, plunging below \$50. Investment in renewables is therefore encouraged but not at the expense of scaring away the oil giants, mainly because they have the capital necessary to finance the energy transition.

"In Aberdeen we've had a very buoyant econo-



**ABERDEEN, UK:** In this file photo taken on April 29, 2022 supply vessels used in the oil, gas and renewable energy industry are docked by the Caledonian Oil's tank, at the Aberdeen Harbour, in the North East of Scotland. —AFP

my due to the oil and gas sector," said Laing. "We want to make sure that we protect jobs and our local economy." Many also want the energy transition to be an opportunity to create a more level playing field. Scott Herrett, who works as a "just transition organizer" at Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "We have vast wealth which gets generated offshore in the North Sea here in Aberdeen and the northeast of Scotland.

"But we still have mass inequality in the city." Scientists from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in April warned that humans have only three years to radically transform the world economy, weaning it off fossil fuels to avoid catastrophic warming of the planet.

Aberdeen is trying to diversify, focusing on health, tourism and life sciences—but it's not ready yet to do so without the money oil brings. —AFP

## EBRD bank raises 1.04bn for Ukraine

**BRUSSELS:** The European development bank raised one billion euros (\$1.04 billion) in aid for Ukraine at its annual meeting this week, the institution's president said Thursday.

The money comes on top of two billion euros in a "resilience package" that was launched by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) at the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Donors have expressed the intention" to provide one billion euros to the bank "in response to the war on Ukraine", EBRD president Odile Renaud-Basso said at a news conference in the Moroccan city Marrakesh. The EBRD forecast this week that the Ukrainian economy will shrink by 30 percent this year, more than previously estimated. The World Bank expects the country's economy to shrink by an even larger 45 percent. "Ukraine needs our help to support vital infrastructures, to maintain access to electricity and transport, railways," Renaud-Basso said.

"Ukrainian municipalities need support to cope with large numbers of displaced refugees," she said.

"The Ukrainian economy needs the money to support companies and try to keep going within the world economy, which is crucial, for example, for the food security of many countries," the EBRD head said, referring to Ukraine's role as a major exporter of wheat and sunflower.

### 'Major challenge'

Ukraine estimates that it needs around \$5 billion per month just to cover its budget deficit.

It also wants donors to focus also on its future reconstruction. Ukraine's Finance Minister Sergiy Marchenko had urged international donors to "maximize" efforts to help his nation in a video link address to the EBRD on Wednesday. Kyiv can only cover about 62 percent of primary budget needs excluding military expenditure, Marchenko said.

Ukraine has been pushing Western countries for more support. US lawmakers voted Tuesday to send a \$40-billion aid package to Ukraine. If the package passes the Senate as expected, US spending to bolster Ukraine's defences and address the ensuing humanitarian crisis will soar to around \$54 billion.

European Union's economy commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis told the EBRD meeting this week that rebuilding Ukraine will be a "major challenge" and that quantifying the cost was not possible as "the damage continues every day". The bloc was willing to "provide large and very meaningful support for those reconstruction needs", he added. The EU was also examining how it could link support with structural reforms "which Ukraine may need, potentially as an EU candidate country", Dombrovskis said. The bloc is due to give an opinion on Ukraine's accession bid next month. —AFP

## Kamco Invest reports net profit of KD 3.6m for first quarter of 2022

**KUWAIT:** Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced its financial results for the first quarter ended 31 March 2022. The Company reported a net profit of KD 3.6 million (EPS:10.53fils) compared to KD 1.5 million during the same period in 2021 (EPS:4.52fils), an increase of 132.7 percent.

Total revenue for the period increased by 77.5 percent to reach KD 9.2 million (Q1 2021: KD 5.2 million), impacted by the increase in fee and commission income as well as the performance of the Company's investment portfolio. Fee & commission income increased by 43.4 percent to reach KD 4.8 million, representing 52.5 percent of total revenue.

During the first quarter, assets under management grew by 10.1 percent to reach \$16 billion as of 31 March 2022, impacted by the performance of portfolios and funds managed on behalf of clients, as well as new money raised during the period. Equity funds and managed portfolios continued to outperform their respective benchmarks. The real estate assets under management grew to \$1.5 billion with a total area of 3.35mn sq. ft and an average annual distribution of 7.7 percent to investors.

The Private Equity team continued to undergo plans to exit legacy assets held by the private equity funds. The team is building transactions pipeline for Private Equity deals, evaluating a healthy pipeline of deal flows as well as working on new initiatives and products. Efforts to raise capital for "The JEDI Fund" continue through marketing initiatives directed to qualified investors in Kuwait following the approval granted by the Capital Market Authority.

The Investment Banking team continued to advise their clients with several transactions in the pipeline expected to close during 2022 across Equity Capital Markets, Debt Capital Markets, and Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A). The team managed to complete two M&A transactions on behalf of clients during the second quarter of 2022.

First Securities Brokerage Company, Kamco Invest's brokerage arm, continued to strengthen its competitive position and attracted new clients through its online trading platforms. The company witnessed an increase of 75 percent in the trading value on Bursa Kuwait during the quarter in comparison to Q1-2021, with an increase of 78 percent in commission income generated for the same period. Total assets during the first quarter increased by 4.3 percent to reach KD 135.5 million, whereas shareholders' equity increased by 6.8 percent amounting to KD 64.5 million as of 31 March 2022. The company also enjoys a strong

finding big spenders from other countries to make up for the loss of its Russian visitors. The pandemic had already caused an 80 percent drop in the number of Russian tourists in the Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur region, according to the head of the local tourism committee, Francois de Canson.

After Paris, it is the second most popular French destination for Russian visitors. And it is a historic hotspot, too—Russian visitors have stayed here in "sumptuous villas since the 19th century," de Canson added. Russia may not account for the largest number of tourists, but in the past, they could be relied on to bring enormous wealth to the coast. "It's not a huge volume," said Denis Zanon, general manager of the Nice metropolitan tourist office. "But there is a fringe of this market with a lot of money, who live on the coast and whose guests rent villas nearby, bringing work to the luxury hoteliers, yacht rental companies, and private caterers," Zanon said. French Riviera workers in

stretch which "will have an impact on cereal production" in France following lower-than-average rainfall over the winter period. As well as wheat, other crops sown in winter such as barley are in a key development stage in May, while corn and sunflower production over the summer could also be hit.

"There's not a region that's not affected," the head of French farmers' union FNSEA, Christiane Lambert, told AFP. "Each day that passes, we're seeing the ground cracking more... if it carries on like this, those that can irrigate will be okay, but the others will have dramatic decreases in production."

The French national weather service said the country was in the grip of a hot spell that is "notable for its timing, its duration and its geographical spread", with a 20-percent drop in rainfall from September 2021 and April 2022.

### Record highs

World food prices hit an all-time high in March following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which accounted for 20 percent of global wheat and maize exports over the past three years, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. Ukrainian ports are blockaded by Russian naval vessels and French data analysis firm Kayros recently calculated that the area planted with wheat had been reduced by a third this year



Faisal Mansour Sarkhou

financial position and a "BBB" long-term credit rating and "A3" short-term rating with stable outlook by Capital Intelligence in their latest review in June 2021.

Commenting on the results, Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, Chief Executive Officer, said, "We are pleased with the results achieved as they positively reflect the robustness of our business model and the competitive performance of our products and services, leveraging on the positive sentiments witnessed by regional markets. We managed to grow our assets under management and attract new clients during the quarter, in addition to growing our total revenue, fee income, net profits, and further strengthening our financial position."

these industries have noticed the change.

Lea Combelongue, who worked as a private chef during the pandemic, has lost her rich Russian customers, too. They could be complicated clients—sometimes making last-minute orders for caviar—but they were also generous, she said.

It hasn't been difficult to make up the lost business though, she added, because "there are rich people everywhere". M'nasri agreed. "There's plenty of work," he said. The European Union has blacklisted hundreds of Russian oligarchs and politicians since Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014, adding many more following the outbreak of war in Ukraine. But many ordinary Russian families living in France have stayed on the coast, according to Thomas de Pariente, deputy director of tourism in Cannes. "You can still hear Russian spoken on the Croisette," he said, referring to the city's famous beachfront promenade. —AFP



An unusually hot snap this spring and lower-than-average winter rains have left wheat fields parched across France. —AFP

because of the conflict, according to satellite imagery.

Production could fall by as much as 50 percent this year, according to government and industry forecasts, with some farmers abandoning their fields to join the army. The strains on global markets have led to warnings from NGOs and the United Nations that hunger or even famine could strike vulnerable import-dependent countries across Africa and the Middle East. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# PARIS PLANS GREEN MAKEOVER OF CHAMPS-ELYSEES FOR OLYMPICS

Paris will give the famed Champs-Elysees a makeover ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games by planting trees and increasing pedestrian areas, the French capital's officials said on Wednesday. The French often call it "the most beautiful avenue in the world" but activists complain that traffic and luxury retail have turned it into a noisy and elitist area shunned by ordinary Parisians.

"We need to re-enchant the capital's most famous avenue, which has lost a lot of its splendor in the past 30 years," the mayor of the capital's 8th district Jeanne d'Hauteserre told reporters. "It's a reduction of the space for cars, to be clear, because that's how we need to envision the city of the future," socialist Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo said.

The plan is in keeping with other efforts by the city leader to squeeze cars out of Paris and make the city more green, a push that has divided residents with critics saying her policies go too far too fast. Later Wednesday, the Paris police gave a less than enthusiastic response to Hidalgo's plans, stressing that the Champs-Elysees is a transport route, which falls under the purview of the French state.



This file artist's impression made available by PCA-STREAM shows the Concorde Square (bottom) and the Champs-Elysees avenue in Paris as Paris's famed Champs-Elysees avenue is to be given a green makeover to transform it into what the mayor says will be an "extraordinary garden". — AFP

In a tweet, the prefect of police said he would "carefully examine" the proposals from the mayor's office. His team pointed out that their boss had not received the proposals, adding that he "must be involved in the project". But supporters

have lauded the former presidential candidate Hidalgo's efforts to reduce pollution and increase green areas in the densely populated city that can become unbearable when increasingly frequent summer heatwaves hit.

Around the Arc de Triomphe, which perches atop the Champs-Elysees, the plan is to widen the pedestrian ring surrounding the monument. And at the bottom of the two kilometer-(1.2 mile) long avenue next to the Place de la Concorde,

the "Re-enchant the Champs-Elysees" plan will revamp the gardens. "We will create a hectare and a half of green spaces and plant over a hundred trees," deputy mayor Emmanuel Gregoire said.

Paris will spend 26 million euros (\$27.5 million) in the lead up to the Olympics on the works set to begin within weeks. The terraces near the top of the avenue favored by tourists will also be reworked by Belgian designer Remy Fischler, who will strive to "preserve the identity and personality" of the area, he said.

The Champs-Elysees was first laid out in 1670 but was given a revamp by Baron Haussmann, the architect behind the transformation of Paris under Napoleon III in the mid-19th century. Over the centuries, the avenue has been the stage for the high and low moments in French history, hosting celebrations and commemorations as well as protests, notably the violent Yellow Vest movement. It is also used as the route for the Bastille Day military parade, which celebrates the French republic and its armed forces on July 14, as well as the finishing point for the annual Tour de France cycle race. — AFP



## LAPA signs an agreement with 'KidsArt UK'

LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) signed an agreement with "KidsArt UK", one of the most important formative arts academies for kids in Britain, as LAPA instructors will be trained on the means of adopting a specialized approach in teaching art, and prepare a generation of young artists who are aware of Arts theories and culture, as well as the history of Art and its place in the world.

Chairwoman of LAPA Board Farieah Al-Saqqaq lauded the signing and said "our keenness to advance our services and activities made us search for the best specialized institutions in the field of formative arts, as art is a necessity not a luxury, and is more compelling now than any other time." She said "arts bring a Psychological balance the child needs, because the human being is naturally attracted to music and colors, and search

for it in his surroundings, and he makes it if he does not find it."

Developed countries adopted the providing of opportunities to develop children and adolescents' skills, as a basic tool to fight crime among the young. Member of LAPA board, Chairwoman of Formative Arts Department, Artist Ameera Behbehani spoke about the importance of this cooperation as it is "the first of its kind in Kuwait, and link us with a prestigious and a specialized academy in the field of teaching arts in a professional manner, and targets the young age, bearing in mind that this is provided only by private schools that do not cooperate with other institutions."

Founder and Chairwoman of KidsArt Academy said this the first cooperation of its kind in the Middle East, and it is an important cooperation to add to our experience as well as to develop skills and enable upcoming generations. "We both love to deal with children and we are pleased with LAPA's approach and its concentration on teaching them the techniques of various arts", adding that "art is the king of the entire sciences, as through it knowledge than be moved to the generations as Leonardo da Vinci said 500 years ago, and this is still true to date.



## Disney profit slips but streaming TV subscribers jump

Disney on Wednesday said its profit slipped in the recently ended quarter but its television streaming service and parks were booming. The entertainment giant reported net income of \$470 million, just over half of the \$912 million profit it made in the same period a year earlier. But park attendance that had fallen due to the pandemic rebounded and the Disney+ television streaming service gained 7.9 million subscribers to

137.7 million. When adding in subscriptions to Disney's streaming services Hulu and ESPN, the overall number tops 205 million.

"Our strong results in the second quarter, including fantastic performance at our domestic parks and continued growth of our streaming services once again proved that we are in a league of our own," said Walt Disney Company chief executive Bob Chapek. He told analysts Disney is open to raising its streaming service subscription price in the future, but has no specific plans. Disney+ is pursuing a version of the service that would be supported by advertising, Chapek said. Disney+ gained more subscribers than analysts had expected, in stark contrast to a dive in subscriber numbers reported by rival Netflix in the first quarter of this year.

A drop of just 200,000 users-less than 0.1 percent of the total Netflix customer base-caused shares in the Silicon Valley firm to plunge and prompted a shareholder to file a lawsuit accusing the streaming television titan of not making it clear that subscriber numbers were in peril. "Disney+ has been taking Netflix out at the knees," tech analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group told AFP. "Kids have always chased their content, and for parents it has been a no-brainer to get their service." About half of Disney+ subscribers



are families with children, executives said on the earnings call. Disney stopped licensing its coveted content to Netflix to make it exclusive to its own streaming service, and said it planned to stick with the tactic when it comes to rivals in the market.

### Parks and politics

Disney said that as its streaming television service continues to grow strongly, its resorts and parks are generally operating without any of the significant COVID-19 related restrictions on capacity that were in place last year. The pandemic does continue to vex film and television show production, Disney said, but it has been able to release films in theaters so far this year. "Our slate for the remainder of this year is incredibly

strong," Chapek told analysts while discussing the company's line-up of shows for streaming and theaters.

Chapek acknowledged challenges getting Disney films released in China, saying the situation there is "very complicated" from political and business standpoints. He said he was encouraged by the fact that a freshly released "Dr. Strange" film based on a Marvel comics character took in more than \$500 million in its first week, even without being shown in China. Disney has run into political turbulence closer to home, with the Florida governor recently signing a law that eliminates a statute that has for decades allowed the entertainment giant to act as a local government in Orlando, where it has a theme park. — AFP

## #VisitBurundi: Influencers trying to remake their nation's image

Burundi: The name does not immediately evoke centuries-old forests sheltering elusive chimpanzees, or sandy beaches lined with palm trees that stretch along one of the largest lakes in the world. Instead, the small, landlocked nation located in the heart of Africa's Great Lakes region has often been synonymous with poverty, ethnic violence and most recently, a political crisis that prompted 400,000 people to flee the country. So the young team behind the VisitBurundi initiative have a tough job on their hands.

"We have decided to show the beauty of our country, to show the culture, to finally change the image of our country, different from the one it has abroad," explains the group's general manager Bruce Niyonzima, 27. "We want Burundians and foreigners to come and visit our country," he continues, welcoming AFP to the Living Museum of Bujumbura, an intriguing cross between a craft market and a zoo, where a solitary leopard rubs shoulders with crocodiles and turkeys in Burundi's financial capital.

Launched last year, the initiative brings together around a dozen volunteers who organize trips for large groups of visitors, help to spruce up tourist destinations and, above all, broadcast Burundi's charms to the world. Their strategy is simple and can be summed up in three words: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook.

"The communication strategy we use is based on social networks because we have understood that a lot of people" use them, Darlene Nahayo, 28, told AFP. "Our target is largely young people," said the events and public relations manager, who also co-hosts a YouTube channel dedicated to women.



A general view of a tea plantation next to the Kibira National Park, northwestern Burundi. — AFP photos

prospects for tourism-domestic and international-are looking up. In 2015, the country was plunged into crisis after then president Pierre Nkurunziza declared he would run for a third term, triggering deadly violence that cost at least 1,200 lives. The 2020 election of Nkurunziza's designated successor, President Evariste Ndayishimiye, fuelled hopes of political progress, with the United States and the European Union announcing a resumption of foreign aid to the impoverished country in recent months.



A leopard holds a guinea pig in its mouth at Musee Vivant de Bujumbura (the Living Museum of Bujumbura), in Bujumbura, Burundi.

our country," said Niyonzima, adding that VisitBurundi was in discussions with the authorities to formalize a partnership. Burundi's government did not respond to AFP's interview requests.

With very few visitors so far, tourist facilities are in short supply, except in Bujumbura, where hotels and beachside restaurants are scattered along the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Expanding them is one of VisitBurundi's priorities. On the outskirts of Kibira National Park, a dense forest sheltering 200 to 300 chimpanzees, a small lodge is under construction-the first to accommodate potential tourists-with a breathtaking view of the surrounding tea plantations.



A sheltered juvenile chimpanzee looks from a cage at Musee Vivant de Bujumbura (the Living Museum of Bujumbura), in Bujumbura, Burundi.

"People really like this forest... so it's better to create such a lodge to allow people to sleep" here, said tourist guide Deus-Dedit Niyiburana. Since last December, international visitors can obtain their visa on arrival at the airport-a vast improvement on a previously laborious process and a key step on the long road ahead for the young people behind VisitBurundi. — AFP



(From left) Commander, Naval Air Forces/Commander, Naval Air Force, US Pacific Fleet Vice Admiral Kenneth Whitesell, Joseph Kosinski, Tom Cruise, guest, Christopher McQuarrie, Jerry Bruckheimer and band members attend the Global Premiere of "Top Gun: Maverick" in San Diego, California.— AFP photos



Tom Cruise attends the "Top Gun: Maverick" World Premiere in San Diego, California.

## CANNES MARKS ITS 75TH YEAR IN NOSTALGIC FORM

From Maverick to Bowie to Elvis, the Cannes Film Festival launches its 75th-anniversary edition on Tuesday with a roster full of icons from the last century. The world's foremost film festival always tries to strike a balance between serious arthouse fare and popcorn-guzzling entertainment. It has scored some big crowd-pleasers for its diamond jubilee, with Tom Cruise coming to the French Riviera for the European launch of "Top Gun: Maverick", the sequel to his era-defining mega-hit from 1986.

Music legends will feature prominently, with flamboyant Australian director Baz Luhrmann screening his biopic "Elvis" along with new documentaries about David Bowie ("Moonage Daydream") and rock'n'roller Jerry Lee Lewis ("Trouble in Mind") by one-half of the Coen brothers,

Ethan Coen). While those are all playing outside the main competition, there are also iconic names in the race for the top prize Palme d'Or, not least Canadian horror maestro David Cronenberg.

The 79-year-old returns to his body-horror (dis)comfort zone with "Crimes of the Future", in which Kristen Stewart, Lea Seydoux and Viggo Mortensen turn gruesome surgical alterations into a sexualized performance art.

### Five films from women

Meanwhile, US filmmaker James Gray gets nostalgic for his New York adolescence in "Armageddon Time", starring Anne Hathaway and Anthony Hopkins. And one of France's most feted directors, Claire Denis, is back with "The Stars at Noon", a thriller set in Central America

featuring Robert Pattinson.

Following some last-minute additions, a total of 21 films are competing for the Palme d'Or, including several from previous winners: the Dardenne brothers from Belgium, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund, Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda and Romania's Cristian Mungiu. Only five are directed by women-though that still makes it a record year for female representation at Cannes-among them US indie darling Kelly Reichardt who is presenting "Showing Up" with Michelle Williams.

Julia Ducournau became only the second woman to win the Palme last year for her wild and gory "Titane". One of its stars, French actor Vincent Lindon, heads the jury this year with a team that includes Iran's two-time Oscar-winning

director Asghar Farhadi, Indian actress Deepika Padukone and British actress-director Rebecca Hall.

### 'Sadness, shame, pain'

The war in Ukraine will be an inevitable talking point. Its beleaguered filmmakers will get a special day at the industry marketplace that runs alongside the festival and Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa will present a timely film out of competition, "The Natural History of Destruction", about the bombing of German cities in World War II.

The main competition also includes Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov, who was unable to attend for his two previous nominations due to a politically-charged conviction for embezzlement back home. Now in exile, the director recently told

AFP of the "horror, sadness, shame, pain" he felt about the invasion of Ukraine, which he said was an act of "self-killing" by the Russian government.

Elsewhere, the festival will celebrate the return of "Mad Max" creator George Miller, who returns with "Three Thousand Years of Longing", a different beast for the Australian director, featuring Idris Elba as a djinn. And actor-director Ethan Hawke will add to the nostalgic feel of the fortnight with his new series, "The Last Movie Stars", about 1960s Hollywood golden couple Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward. This year's honorary Palme d'Or will be presented to US actor Forest Whitaker, best known for his Oscar-winning turn in "The Last King of Scotland". — AFP



### 'Real euphoria': Cannes luxury back after pandemic pause

After celebrations took a hit during the past two years of COVID-19, this year's Cannes Film Festival promises a return to its traditional wild festivities and displays of exorbitant wealth. "There is real euphoria... people want human contact," Romain Benichou of rental firm Century 21, told AFP. But buying your way into the best parties doesn't come cheap, with the fanciest villas going for up to 400,000 euros (\$421,000) for the fortnight of the event.

That is a small price to pay for the movie moguls and big brands keen to rub shoulders with the glamorous attendees of the world's favorite film shindig. That is especially true after the 2020 edition was cancelled due to COVID, and last year's was forced to go ahead under strict health protocols that meant the parties were far more muted.

Largely back to normal this year, the French Riviera town is hoping to enjoy the windfall. The 2019 edition was estimated to have generated 196 million euros (\$206 million) for Cannes as it welcomed 125,000 festival goers and 12,000 film professionals. That created 90,000 overnight stays and 2,200 jobs during the event, according to local authorities. They did not give the figures for 2021, but with American and Asian delegations largely absent and attendees subject to masks and daily COVID-19 tests, they are almost certain to have been far lower.

### 'Bursting' ports

Things are looking up, though. "We are not necessarily back to the budgets of five or six years ago, but there is a recovery," said Stephane Grosso, head of Nice-based events firm Terre d'Evenements, adding that he had just

come back from scouting a villa for an "important influencer". "It's changed a lot because last year was bleak," he added. One sour note for those facilitating the ultra-wealthy will be the lack of Russians.

The festival has explicitly said that Russians with ties to the government are not welcome at the festival or the industry marketplace that runs alongside it. A spokesman for the market said only "a few Russians without links to the government or public sector" would be present this year, compared with hundreds traditionally. "There were always one or two Russians organizing a big party on the beach," said Grosso. "But the return of the Americans will make up for it."

The promise of Americans also has ice cream makers Magnum, one of the festival's sponsors, in a chipper mood and they are hosting a private beach party on May 19 featuring singer Kylie Minogue to celebrate. "All the big producers are present this year in Cannes," gushed press officer Frederic Henry. "Not just Tom Cruise... but also Disney and Netflix." Liberty Yachts, a rental firm, said the two ports in Cannes were "full to bursting".

"The American clientele prefer to rent large private boats during the festival-it's more discreet than a large hotel," said owner Fabrice Viard. Not that there is any room in hotels. Such is the demand, said Viard, that even a former Miss France was unable to secure a room and was forced to book a place in St Tropez, an hour away. "There isn't a single hotel room or Airbnb left in Cannes," he said. — AFP

## The 21 films in competition at Cannes

This year's Cannes Film Festival has 21 films in competition, including movies from four past winners of the top prize Palme d'Or, as well as several cult favorites. The festival starts on Tuesday, with the winners to be announced at the closing ceremony on May 28.

### 'Crimes of the Future'

The horrible genius behind "The Fly" and "Crash", David Cronenberg returns to his body horror roots with a tale starring Viggo Mortensen, Lea Seydoux and Kristen Stewart about people indulging in revolting surgical alterations for artistic pleasure. Buckets at the ready.

### 'Triangle of Sadness'

The king of cringe, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund took a scalpel to modern bourgeois niceties with his Palme d'Or-winning "The Square" in 2017. In a similar vein, his latest places two models and a cleaning lady on a desert island with a group of billionaires.

### 'Tchaikovsky's Wife'

The enfant terrible of Russian film and theatre, Kirill Serebrennikov fell foul of authorities with his caustic attacks on conservative values and was barred from travelling to Cannes for two previous nominations. Now in exile, he should be present for his historical tale about the famous composer.

### 'Armageddon Time'

James Gray has made big sweeping dramas, from space odyssey "Ad Astra" with Brad Pitt to Amazon adventure "The Lost City of Z". This one is based on his adolescence in 1980s New York and a school governed by Donald Trump's father, starring Anne Hathaway and Anthony Hopkins.

### 'Broker'

Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda won the Palme d'Or in 2018 for his beautiful and touching family tale "Shoplifters". Featuring the star of "Parasite" Song Kang-ho, this one is about people dropping off infants in "baby boxes" to be looked after by other families.

### 'Decision to Leave'

Park Chan-wook had an international hit with nightmarish thriller "Old Boy" that won him the runner-up Grand Prix in 2004. This time, the South Korean brings his unique stylings to the familiar trope of a detective falling for the prime suspect in a murder investigation.

### 'Showing Up'

Kelly Reichardt has gradually built up a cult following with her mini-masterpieces about life on the edges of American society, including 2019 sleeper hit "First Cow".

She is reunited with her favourite muse Michelle Williams for a self-reflective look at a small-town artist trying to overcome distractions.

### 'Tori and Lokita'

Belgian brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne make simple but devastating slice-of-life stories and are among a handful to have won the Palme d'Or twice. Their latest follows the friendship of two African teenagers exiled in Belgium.

### 'Stars at Noon'

One of France's most lauded auteurs, Claire Denis is having a busy year, having already won the directing prize at this year's Berlinale. Her Cannes entry is a political thriller set in Central America starring Robert Pattinson.

### 'Forever Young'

A tale of love, life and tragedy in a Paris theatre troupe against the outbreak of AIDS in the 1980s from French-Italian director Valeria Bruni Tedeschi.

### 'Nostalgia'

Italian director Mario Martone pays homage to his hometown of Naples.

### 'Brother and Sister'

Marion Cotillard stars in a drama about feuding siblings brought back together by the death of their parents, directed by Cannes veteran Aude Desplechin.

### 'Leila's Brothers'

Iran's Saeed Roustaei made a splash last year with his punchy cop thriller "Just 6.5". His new film examines the economic



The Palme d'Or trophy is pictured at Chopard Jewelry House in Meyrin near Geneva ahead of the 75th Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

### 'R.M.N.'

Romania's Cristian Mungiu won the Palme d'Or in 2007 for his bleak but vital abortion film, "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days". This one explores ethnic and political tensions in a remote Transylvanian village.

### 'Close'

Belgium's Lukas Dhont won the Camera d'Or newcomer award in 2018 for his debut "Girl" about a trans ballet dancer. Here he tackles two teenagers separated by a tragedy.

### 'Boy from Heaven'

A daring film about power struggles in the leading centre of Sunni Islam, the Al-Azhar University in Egypt, from Swedish director Tarik Saleh.

### 'Holy Spider'

Having won the Un Certain Regard section in 2018 with "Border", Danish-Iranian Ali Abbasi heads for the Iranian religious city of Mashhad where a family man seeks to rid the streets of prostitutes.

struggles of a family in a country hit by international sanctions.

### 'EO'

Following a donkey from the circus to the slaughterhouse, this treatise against animal cruelty is from 84-year-old Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski, who was first in competition at Cannes in 1972.

### 'Pacification'

Spanish director Albert Serra heads for Tahiti to explore the diplomatic tensions around French nuclear testing.

### 'Mother and Son'

France's Leonor Serraille follows a Senegalese mother from the 1980s to the present day as she tries to establish a life in the Paris suburbs.

### 'The Eight Mountains'

A story of a lifelong friendship between boys and their rural home from Belgian husband-and-wife team Felix Van Groeningen and Charlotte Vandermeersch. — AFP

## Lifestyle | Features

World's biggest YouTuber **PewDiePie** moves to Japan

Swedish gaming streamer PewDiePie

The world's top YouTube star, Swedish gaming streamer PewDiePie, has moved to Japan after the country relaxed its COVID-19 entry rules for some visa-holders. The 32-year-old has a huge online following, with 111 million subscribers on YouTube, but has faced controversy over offensive jokes in the past.

He posted a video this week documenting his arrival with his wife and dogs in Japan, which has some of the strictest virus border controls in the world. "For so

long we doubted whether we could even make this move, and we went through all the ups and downs, and obviously it's been a really long journey," said the streamer, whose real name is Felix Kjellberg. "But I just really, really appreciate everyone who was supportive of us going... it just feels amazing to be here, finally."

Japan has allowed in foreign business visitors, students and other new residents since March but remains closed to tourists, although the prime minister has

pledged a gradual easing of the rules from next month. Details of who will be allowed to enter and when are yet to be announced, although Japanese media reports say group tours may be first to resume and that the government is discussing scrapping COVID-19 testing on arrival.

Japan welcomed a record 31.9 million foreign visitors in 2019 and had been on track to achieve its goal of 40 million in 2020 before the pandemic hit. Kjellberg, who previously lived in Britain, said in

2019 he had bought a house in Japan. The star has landed himself in hot water several times, including over videos containing anti-Semitic remarks and racial slurs, and in 2016 he was temporarily blocked from Twitter after joking he had joined the Islamic State group. Kjellberg also previously said he was "sickened" after hearing that the gunman behind the 2019 New Zealand mosque massacre had promoted his videos before opening fire. — AFP



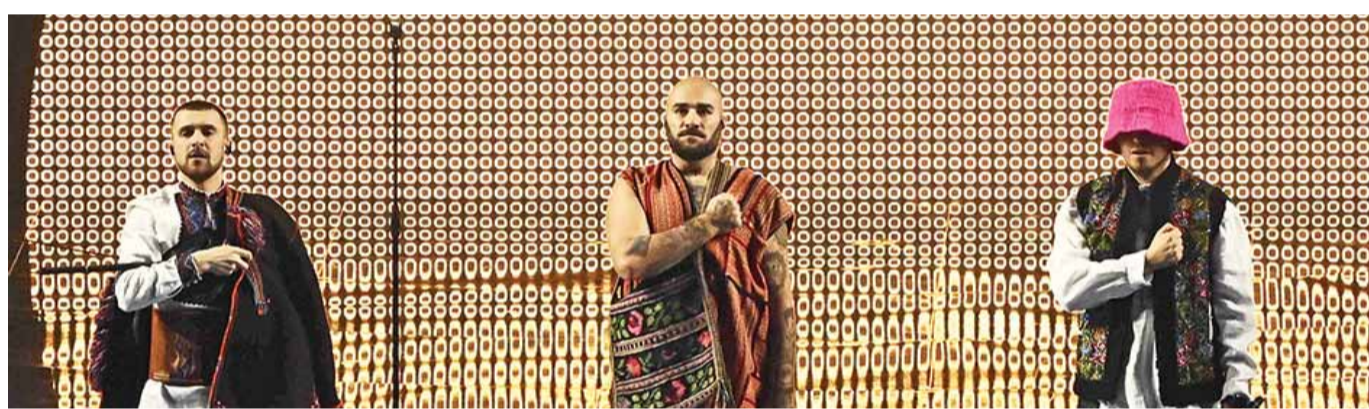
Members of the band "Kalush Orchestra" perform on behalf of Ukraine during the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song contest 2022.

Ukraine's **Kalush Orchestra** throws down motherland's beats at Eurovision

With their infectious musical fusion of roots and rhythm, Ukrainian folk hip-hop band Kalush Orchestra is riding a wave of goodwill at the Eurovision Song Contest this year while eyeing the contest's top prize. Tapping traditional Ukrainian folk music but mashing up an invigorating hip-hop beat with a haunting, lullaby refrain, "Stefania" was written last year by the band's frontman, 27-year-old rapper Oleh Psiuk, as a tribute to his mother. But the song selected to represent Ukraine at Eurovision-just days before Russia's invasion-has taken on outsized meaning for a country nearing its third month of war. It contains nostalgic lyrics such as "I'll always find my way home even if all the roads are destroyed" and celebrates cultural identity and the motherland.

Standing out in the competition long cheered for its flamboyance and camp, the band received a standing ovation on Tuesday after passing the semifinals. It is considered by bookmakers a favourite to become Eurovision's outright winner at the finale on Saturday. "My mum is in Ukraine and many of my relatives are in Ukraine but there is really no safe place in Ukraine at the moment," Psiuk told AFP through an interpreter. "It's really like a lottery, where you cannot know where exactly you'll get in danger. So we are very worried about everyone and our relatives that are in Ukraine."

Such worries have fuelled the band's drive during Eurovision, he said. "We feel here as if on a mission because at the moment, as we speak, Ukrainian culture is being destroyed," Psiuk said. "But it is our



Members of the band 'Kalush Orchestra' perform on behalf of Ukraine during the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song contest 2022 at the Palapitour venue in Turin. — AFP photos

role to show it is alive and it has a lot to offer. It's unique. It really represents every Ukrainian who is now suffering in the world today."

**Flutes and fusion**

Although considered nonpolitical, the world's biggest song contest, watched by millions of people, inevitably reflects greater geopolitical tensions. This year, the European Broadcasting Union banned Russia from the contest a day after it invaded Ukraine on February 24. Russia had competed in Eurovision since 1994. Perhaps the most original and energizing act at this year's competition, the six-member all-male Kalush Orchestra sprang from Psiuk's original hip-hop group Kalush, named for his hometown in western Ukraine. The band is made up of Psiuk, Ihor Didenchuk, Tymofii Muzychuk, Vitalii Duzhyk, Oleksandr Slobodanyk and MC KlymMen ("CarpetMan").

Its new sound incorporates traditional folk instruments, including the telenka, which is played with one hand controlling the pipe's open end, and another flute-like instrument, the sopilka. Performing in richly embroidered traditional garb, the band is also instantly recognizable for Psiuk's bubblegum pink bucket hat and the carpet-like bodysuit worn by the breakdancing MC CarpetMan. But it is Kalush Orchestra's sound that makes the band unique. It "mixes old ancient folk, even forgotten sounds, with super modern and understandable-for-everyone hip-hop rap elements", Psiuk told journalists last week.

**'Fighting age'**

To win Eurovision, Kalush Orchestra will have to be chosen above 24 other finalists competing on Saturday. Votes are cast by a mix of music industry professionals and the public from each country—who are not allowed to vote for their own nation. Were

Ukraine to win, next year's Eurovision would be held in the country, which Psiuk vowed would be a "new, integrated, well developed, flourishing Ukraine".

Although one band member who joined the army three days after the invasion remains in Ukraine defending Kyiv, Ukraine's government gave the group special dispensation to travel abroad to compete at Eurovision. "That's why we want to be as useful to our country as we can be," Psiuk told journalists. "Representing your country is responsible anytime but representing it in a time of war is... a maximum responsibility for us." Psiuk says the band will return to Ukraine directly after Eurovision. As their press release written ahead of the contest explains: "They will be allowed to leave for the final on 14th May but must return as men of fighting age the day after." — AFP



Members of Ukraine's band "Kalush Orchestra" celebrate their qualification during the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song contest 2022.



Members of Ukraine's band "Kalush Orchestra", Oleh Psiuk, Tymofii Muzychuk, Ihor Didenchuk, Vitalii Duzhyk, Oleksandr Slobodanyk and Vlad Kurochka arrive for the opening ceremony of the Eurovision Song contest 2022.

## Rapper sentenced for criticizing president acquitted in DR Congo

A rapper in the Democratic Republic of Congo sentenced to two years in prison for criticizing the president has been acquitted on appeal, his lawyer said on Thursday. A military court in the east of country sentenced Nzanu Muyisa Makasi in December on charges

of insulting the president, for a song called "No President" which suggested the country is ungoverned. Eastern DR Congo is prey to myriad armed groups, many of which are a legacy of regional wars that flared a quarter of a century ago.

Last year, President Felix Tshisekedi placed the eastern North Kivu and Ituri provinces under a "state of siege," putting soldiers and police officers in key administrative positions in a bid to quell the violence. Massacres have continued and rights groups charge that further empowering the security forces has led to abuses against civilians.

On Thursday, Makasi's lawyer Patrick Mukomba told AFP that a military tribunal

in the provincial capital of Goma had acquitted and released the rapper at an appeal hearing the previous day. "The charges against our client were not



Nzanu Muyisa Makasi

established," he said, explaining that criticizing events in the volatile east did not amount to insulting the president. Makasi, 29, is from conflict-torn North Kivu. His father was killed in a 2015 attack in neighboring Ituri province by the Allied Democratic Forces, a militia the Islamic State group describes as its local affiliate in the region.

In December, Makasi was sentenced alongside fellow rapper Idengo-real name Delphin Katembo—who received a 10-year sentence for criticizing the army. Idengo is still in detention. His appeal hearing is scheduled for May 27. — AFP

## And action! Swiss seek Netflix rejuvenation for film industry

When it comes to internationally renowned cinema, Switzerland may not be the first country that immediately springs to mind, but a law being voted on this Sunday seeks to change that by forcing streaming services to invest in local moviemaking. The so-called "Lex Netflix" referendum looks set to pass by a narrow margin, according to recent opinion polls. Under Switzerland's famous direct democracy system, voters will decide on an amendment to the Film Production Act adopted by parliament last October.

The change takes into account the dramatic shift in how audiovisual content is consumed, requiring global streaming platforms like Netflix to help finance Swiss film production. The aim is to boost innovation and help Swiss cinema gain more international traction. "Swiss cinema has become much more international. This new step will allow it to go even further," said Swiss director Lionel Baier, whose movie "Continental Drift" has been selected for this year's Cannes Film Festival.

**'Raise the bar'**

"It will raise the bar in terms of quality and ambition," he told AFP, adding it would push Swiss directors to "imagine that the series or film you are making will be seen on platforms the world over". In a bid to prop up the costly business of film production, domestic television broadcasters have since 2007 been obliged to invest four percent of their turnover in Swiss film-making. But until now, global streaming platforms like Netflix, Disney+ and Blue, which rake in hundreds of millions of dollars in Switzerland each year, have not been asked to pitch in.



Swiss National Film Archives director Frederic Maire answers a question during an interview with AFP in Lausanne. — AFP

If approved, the amended law will submit them to the same rule. The streaming services would be given the choice either to participate directly in Swiss film and series production or pay a substitute levy aimed at financing movie promotion. Cinema production in Switzerland has in recent years received 105 million Swiss francs (\$106 million, 101 million euros) in annual financing on average, according to the culture ministry.

**'A boost'**

If Lex Netflix passes, the sector can add an additional 18 million francs to its coffers each year, it said. The platforms will also have to ensure European-made films or series make up at least 30 percent of the content available in Switzerland, as they are already required to do in the European Union. Right-leaning opponents of the amendment, who forced the issue to a referendum, have slammed that quota, warning that the likes of Spotify and Apple Music could soon be subjected to a similar rule.

They also warn the investment obligation will hike subscription prices. The culture ministry has rejected that argument, pointing to France, where it says that introducing an obligation to invest up to 25 percent of proceeds had entailed no price increases.

Swiss film library chief Frederic Maire insisted the reform would "give Swiss cinema a boost" thanks to additional funds but also the promise of more distribution of Swiss-produced content. "This can only be beneficial, because... more production means more interesting works and thus, over time, maybe more prizes and more visibility for Swiss cinema," he told AFP. The reform's defenders say it would make it possible to shoot more movies in Switzerland, which would benefit local economies. — AFP

## Sports

# Bucks rally to push Celtics to brink, Grizzlies maul Warriors

**LOS ANGELES:** The Milwaukee Bucks erased a double-digit fourth-quarter deficit to beat Boston 110-107 on Wednesday and push the Celtics to the brink of NBA playoff elimination as the Memphis Grizzlies stayed alive with a 134-95 drubbing of Golden State. The Grizzlies, facing elimination and playing without injured All-Star guard Ja Morant, weren't about to go out on their home floor.

They raced to a 38-28 first-quarter lead and never trailed as they cut the deficit in their best-of-seven Western Conference series to 3-2, sending it back to San Francisco on Friday. "We just stuck to the game plan," said Grizzlies forward Jaren Jackson Jr. one of three Memphis players with 21 points. "We knew what was at stake. We didn't change anything though, we just calmed down, looked at the film, understood what we had to take away from the last game and just went out there and executed."

Desmond Bane and Tyus Jones also scored 21 for the Grizzlies, who had seven players score in double figures in the wire-to-wire win. Klay Thompson led the Warriors with 19 points. Jonathan Kuminga added 17 and superstar Stephen Curry scored 14 on four-of-10 shooting for the Warriors, who coughed up 22 turnovers leading to 29 Grizzlies points.

"It was awful, embarrassing," Thompson said. "We all had the mindset we were going to close it out tonight, but sometimes basketball is an inexact science and we played like a shell of ourselves." The Grizzlies outrebounded the Warriors 55-37 and led them 24-5 in second-chance points. Up by as many as 55 late in the third quarter, the Grizzlies were flirting with NBA history, with the largest margin ever in the playoffs — 58 points.

It was a massive comedown for the Warriors, who

played their second straight game with head coach Steve Kerr sidelined by COVID-19. The third quarter hadn't ended when stars Curry, Thompson and Draymond Green were pulled by acting coach Mike Brown. In contrast, it came down to the wire in Boston, where Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 40 points and Bobby Portis and Jrue Holiday came up big late as the reigning NBA champion Bucks rallied to take a 3-2 lead in their Eastern Conference series.

Reserve forward Portis put back Antetokounmpo's missed free throw with 11.4 seconds remaining to give the Bucks a 108-107 lead. Jrue Holiday plucked an attempted shot by Marcus Smart from the air with 8.1 seconds remaining before teammate Pat Connaughton added a pair of free throws to seal the comeback for a Bucks team that trailed by 14 early in the fourth quarter.

Milwaukee took a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series and will have a chance to close it out when they host game six on Friday. Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown combined for 60 points for the Celtics, who took control with a 28-19 second quarter that saw them take a 54-47 halftime lead. They maintained the edge throughout the third, but the Bucks didn't back down. Connaughton's three-pointer with 7:34 to play cut the deficit to 98-90. Jrue Holiday added a jump shot to cut the margin to 101-99.

### 'Golden opportunity' missed

Three-pointers from Antetokounmpo and Holiday knotted the score at 105-105 with 43.2 seconds left, setting the stage for a dramatic finish. "Obviously, in Boston, you're down 14 in the fourth quarter, people would say everything's against us. But we come



**BOSTON:** Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics dunks the ball during the first half of Game Five of the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Milwaukee Bucks at TD Garden on May 11, 2022. —AFP

together," Holiday said. "We live and die like that." Holiday added 24 points for Milwaukee while Portis scored 14 and Connaughton 13 off the bench. "We just didn't do what we were supposed to do," said Smart, who scored 15 points for the Celtics. "We didn't execute when we were supposed to, and when

it mattered the most, they did."

Celtics coach Ime Udoka said it was a bitter defeat after "we outplayed them for three and a half quarters. We talked about showing our resolve, and we made it tougher on ourselves now." Udoka said. "We gave up a golden opportunity tonight." —AFP

## Nadal, Swiatek ease into last 16, Wawrinka wins

**ROME:** Rafael Nadal eased into the last 16 of the Italian Open on Wednesday with a straightforward 6-3, 6-1 win over John Isner, while Iga Swiatek is on course for a fifth straight WTA triumph after seeing off Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-3, 6-0. Third seed Nadal made short work of Isner as he bids for an 11th title in Rome, the King of Clay seeing off his American opponent in one hour and 17 minutes under blazing sunshine at the Foro Italico.

A quarterfinal loser to fellow countryman Carlos Alcaraz in Madrid, Nadal could profit from the in-form teenager's absence in the Italian capital to win the last big clay event before the French Open later this month. The 35-year-old had been out for six weeks with a rib injury before returning in the Spanish capital last week but Isner put up little resistance against the 21-time Grand Slam winner.

"I need to build again the things after a tough stop and that's what I'm trying, just to stay with the right attitude and let's see if I'm able to make that happen," Nadal said court-side. The match swung in Nadal's favor in game eight, when Nadal broke veteran world number 27 Isner before serving out to take the first set.

From there Nadal cruised to victory, dropping just 14 points on his way to setting up a third-round clash with Denis Shapovalov. "I need to play better than I did today but after a while out it's another victory and tomorrow another chance to play against one of the best players in the world," Nadal added.

### Red-hot Swiatek

Nadal later told reporters that Swiatek was doing "amazing things" and it was difficult to argue after she set up a third-round match with Victoria Azarenka after wiping the floor with Ruse. The 20-year-old Swiatek is in red-hot form after winning her last four tournaments and will be eyeing a second title at Roland Garros after winning there as a teenager in 2020. Swiatek dropped just nine points in a second-set demolition of Ruse which highlighted the gulf between the two players.

Former champion Karolina Pliskova was dumped out of the women's tournament after being beaten by Switzerland's Jil Teichmann 6-2, 4-6, 6-4. Pliskova had made the previous three finals in Rome, winning the title in 2019, but the sixth seed lost to 24-year-old Teichmann in a battle which lasted two hours and 40 minutes. Third seed Aryna Sabalenka strolled into the next round with a routine 6-2, 6-0 win over Zhang Shuai, while Coco Gauff is also in the last 16 after seeing off fellow American Madison Brengle 6-2, 6-4.

### Wawrinka sets up Djokovic clash

Stan Wawrinka, who won for the first time in 15 months in the first round, edged out Laslo Djere 7-6 (10/8), 3-6, 6-3 to set up a last-16 clash with world number one Novak Djokovic. The injury-hit 37-year-old beat Djokovic in finals to win two of his three Grand Slam titles, but has lost 19 of their 25 career meetings.

Stefanos Tsitsipas was forced to work hard to beat Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) in a tough match in which he had to save two match points before eventually prevailing in a third-set tie-break. Bulgarian Dimitrov, beaten by world number five Tsitsipas in both Barcelona and Madrid in recent weeks, fought back from 5-3 down in the second set to level the match and looked to have the better of his Greek opponent in set three. —AFP

## No more shared medals, say Tamberi and Barshim

**DOHA:** Gianmarco Tamberi and Mutaz Essa Barshim, who provided one of the emotional peaks of the Tokyo Olympics by sharing the high jump gold medal, will not repeat the gesture if they are tied again. "We already talked about it, it is not going to happen again," Italian Tamberi said ahead of his first clash with his Qatari friend since the Olympics at the Doha Diamond League meeting on Friday.

Barshim, 30, who holds the world title as well as joint Olympic gold, was sat alongside Tamberi as he made the statement on the extraordinary events of August 1 last year. Both cleared 2.37 m and with neither able to make 2.39m, track officials offered a jump-off but Barshim famously asked: "Can we have two golds?"

It was the latest episode in their unlikely rivalry-friendship that he has seen them console each other when each had a career-threatening ankle ligament injury. But with a world championships looming this year, both know that sentiment has to be put to one side. If they were tied again, "we will look at each other, we will say OK let's go" to the jump off, declared Tamberi at a press conference Thursday.

## Sindhu outplayed as India crashes out of Thai Uber Cup

**BANGKOK:** India crashed out of Thailand's Uber Cup on Thursday after women's badminton superstar PV Sindhu came up short against local crowd favorite Ratchanok Intanon. Thailand will now progress to the women's semifinals against China, while Japan will meet Korea on Friday. Spurred on by a rowdy crowd, eighth-ranked Intanon - a former world champion - fought back from one game down to beat Tokyo bronze medalist Sindhu 18-21, 21-17, 21-12.

Light on her feet, Intanon's technical skills helped her battle the severe sideways drift on court. "I know she is an attacking player... I was trying to be myself," Intanon told reporters. Fourth-ranked An Se-young from South Korea triumphed over Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt - who is 14th in the world - 18-21, 21-15, 21-18.

Earlier, world number one Akane Yamaguchi saw off Taiwan's Tai Tzu Ying - a day after a surprise loss to Bilqis Prasista, a teenage Indonesian rookie ranked 333rd in the world. Tai-ranked second in the world - pushed her Japanese 24-year-old opponent

together." Holiday said. "We live and die like that." Holiday added 24 points for Milwaukee while Portis scored 14 and Connaughton 13 off the bench. "We just didn't do what we were supposed to do," said Smart, who scored 15 points for the Celtics. "We didn't execute when we were supposed to, and when

### Triple target

Tamberi wants to add a world title to his Olympic gold. Barshim wants to establish his name among athletics greats by becoming the first to win three straight high jump titles at the world championships in Eugene in July. The Qatari hero said it had already been "amazing" to be the first to defend the world title in Doha in 2019. "Now I am trying to find some goal, some target to motivate myself and maybe it is even better to be the only one that did it three times so that keeps me going. It is not easy to find motivation after such a big year, such a big success."

Their competition will be a highlight of the opening Diamond League meeting of the year. Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis will be aiming for a new world record having set his latest best of 6.20m at the world indoor championships in Belgrade in March. No-one has cleared 6.0 metres at Doha's outdoor track. But he is also aiming for a first world title to add to his Olympic gold and so has lined up a



**TOKYO:** In this file photo taken on Aug 2, 2021, joint gold medalists Qatar's Mutaz Essa Barshim and Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi pose on the podium of the men's high jump final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium. — AFP

five meetings before Eugene.

"It comes down to these really tiny margins so I'm just trying to get everything in the right place for when it comes to competing in the world championships to make sure that, when the bar is at that gold medal height, I'm on the right pole, right grip, right run." In the men's 200 meters, Olympic champion Andre De Grasse of Canada will compete against American world title holder Noah Lyles. —AFP



**BANGKOK:** Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon hits a return against India's Pusarla V Sindhu during their women's singles quarterfinal match at the 2022 Thomas and Uber Cup badminton tournament on May 12, 2022. —AFP

to three games but lost 10-21, 21-19, 19-21. Meanwhile, Prasista, 18, managed to put up an admirable fight against China's He Bing Jiao - ranked

ninth in the world - dragging out play for three games. But after losing the first game 25-year-old He sealed victory: 19-21, 21-18, 21-7. —AFP

## 'Cultural experience' promised for first all-Pacific isle clash

**SYDNEY:** Fijian Drua and Moana Pasifika will put pride on the line and are promising a "cultural experience" when Super Rugby breaks new ground on Saturday with the first clash of two Pacific island sides. The powerful islanders, with their flair and unorthodox style, have always been an integral part of teams in the southern hemisphere club championship.

But this year for the first time they have teams of their own, with the competition rebranded Super Rugby Pacific. The round 12 clash may only be a battle to avoid the wooden spoon, but it will be a historic occasion with bragging rights on the line when Moana Pasifika and Fijian Drua run out

at CommBank stadium in Sydney. "Our boys are really excited ... It is a clash of the islands and we are really looking forward to it," said Drua coach Mick Byrne. "It should be a massive cultural experience."

Moana Pasifika coach Aaron Mauger, highlighted the mutual respect the islanders have for each other. "It's a celebration of both teams' inclusion into Super Rugby," said Mauger. "From a supporter perspective, we're right behind them. (They) are obviously part of our beautiful moana (ocean), the Pacific, so the boys have been right in behind them and connecting with quite a few of their players."

Fijian-born Moana Pasifika wing Timoci Tavatavanawai is looking forward to the challenge of going up against his islander "brothers". "It's going to be cool playing against the Drua boys, they're like my brothers," said Tavatavanawai. "I played with half of the team when I was younger. I've never played against them so it's going to be interesting."

Auckland Blues coach Leon MacDonald had a

good look at the Drua when his table-topping side battled to a 35-18 win against the islanders and found them "so different" to every other team. "The way they attack the game is refreshing. We're sitting here frustrated because we were unable to play the game we wanted to because they didn't allow us to."

Moana Pasifika are arguably playing the better rugby and go into the match off the back of a narrow 26-20 loss to the NSW Waratahs, after leading 17-0 at half-time. The Drua, however, suffered a 67-5 thrashing by the Wellington Hurricanes and Byrne's task was to pick them up again after a "quite poor" training session at the start of the week. "But, it is a learning curve," he said.

Moana Pasifika face selection issues after Mauger on Thursday left out center Levi Aumua and lock Sam Slades from his match-day squad for breaching unspecified team protocols. "They've been two of our best rugby players all year and they know they got it wrong, so there was a consequence coming," he said. —AFP

Sports

# Man City go three points clear after four-goal De Bruyne masterclass

LONDON: Kevin De Bruyne produced a four-goal masterclass as Manchester City thrashed Wolves 5-1 to move three points clear at the top of the Premier League, while Chelsea consolidated their top-four place and pushed Leeds deeper into relegation trouble on Wednesday. City had seen second-placed Liverpool go level on points with them after a 2-1 win at Aston Villa on Tuesday.

But De Bruyne's brilliant display ensured Pep Guardiola's side responded emphatically as a thrilling title race enters the final furlong. After De Bruyne put City ahead in the seventh minute from Bernardo Silva's pass, the leaders were briefly rocked by Leander Dendoncker's equalizer four minutes later. But De Bruyne extinguished Wolves' hopes of a shock win as he completed his hat-trick with two more lethal finishes in the 16th and 24th minutes.

He bagged his fourth goal from close range in the 60th minute and Raheem Sterling put the seal on the demolition with an 85th-minute tap-in. The Belgium midfielder's heroics mean City need four points from their last two games to be guaranteed a fourth Premier League title in the last five seasons. Guardiola lavished praise on De Bruyne, saying: "Unstoppable, brilliant, awesome, outstanding, perfect! He has the ability to create the special things. He has to score goals and this season is the most prolific he has had since we are together."

If City can win at West Ham on Sunday, they will climb six points clear of Liverpool before Jurgen Klopp's quadruple-chasing team next play in the league at Southampton on Tuesday. City's second goal spree in four days after the 5-0 rout of Newcastle on Sunday also gives them an important seven-goal advantage over Liverpool in the goal difference column. "If we win these games we will be champions. Now recover the players and the next

final for us is against West Ham," Guardiola said.

Their latest win was even more impressive given City are without injured defenders Ruben Dias, John Stones and Kyle Walker for the rest of the season, with Aymeric Laporte limping off in the second half at Molineux. While Liverpool have maintained a blistering pace in pursuit of City since January, Guardiola's team have been up to the challenge. After drawing with Liverpool on April 10, City have won five successive league games, scoring 22 times and conceding only twice.

### Clinical Chelsea

Chelsea moved to the brink of qualifying for next season's Champions League with a 3-0 victory at struggling Leeds. Thomas Tuchel's side won for the first time since Todd Boehly's consortium agreed a deal to buy Chelsea from Roman Abramovich last week. Mason Mount opened the scoring in the early stages at Elland Road and Leeds suffered another blow when Daniel James was sent off.

Christian Pulisic bagged Chelsea's second goal after half-time and Romelu Lukaku wrapped up the Blues' first win in four games. Third-placed Chelsea are now eight points clear of fifth-placed Tottenham and will be guaranteed a top-four finish if Antonio Conte's team fail to beat fourth-placed Arsenal on Thursday.

Arresting their worrying recent slump was the ideal preparation for Chelsea ahead of Saturday's FA Cup final against Liverpool at Wembley. "We accepted all the obstacles we'd have to face, a physical team and an emotional stadium. We were strong from the beginning and deserved to win," said Tuchel, who revealed Mateo Kovacic could miss the final with an ankle injury.

While Chelsea look to end the season on a high, Leeds are in grave danger of relegation. Jesse



WOLVERHAMPTON: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne fights for the ball with Wolverhampton Wanderers' English defender Conor Coady during their English Premier League match at the Molineux stadium on May 11, 2022. —AFP

Marsch's men sit third-bottom of the table, behind fourth-bottom Burnley on goal difference. Burnley have three games left compared to only two for Leeds, who host Brighton and travel to Brentford in the matches that will decide if their two-season stay in the top flight is destined to end with a return to the Championship.

Everton moved two points clear of Leeds after a

0-0 draw at relegated Watford. Frank Lampard's side have lost just once in their last six matches to climb out of the relegation zone. They also have a game in hand on Leeds in the fight for survival. Jamie Vardy scored twice and James Maddison also netted as Leicester beat relegated Norwich 3-0 at the King Power Stadium to end a run of seven games without a win. —AFP

## Teams prepare for Gulf Games

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The third Gulf Games will begin on Friday with women's athletics in the presence of heads of Gulf Federations. The Head of the Asian Federation Dahlan Al-Hamad will arrive on Saturday. The Friday morning competitions will include the semifinals of the 100m race and the 100m and 400m hurdles. The evening competitions will include the finals of the pole vault, 100m race, 100m hurdles, shotput, long jump, 10,000m race, javelin throw and 400m race.

Competitions will be completed on Saturday with the 100m hurdles, heptathlon 1, semifinal of the 400m hurdles, 800m race, the finals of the long jump and heptathlon 2. In the evening, the finals of the discus throw, shot put, heptathlon 3, 400m hurdles, triple jump, 800m, 2,000m hurdles, 200m race, heptathlon 4 and 100m relay.

President of Athletics Federation Sayyar Al-Enezi said the Ahmad Al-Rashdan track and field stadium in Kaifan is ready for the Gulf event, and expressed his pleasure on the participation of women in the Gulf Games for the first time. He appreciated the efforts of Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser and Director General of the Public Authority for Sport Dr Humoud Fulaiteh for the development of the field and tracks.

Chairwoman of the Women Committee and Head of the Women's National Team Hanan Al-Hardan said Kuwait athletes are well prepared as they began training since February, all the way up to the training camp that began on Saturday.



Men's handball team.



Women's athletics team

Meanwhile, the men's futsal team will start its competition against UAE at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah complex Saturday evening following a match between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Technical Director at the Handball Federation Dr Khalid Al-Sharji said the national team went into a camp Thursday prior to the start of competition, adding that training will be in the mornings and evenings before leaving for Doha for a training camp there. The team will play two friendlies with Qatar before returning home to get ready for its opener May 25. Sharji asked fans to back the handball team during competitions and encourage the young players who are in need of

such support.

The Kuwait swimming team continues its training at Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Complex at Nasser Club to get ready for the start of competition on Tuesday. Team Director Zainalabideen Mohammad commended the players' discipline, adding that two-hour daily preparations began two months ago, adding all players are fit and no injuries have taken place. Deputy Chairwoman of the Basketball Women Committee Hanan Al-Zayed said "we selected the best players from clubs during the league and federation cup competitions, as eight players were selected." She said the team will train in Turkey from May 15 to 25.

## Atletico seal Champions League qualification after win over Elche

MADRID: Atletico Madrid secured qualification for the Champions League on Wednesday as a 2-0 victory away at Elche guaranteed their place in La Liga's top four. Matheus Cunha and Rodrigo De Paul were both on target as Atletico pulled six points clear of Real Betis in fifth, with two games left to play. Atletico also have the superior head-to-head record over Betis.

Sevilla, though, failed to make sure of their top-four spot as the team's poor end to the season had earlier continued with a goalless draw at home to struggling Mallorca. Atletico look likely now to finish third and although the defense of their league title has been hugely disappointing - they are 14 points behind Real Madrid - Diego Simeone's side have at least avoided missing out on the Champions League, which for a while seemed a very real possibility.

"I'm happy for the players," said Simeone. "It's been an up and down season, with a Champions League when we competed very well and a La Liga where we haven't been able to maintain our consistency. It's not what we imagined but we have achieved the objective - the Champions League for another year, which is very important for the club."

In December, Atletico lost four league games in a row for the first time ever under Simeone, before defeat by Levante, who sat bottom of the table, prompted crisis talks between coach and players in February. But five consecutive victories in March proved crucial and while

there has been another dip in recent weeks, Atletico have done just enough to seal Champions League qualification for a 10th consecutive year.

### Cunha turns home

Cunha gave Atleti the lead in the 28th minute as Antoine Griezmann picked out Renan Lodi's run down the left and Cunha was in the right place to divert in the cross to the near post. The visitors made it two shortly after the hour, De Paul finishing off a superb move after a slick exchange with Lodi, who had again broken through the Elche defense.

Atletico play at home on Sunday to Sevilla, whose stalemate against Mallorca at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan should only delay their qualification given they sit five points clear of Betis, with two games left to play. Sevilla will need only one more point to guarantee they finish ahead of Betis, as they also have the better head-to-head with their city rivals.

But Julen Lopetegui's side do have two tricky last games, with Sunday's trip to the Wanda Metropolitan coming before a final match at home to Athletic Bilbao. And even if they get over the line, Sevilla are ending what was once a promising campaign with a whimper, after just three wins now in their last 12 in all competitions. There were whistles from the home fans while Mallorca were hardly satisfied with a draw either. They stay 18th, two points adrift of safety, with Cadiz ahead of them playing a game in hand away at Real Sociedad on Thursday. —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Adaliya	22517144
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Khaldiya	24848075
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Kaifan	24849807
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shamiya	24848913
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shuwaikh	24814507
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Adan Hospital	23940620	Nuzha	22526804
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Qadsiya	22515088
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Dasmah	22532265
		Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401
<b>Clinics</b>			
Kaizen center	25716707		
Rawda	22517733		

### CHANGE OF NAME

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

### EMERGENCY

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Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:

Call MSALHOTLINE 128



Mr. Laurent Feraudet, French national, son of Mr. Michel Feraudet, resident of 53 Bis Rue De Versailles 91400 Orsay and Ms. Kimberly Sarah D Souza, Indian national, daughter of Mr. Alwyn D Souza, resident of 22/8 Model Town Apts, Mahakali Caves Road, Andheri East, Mumbai-400093 both presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters/ telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

First Secretary (Community Affairs) and Marriage Officer, Embassy of India, Kuwait. Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in



ROME: Inter Milan players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) final against Juventus on May 11, 2022 at the Olympic stadium. —AFP

## Inter see off Juve to win Italian Cup

ROME: Inter Milan claimed their eighth Italian Cup on Wednesday after overcoming old foes Juventus 4-2 in an extra-time victory full of incident and controversy. Ivan Perisic secured a thrilling win with a double in the first half of extra time but the match hung on the awarding of a soft-seeming penalty which Hakan Calhanoglu smashed in to take the match past 90 minutes.

Juve had been deservedly leading through quickfire goals from Alex Sandro and Dusan Vlahovic early in the second half and referee Paolo Valeri's decision to give the spot-kick after Lautaro Martinez fell following a slight touch from Leonardo Bonucci enraged Massimiliano Allegri's team. "I always thought we could do it, even when we were 2-1 down... We lost our heads a bit for 10 or 15 minutes but we fought back and I think that we definitely deserved to win," Perisic said to Mediaset.

For Inter it is another success over Juve after another controversial win in Turin last month and beating them to the Italian Super Cup earlier in the season and is one which will boost them in their Serie A title defense. Simone Inzaghi's side trail AC Milan by two points and could hand their local rivals the Scudetto if they don't beat relegation-threatened Cagliari on Sunday.

Juve meanwhile have only Champions League qualifi-

cation to show for an up-and-down season, but they chose to say nothing about the penalty decision which denied them a trophy. "Inter are fighting for the league title and we're behind them. We need to close that gap with hard work and looking to sort out the team," said Allegri.

Nicolo Barella gave Inter the lead in the sixth minute with a long-range effort which would soon be forgotten amid the controversy to come. His thumping strike came after a blistering start from Inter which threatened to blow Juve away, the Italy midfielder collecting after a corner was cleared, cutting inside and unleashing a curling effort which Mattia Perin didn't even bother trying to stop.

### Penalty drama

However from then on Juve were the better team and should have gone in at the break at least level, if not ahead. Paulo Dybala was the first to offer signs of life in the 23rd minute when his low shot was comfortably saved. Moments later the Argentine fed Vlahovic whose powerful, angled drive needed smart reactions from Samir Handanovic to be kept out.

Matthijs de Ligt had a header well saved on he half-hour mark and it looked for all the world that Dybala would bag a deserved leveller when the subsequent cor-

ner fell kindly to him, but he sliced his first-time strike wide. Juve soon turned the match on its head though, with Sandro levelling the scores five minutes after the break when his shot slipped through Handanovic's hands as Alvaro Morata tried to deflect the ball.

The Juve fans were jumping and their end of the ground exploded with joy seconds later, Vlahovic ending a four-match dry spell in front of goal after being sent flying through on goal by Dybala. The Serbia forward sent Danilo D'Ambrosio packing and although his first effort was kept out, the 22-year-old made no mistake on the rebound. Juve looked to have the game under control until referee Valeri handed Inter an ill-deserved lifeline.

Calhanoglu rifled home from the spot and an already fired-up Juve team then lost control when De Ligt was ruled after a VAR check to have chopped down Stefan de Vrij. Perisic stepped up to smashed in the penalty in the 99th minute and once the Croat's decisive second flew in from distance three minutes later there was chaos, with Allegri sent off and players and officials tussling on the sidelines. However Juve couldn't turn that anger into a fightback and Inter took the honors to set up a potential league and cup double with the Serie A season heading to its climax. —AFP

## Rugby opens new frontier by picking US as World Cup hosts

LONDON: The Rugby World Cup will be staged in the United States for the first time in 2031 after the game's governing body named the host nations for five men's and women's tournaments. Australia will hold the men's World Cup in 2027 with the women's tournaments going to England (2025), Australia (2029) and the United States (2033). By taking the showpiece to North America, officials hope to grow the sport in a non-traditional rugby nation. "Today, we have approved three exceptional Rugby World Cup host nations - England, Australia and USA - providing unprecedented certainty and an unparalleled opportunity to accelerate the growth and impact of rugby globally," said World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont. "It is great for rugby, for fans and for the host nations."

USA Rugby chief executive Ross Young said: "We look forward to partnering with World Rugby in the years ahead to ensure that our preparations for these tournaments and the events themselves are a paradigm-shifting catalyst for the growth of our sport, not only here in the United States but around the world."

World Rugby did not spring any surprises with their announcements on Thursday. Officials were determined to avoid a repeat of the situation when South Africa was chosen as the preferred venue for the 2023 World Cup by an independent assessment panel only to lose out in a subsequent vote to France.

### US market

By taking the event to the United States, rugby chiefs hope to make a dent in a lucrative market dominated by homegrown sports such as American football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey. The hope is that by 2031 the Eagles - as the US men's team are known - might be competitive enough to match the achievement of 2019 hosts Japan, another emerging rugby union nation.

Japan reached the last eight of their home World Cup three years ago in a tournament won by South Africa. The Eagles, however, have yet to qualify for next year's World Cup in France, with the team facing Chile in a two-legged qualifier in July. In order to help boost the competitiveness of teams such as the United States, officials are trying to restructure the existing July and November international windows to ensure they have more meaningful games between World Cups - a thorny issue since the sport turned professional in 1995.

Australia last staged the World Cup in 2003 when the Wallabies were beaten in the final by England. Eddie Jones, the then Australia coach, is now in charge of England. "We're beyond thrilled to be welcoming not one, but two Rugby World Cups to our shores," said Rugby Australia chairman Hamish McLennan. "It's a gamechanger for rugby in this country, a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalize and secure the future of the sport here and see the game we all love grow and thrive for years to come." —AFP



AMSTERDAM: Ajax players celebrate after winning the national championship at the end of the Dutch Eredivisie match against Heerenveen at the Johan Cruyff Arena on May 11, 2022. —AFP

## Ajax seal 36th Dutch title

AMSTERDAM: Ajax secured a second straight Dutch Eredivisie title on Wednesday with a 5-0 thrashing of Heerenveen at the Amsterdam Arena. The club's 36th league crown is the third in charge for outgoing coach Erik ten Hag, who will end his five-year stint at the helm at the end of the season to become Manchester United manager.

Ajax have a four-point lead over second-placed PSV Eindhoven, who beat Nijmegen 3-2, with one match remaining. PSV missed the chance to cut the gap to two points last weekend when they conceded two late goals in a 2-2 draw at Feyenoord.

On Wednesday, Nicolas Tagliafico and Steven Berghuis calmed any home nerves by giving Ajax a two-goal lead. Sebastian Haller, the league's top-scorer, netted a penalty before half-time to score his 34th goal in all competitions this season. Brian Brobbey and Edson Alvarez added further gloss to the scoreline late on as Ten Hag's final home game ended in celebration. —AFP

## Malaysia to host 2027 SEA Games, Singapore in 2029

HANOI: Malaysia will host the 2027 SEA Games and Singapore the 2029 edition, the two countries said on Thursday, hours ahead of the opening ceremony of the COVID-delayed 2021 showpiece in Vietnam. Olympic Council of Malaysia president Norza Zakaria said in a statement that a meeting at a Hanoi hotel saw the SEA Games Federation "unanimously" award his country the event for the seventh time.

Singapore's Olympic Council said on Facebook that the city-state will hold the biennial Games for a fifth time. "We are pleased to host the prestigious regional sporting event in Singapore again," council president Tan Chuan-Jin said in the social media post. The 2021 Games in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi

## Celtic win 52nd Scottish title

GLASGOW: Celtic secured a 52nd Scottish league title on Wednesday despite being held 1-1 by Dundee United. Ange Postecoglou's men only needed a point to win a 10th league title in 11 years as they also booked their place in next season's Champions League group stage. The Hoops realistically already had the title sewn up as they began the evening with a six-point lead over Rangers and a 20-goal superior goal difference with two games remaining.

Postecoglou was plucked from Yokohama Marinos



HANOI: Performers take part in the opening ceremony of the 31st Southeast Asian Games at the My Dinh National Stadium on May 12, 2022. —AFP

were delayed six months because of COVID and officially opened later Thursday. The 2023 SEA Games are scheduled to be held in Cambodia and 2025 will be in the Thai capital Bangkok. —AFP

when Eddie Howe turned his back on Celtic's offer a year ago. The Australian has overseen a remarkable turnaround between the Glasgow giants, as Celtic finished a distant 25 points behind Rangers last season. After losing three of their first six games, Celtic are now unbeaten in 31 in the league. But they dropped points for just the third time in 2022 at Tannadice.

Georgios Giakoumakis' towering header early in the second half put the visitors on course for another three points. But on-loan Manchester United midfielder Dylan Levitt's sensational strike earned United a crucial point in their battle for European football. Daizen Maeda missed a glorious chance to win the title in style in stoppage time, but a draw was enough to spark celebrations among the travelling support. —AFP