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**8** Wheat prices hit record after India export ban



**16** World Cup trophy displayed in Kuwait for the first time



# Deputy Amir hails efforts of Qatar to organize World Cup

## Sheikh Mishal receives FIFA World Cup delegation



KUWAIT: HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Hamad Al-Bahar, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yusuf Al-Sabah, Gilberto Silva, Khalid Al-Muzaire and other officials, who displayed the World Cup original trophy on May 16, 2022. — KUNA

KUWAIT: HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Monday a FIFA delegation as part of a tour of GCC countries ahead of the 2022 Qatar World Cup. HH

Sheikh Mishal praised the tireless efforts made by Qatar to organize this world championship, expressing his pride in the unprecedented capabilities offered by the sisterly state, wishing them success in organizing such a

global tournament.

The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Director of

HH the Amir's Office Ahmad Al-Fahad, Director of HH the Crown Prince's Office Lt Gen Mohammed Al-Theyab and the Foreign Affairs Undersecretary of HH the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Essa. — KUNA

## Saudi eyes 13m bpd oil capacity

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia expects to ramp up its daily oil production capacity by more than one million barrels to exceed 13 million barrels by early 2027, the kingdom's energy minister announced Monday. "Most likely it will be 13.2 to 13.4 (million barrels per day, bpd), but that would be (reached) at the end of 2026, beginning 2027," Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told an energy confer-

ence in Bahrain. Production at that level would be maintained "if the market allows it", he said.

Energy giant Saudi Aramco announced in March 2020 it had been directed by the energy ministry to increase its maximum sustainable capacity from 12 million to 13 million bpd. No timeline was given then for the new target. Monday's announcement came one day after Saudi energy giant Aramco posted an 82-percent jump in first quarter profits, buoyed by a global surge in oil prices stemming from the Ukraine war.

Continued on Page 6

## King Salman leaves hospital

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's King Salman has left the hospital one week after being admitted for tests, including a colonoscopy, state media reported. Video broadcast by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) late Sunday showed the monarch walking out of King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Jeddah surrounded by officials, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, before being driven away. He left "after conducting medical examinations and successfully completing the treatment plan and recovery period," the SPA said on Twitter. — AFP



JEDDAH: Handout photo provided on May 16, 2022 shows Saudi King Salman leaving a hospital. — AFP

## Massive dust storm engulfs Kuwait, Iraq

KUWAIT: Flights to and from Kuwait International Airport were temporarily halted on Monday due to a dust storm that reduced visibility throughout Kuwait. Flights have been affected with the current weather conditions, said Imad Al-Jalawi, Deputy Director General for Air Navigation Services at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. The flight schedule will be reviewed and regular flights will resume once visibility improves, Jalawi added. He added that Kuwait is currently

affected with low visibility conditions along with strong winds reaching more than 50 km/h.

Meteorologist Jamal Ibrahim said the sandstorm that engulfed Kuwait will cover most of the country. Ibrahim said conditions could start improving by Tuesday evening, while temperatures could reach 43 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, another sandstorm that descended Monday on Iraq sent at least 2,000 people to hospital with breathing problems and led to the closure of airports, schools and public offices across the country. It is the eighth dust storm since mid-April to hit Iraq, which has been battered by soil degradation, intense droughts and low rainfall linked to climate change.

The last one earlier this month led to the death of one person while 5,000 oth-

ers had to be hospitalized for respiratory problems. On Monday a thick cloud of dust enveloped the capital Baghdad in an orange glow and blanketed many other cities including the Shiite shrine city of Najaf to the south, and Sulaimaniyah, in the northern Kurdish autonomous region, AFP correspondents said.

Yellow and orange sand covered building roofs, cars and even crept into homes. Authorities in seven of Iraq's 18 provinces, including Baghdad, ordered government offices to shut. But health facilities remained open to assist those most at risk, including the elderly and people suffering from chronic respiratory diseases and heart ailments.

By midday at least 2,000 people were admitted to hospitals across Iraq in need

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive amid a heavy sandstorm on May 16, 2022. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Local

# Course to improve quality of environmental news in Kuwait

## Enhancing press role in finding solutions for environmental issues



KUWAIT: A general view of participants attending the course. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Reem Al-Wuqayyan (left) and Fatima Al-Azmi from Kuwait Journalists Association attend the course.

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The Environment Public Authority launched on Monday a basic course in environmental media in cooperation with Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA). The four-day course will include various media topics, such as preparing environmental news reports and environment investigation, in addition to how to write an environmental story.

Abdullah Al-Zaidan, EPA Deputy Director-General of Technical Affairs, said the course aims to raise the level of efficiency of the cadres in public relations, government agencies and civil society institutions by qualifying media professionals specialized in the environmental field, which is one of the most important issues locally and internationally. "The media's role is important in order to convey information and find appropriate solutions for environmental issues. Also, they have an important role in creating environmental awareness among people," Zaidan said.

### First of its kind

KJA Trustee Adnan Al-Rashed noted this is the first cooperation of its kind regarding training media to specialize in environmental issues. "We consider environmental media as one of the types of journalistic work. Media in Kuwait should be specialized, especially in the environment field. Specialization is weak in our local media - we cover environmental issues from time to time but we normally do not pay attention to it," he said.



Suhair Jaradat, Representative of Jadal Media Training Center speaks during the training course.



Kuwait Journalists Association Trustee Adnan Al-Rashed addresses the attendees.



KJA Trustee Adnan Al-Rashed presents a memento to Representative of Jadal Media Training Center Suhair Jaradat.

"The environment media should guide human behavior and develop awareness among people. It is the responsibility of the government sector, private sector and civil society to seek specialization, especially in environmental media. We hope to intensify efforts and achieve this within a short period," Rashed said.

### Neglected news

Suhair Jaradat, Representative of Jadal Media Training Center, said environmental news is the most neglected news, and there is no coverage because of its difficult terms and concepts. Also, some readers do not prefer reading such news, along with a lack of specialized journalists in this field. "However, those concerned from the environmental sector should

facilitate alternative terms and educate professional journalists to present environmental issues simply to readers," she pointed out.

Mohammed Al-Tamimi, Representative of the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment, said: "There is no doubt that the issue of environment has played a major role in economic and political systems around the world. Therefore, the media must be concerned with the protection of the environment, and this is based on the reality of the media's ability to reach different segments of the society." He affirmed that the growing societal, economic and political role played by environmental institutions makes it important to find specialized environmental media within various media, including visual, audio and print.

### News in brief

#### Amendment to improve women's election chances

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem announced that he plans to submit an amendment to the elections law that helps improve women's chances of being elected to parliament. Ghanem plans to announce details of his draft law in a press conference soon, he said in an event marking the Kuwaiti Women's Day at Kuwait University on Monday.

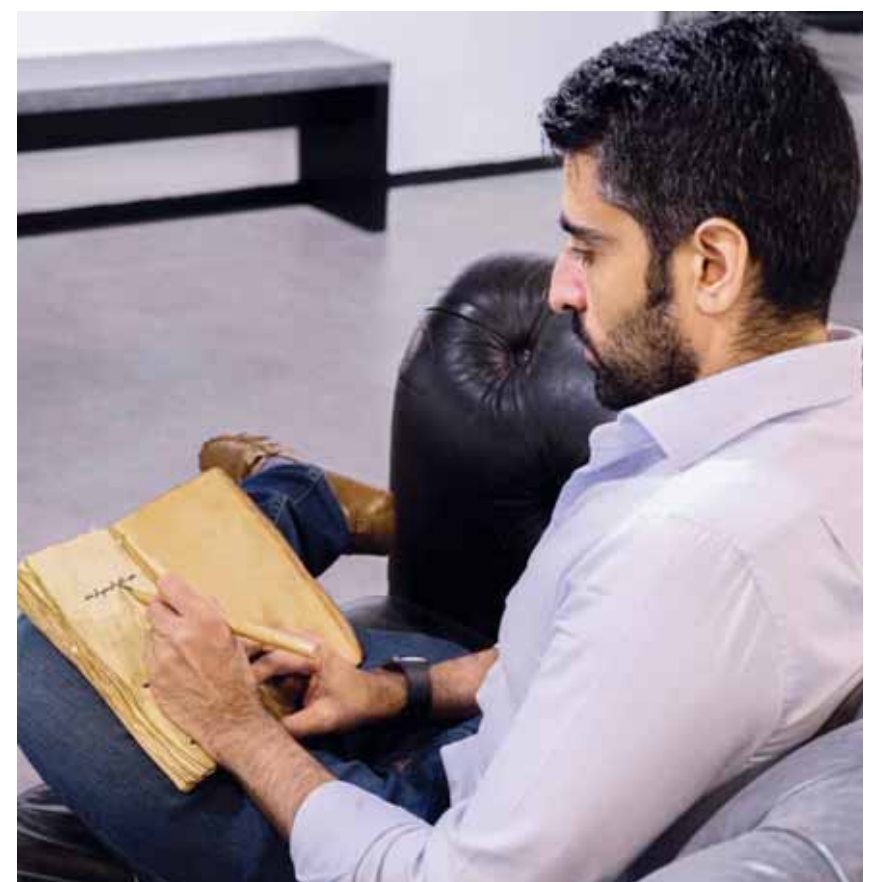
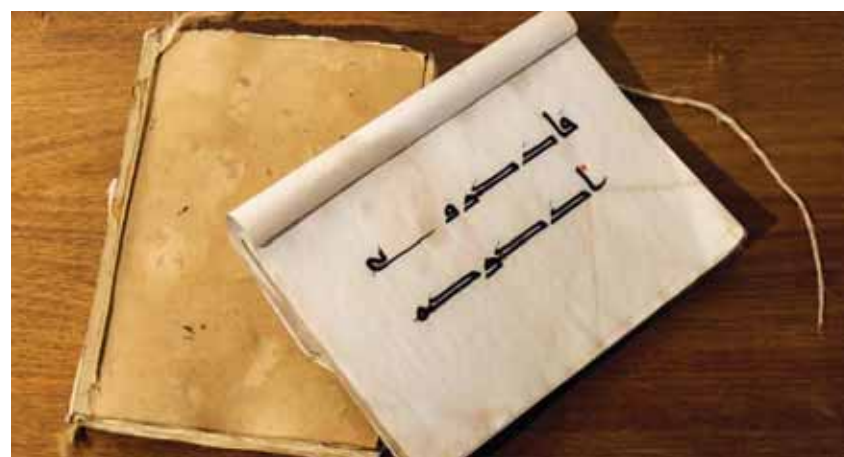
#### Arab journalists to take action

**CAIRO:** The Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ) intends to participate in an investigation alongside other pan-Arab unions into the details of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh's killing by Zionist entity soldiers. The FAJ will present a report documenting the events leading up to the slaying to the Arab Lawyers Union, Arab Writers Union and Arab Organization for Human Rights. Together, these bodies will form a joint committee which will administer the probe. Meanwhile, the FAJ has come out to condemn Facebook after the social media network removed all videos on its platforms depicting the event and the subsequent Zionist police's attack by baton on mourners at her funeral procession. The move runs counter to humanitarian principles, professionalism, ethics and human values, read an FAJ statement, demanding Facebook to repost the videos and stop siding with the killers.

#### Kuwait, Morocco discuss air transport

**RABAT:** President of Kuwait's Civil Aviation Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah explored on Monday with Moroccan Minister of Transport and Logistics Mohammad AbdJaleel, in Rabat, ways to enhance the bilateral relations in the civil aviation sector and air transport. Sheikh Abdullah expressed his affirmation regarding the strength of the relation between the two countries and explored topics of common interests concerning aviation and air transport. Meanwhile, AbdJaleel praised the relation between Kuwait and Morocco, adding that both sides agreed to open direct air transport between the two countries which will contribute to economic, tourism and humanitarian exchange.

## Kuwaiti calligrapher maintains legacy of Kufic script via workshops, exhibits



**KUWAIT:** To maintain the legacy and history of Arabic calligraphy, Kuwaiti artist Abdulaziz Al-Awadhi continues his mission to provide intricate

details and knowledge of the Arabic Kufic script via numerous workshops and exhibits. The Kufic script is known for its historical significance to

the language and was used in the early years of Islam to record the early copies of the Holy Quran. —KUNA



Local

# Dust storm blinds Kuwait

Flights via Kuwait Airport halted, Amir Cup final postponed



KUWAIT: Traffic in Kuwait affected by a heavy dust storm that hit the country on Monday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ahmad Jabr

**KUWAIT:** A massive dust storm coming from Iraq affected large areas of Kuwait on Monday, dropping visibility to less than 1,000 km and suspending flights from and to the country.

Kuwait Meteorological Center said the dust storm was accompanied with strong winds exceeding 50 km/h in speed, while sea waves would reach as high as six feet. The bad weather conditions, described as "severe" in the meteorological center's weather warning, was set to last through the early hours of Tuesday morning before the dust storm would start to subside.

Flights to and from Kuwait International Airport

were temporarily halted on Monday due to the dust storm. Imad Al-Jalawi, Deputy Director General for Air Navigation Services at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, said flights would be rescheduled and regular aviation would resume once visibility improved.

The Interior Ministry meanwhile issued a warning to motorists to avoid driving unless necessary and take extreme caution

while on the road as visibility dropped to as low as 100 meters especially in open areas. The health ministry also warned people with breathing difficulties to exert extra caution.

The Amir Cup Final between Kazma and Salmiya, originally scheduled for Monday, was also postponed for next week due to the bad weather conditions. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah was scheduled to attend the high-profile match at Sheikh Jaber International Stadium.

Meteorologist Jamal Ibrahim described the dust storm as strong and would cover "most of the State of Kuwait." He said the weather condition may start improving by Tuesday evening while temperature may reach 43 degrees Celsius.

Kuwait has been hit by frequent dust storms this year well ahead of their usual season. Most of the dust is carried from Iraq to Kuwait by northwesterly winds brought by the Indian monsoon depression affecting the region. Another massive dust storm hit Iraq yesterday; the eighth since mid-April. Iraq has been battered by soil degradation, intense droughts and low rainfall linked to climate change.



## Northwesterly winds carry dust from Iraq

## Health Ministry launches obesity risks awareness campaign

**KUWAIT:** The Central Administration for Primary Health Care at Kuwait's Health Ministry organized a campaign to bring awareness about obesity risks. The event came amid a rise in obesity rates around the world, the administration's Director Dr Dina Al-Dhubaib said. The campaign continues for five weeks in 25 primary care centers where body mass

index, blood sugar level and the hemoglobin A1C tests will be carried out, she said. "The campaign aims at spreading awareness about the risks of obesity and means of preventing it," she said. The function is held in cooperation with the diabetics care committee for combating non infectious diseases and early cancer detection program.



## Municipal vote arrangements in full swing

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior said on Monday it has already geared up for the municipal elections due next Saturday, with 38 rivals vying for the votes of 438,283 people in eight precincts. The Ministry's Undersecretary Major General Anwar Al-Barjas, who is in charge of the municipal elections, said all services and facilities will be at the disposal of all candidates and voters in order to ensure a smooth electoral process. In a press statement, he

voiced much thanks and appreciation to the ministry's personnel for their great efforts in view of security, traffic and organizing measures ahead of the vote. However, called on them to remain prepared until the race is over and to take immediate and decisive action against anything that could negatively affect the election. There will be no vote in both seventh and 10th constituencies where the only two candidates have already won uncontested, the ministry's legal affairs head said in a statement. There are 17,820 voters in the first constituency, 26,951 in the second constituency, 33,785 in the third, 83,018 in the fourth, 39,588 in the fifth, 60,150 in the sixth, 94,081 in the eighth and finally 82,890 in the ninth, he elaborated. The ministry's official warned that voters should handpick only one candidate or the ballot would be invalid. —KUNA

## Interior Ministry launches visual sessions for prisoners



**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Interior announced on Monday launching the visual sessions' system at correction facilities at prisons. The advanced service has been provided in cooperation with information technology and communication sector at the ministry and the Ministry of Justice.

The system has been set up upon instructions by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior (retired General) Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-

Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Ministry's Undersecretary Major General Anwar Al-Barjas, matching latest international technology techniques, the public relations and information department at the ministry added in a press release. This new system constitutes a major leap, resembling international technologies operating at prisons, it added. A number of senior ministry's officials witnessed its inauguration. —KUNA

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Seham Al-Husaini

## Deliveroo launches 2022 restaurant awards for the first time in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Deliveroo Kuwait, the leading food-delivery company, has announced it is launching Deliveroo's annual Restaurant Awards for the first time in Kuwait, revealing a list of many amazing local restaurants that have been long-listed across 19 award categories.

The awards, which Deliveroo (global) first launched in 2019, were created to celebrate the best restaurants around. As of today, the Kuwaiti public can vote for their favorite local restaurants and help crown 19 restaurants as winners.

Deliveroo has identified 19 award categories to showcase the best food delivery available to customers on the platform including Best Burger, Best Asian, Best Pizza, Best Middle Eastern, Best Fried Chicken, Best Dessert, Best Italian, Best Plant Based, Most Loved Chain, Best Newcomer on Deliveroo, Best Coffee, Best Fine Dining, Best Healthy Restaurant, Best Family Restaurant, Best Value Eats, Best Delivery Only Brand, Best Japanese, Best Poke, and Restaurant of The Year. For The Restaurant of the Year Award, customers will be able to vote for their favorite restaurants meaning any brand on the platform has a chance to win, no matter how big or small.

After a week from the launch, Deliveroo Kuwait will reveal the top restaurants that have been shortlisted in each category, as voted for by customers. Voting will re-open again for one final chance to vote for the winners of each category, which will be announced online on 9 June during the virtual Deliveroo Kuwait Restaurant Awards 2022 held on Deliveroo's Instagram and Twitter channels.

Seham Al-Husaini, general manager at Deliveroo Kuwait, said: "In keeping with an annual and beloved global Deliveroo tradition, we are incredibly excited to be launching Deliveroo's annual Restaurant Awards for the first time in Kuwait! It's no secret that Kuwait has some of the best flavors and most unique restaurant concepts in the region, and we can't wait for our restaurant, and coffee, partners to get the recognition and accolades they deserve."

The food delivery company is encouraging restaurants, and customers to vote and tune in to see who will take home the 19 trophies, including the coveted "Restaurant of the Year" Award. The Restaurant Awards have become one of Deliveroo's most anticipated annual global events, and for the first time in Kuwait, customers are going to be able to take part and vote for their favorite local restaurants and more. The first round of voting is open from 12 May. The shortlist will be revealed on 24 May.

### Voting Timeline:

- 12th May - Longlist goes live and voting opens for the public
- 20th May - Voting closes temporarily
- 24th May - Shortlist revealed and voting re-opens
- 31st May - Voting closes
- 9th June - Restaurant Awards takes place on Deliveroo's Instagram channel (@Deliveroo\_kw) and all winners revealed

### Full list of 2022 categories below:

- 1 Best Burger
- 2 Best Asian
- 3 Best Pizza
- 4 Best Middle Eastern
- 5 Best Fried Chicken
- 6 Restaurant of the Year
- 7 Best Dessert Only
- 8 Best Italian
- 9 Best Plant Based
- 10 Most Loved Chain
- 11 Best Newcomer on Deliveroo
- 12 Best Coffee
- 13 Best Fine Dining
- 14 Best Healthy
- 15 Best Family
- 16 Best Value Eats
- 17 Best Delivery Only
- 18 Best Japanese
- 19 Best Poke

# Saudi Arabia, Kuwait want to discuss Durra gas field with Iran

## We cannot be derailed for more than 22 years: Saudi energy minister

MANAMA: Saudi Arabia has publicly encouraged Iran to come to the negotiating table on the Durra gas field, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait want to discuss the Durra field with them because resources there are of common interest between both countries, he added. "Kuwait and Saudi Arabia need gas... we cannot be derailed for more than 22 years," he said during an energy conference in Bahrain Monday.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait invited Iran in April to hold negotiations to determine the eastern limit of the joint offshore area and reaffirmed their right to develop the gas field located within it. "We are proceeding with that field, we have made a joint public statement encouraging Iran to come to the negotiation table if they claim they have a piece of that [field] and it remains a claim," Prince Abdulaziz said, adding Saudi Arabia and Kuwait wanted to work together in any discussions as they had a common interest in the resources. Iran says it has a stake in the field and opposes the Saudi-Kuwaiti agreement.

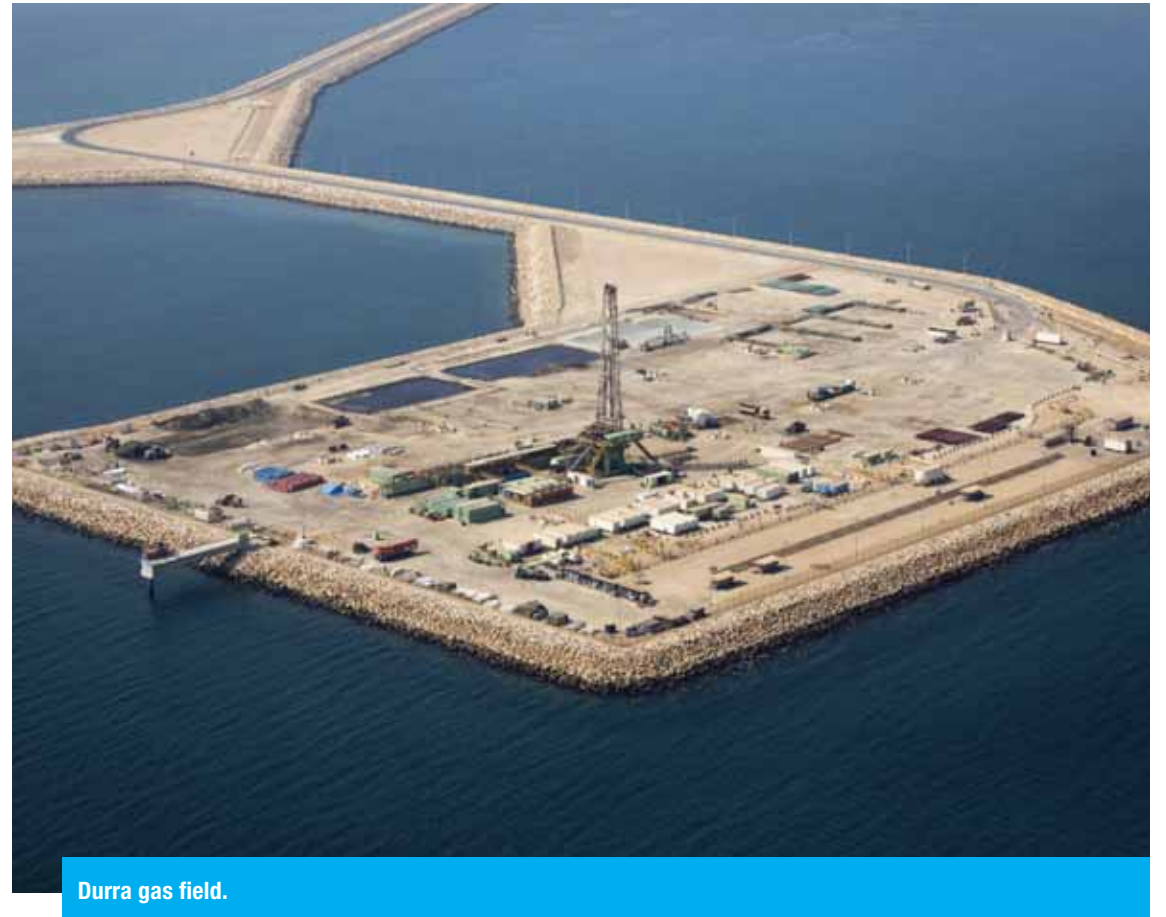
On a US bill, dubbed NOPEC, that could open members of OPEC and its partners to antitrust lawsuits for orchestrating supply cuts that raise global crude prices, Prince Abdulaziz questioned whether it would also apply to consuming nations which have released crude from strategic reserves in an attempt to manage the market.

"It is not only OPEC that is trying to manage the market, it is also the consumers...so I don't know about this NOPEC if it is going to be inclusive of all or just those who are producing?" he told the conference. Iraq's oil minister Ihsan Abdul-Jabbar told reporters at the same conference OPEC had discussed the bill at the group's regular meetings. "We are in internal discussions about that so for now we have no response," he said.

### Crude price

The price of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' basket of crudes climbed \$3.7 to \$112.37 per barrel on Friday against \$109.30 pb Thursday, OPEC's bulletin said on Monday. Average monthly rate of the crudes' basket in April reached \$105.54 pb and \$113.48 pb in March, thus the basket average price, since start of the current year until the end of last week, was at \$110.96 a barrel. The bulletin said annual price of the crudes' basket, last year, reached \$69.89 pb.

The oil organization, in its latest report, said



Durra gas field.

oil prices, including OPEC's crudes, rose by \$20 pb for the third month in a row, last March,



### OPEC crudes basket rises to \$112.37 pb

against backdrop of mounting geopolitical jitters, particularly in East Europe. Forward oil contracts have been sharply unsteady due to uncertain short-term forecast of supply and demand. As to the reference OPEC's basket rate, it increased by \$19.53-20.8 percent, settling at

\$113.48 pb. The OPEC report called for continuing vigilance due to negative ripples emanating from geopolitical tension, the coronavirus, soaring inflation, emerging issues in the importing chains, snowballing sovereign debts in many countries, monetary tightening policies by central banks namely in the US, the UK, Japan and the Euro zone member states.

Oil ministers of the OPEC+ alliance agreed during their 28th ministerial meeting, held on May 5, on pursuing supplies by 432,000 a day in the coming June. They affirmed, in a statement released in the end of the meeting, that the market factors, namely supply and demand, have been balanced and sound and that price fluctuations of prices are caused by the geopolitical events. The OPEC+ oil producers had resumed two thirds of the crude output following decline during first phases of the coronavirus crisis. Meanwhile, OPEC and its partners forecast supply glut. —Agencies

## Clean fuel project enhances Kuwait's oil refining capabilities: Rushood

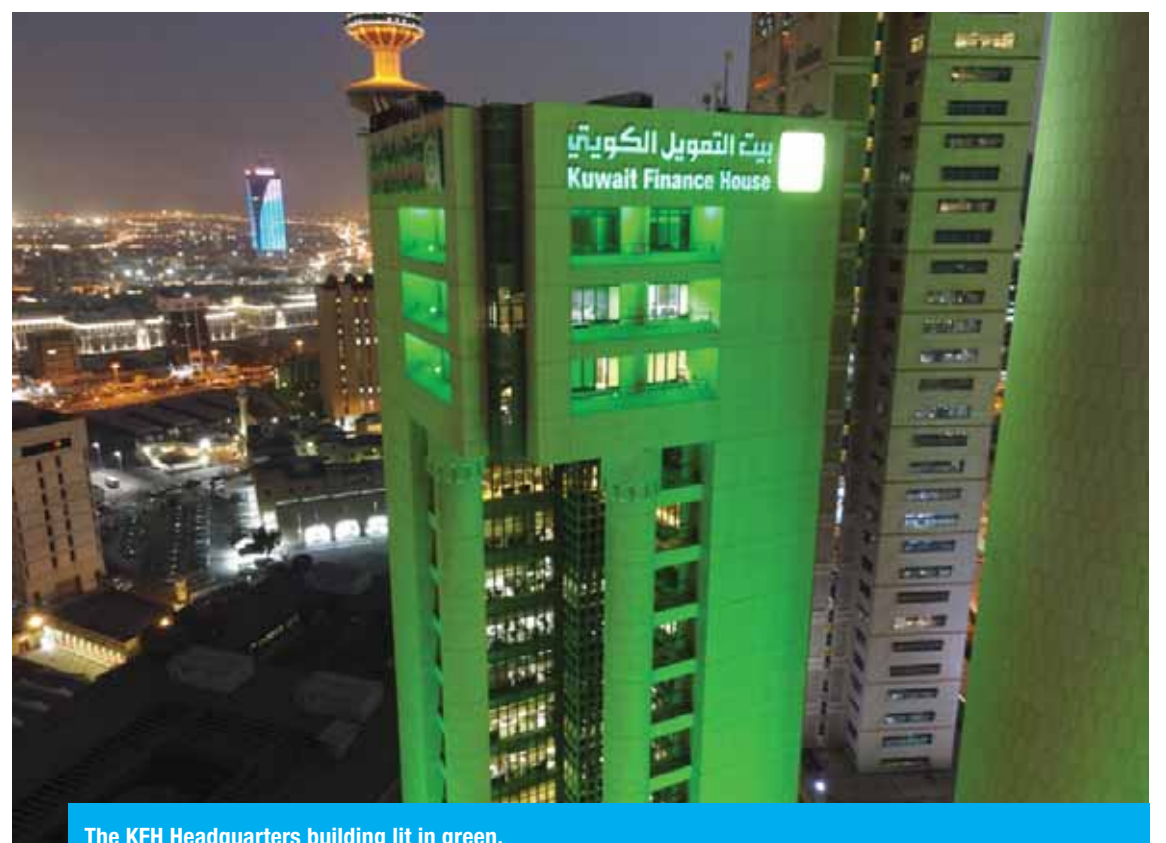
KUWAIT: Acting Group CEO at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Abdulwahab Essa Al-Rushood affirmed that KFH celebration of KNPC clean fuel project, participation in the company's celebrations of the full operation of the project, illuminating the Headquarters facade in green color and posting it in the bank's social media channels reflect KFH full

support to projects and products mitigating carbon emissions and environmental pollutions through cleaner oil products which are compatible with modern global criteria. This process is compatible with KFH strategy to preserve Kuwait's environment and achieve low carbon economy.

Rushood said in a press release that KFH has participated in the finance of the clean fuel project which is considered as the largest trade finance deal amounting KD 1.2 billion. KFH led the Islamic tier amounting KD 490 million with a share amounting KD 275 million. Accordingly, KFH has affirmed its appreciation of the project which is considered as a quantum leap in the history of oil refining in Kuwait. The project enables the manufacturing of environment friendly petroleum products and adds new technology to Kuwait's industry to increase its competitive and export qualities global wise and enhance its global position in oil refining industry which stands as the main source of income for the state. Also, the project helps in environment protection which has become one of the main targets of organizations and countries.

Rushood indicated that the clean fuel project develops Kuwait's refineries and achieves the highest return investment. Refining projects contribute to the increase in transformational capabilities, efficient usage of energy, production of latest oil products according to global environmental requirements, industry nationalization, creation of national human resources which can work and achieve production according to new standards and provision of job opportunities for qualified Kuwaiti youth.

Rushood reiterated KFH's deep commitment to enhance social, economic, and environmental sustainability. KFH adopts several related programs considering its field of business and social role. KFH aims to spread environmental awareness among its employees, customers, and the regions where it operates and ensures that the projects in which it participates financially are environment



The KFH Headquarters building lit in green.

- KFH Participated in project's financing
- KFH building lit in green to celebrate operation
- Firm, multi-shaped commitment to preserve environment

friendly projects. KFH has ensured that all its branches, locations and service centers are compliant with environment calibers. KFH owns KFH Auto showroom which is the largest and most modern auto showroom in the region. The showroom is environment friendly and complies with sustainability standards.

He said that KFH has recently released the sustainability report as part of the group's integrated sustainability strategy. He emphasized that this practice is compatible with environment, social and corporate governance standards as well as the sustainability development goals in KFH activities and operations on both operational and business continuity levels. This practice would achieve an added value to stakeholders, customers, partners and interested persons.

Environment wise, KFH has launched the "KFH is Green" initiative which is considered as the umbrella for all environment related initiatives. Also, it has supported the launch of the first Carbon Offset platform in Kuwait to mitigate carbon emissions as part of the sustainability and the strategic partnership with the Sedra Initiative and the voluntary green dream team. The initial stage of the project comprises the plantation of 500 trees plus 3 years care.

KFH signed strategic partnerships with several parties e.g., Public Authority for Agricultural and Fishery Affairs to support its efforts in the plantation and greening campaign of Kuwait areas, landscaping of capital streets and areas and organized beach cleaning campaigns in cooperation with the Public Authority for Environment.





Sri Lanka's PM wins support for 'economic war cabinet'

## Somalia's foreign partners hail peaceful election of new president

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BATROUN, Lebanon: Supporters of the Lebanese Forces party celebrate in the Lebanon's northern coastal city of Batroun as they await results after the end of voting in the parliamentary elections on May 15, 2022. — AFP

# Lebanon vote weakens Hezbollah bloc

## Polling booths lacked electricity, voters use smartphone lights to cast their ballots

BEIRUT: An election in crisis-hit Lebanon appears to have dealt a setback to the biggest bloc, led by the Iran-backed Shiite Muslim Hezbollah party, and boosted reformists, provisional results showed Monday. Turnout was low in the general election Sunday, the first since the Mediterranean country was plunged into a deep economic crisis that has stoked popular fury with the hereditary and graft-tainted ruling class.

Many polling booths lacked electricity, forcing voters to use their smartphone lights to cast their ballots, in a reflection of Lebanon's most painful crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Official results later Monday will show whether Hezbollah, a political and military movement seen as a state within a state, and its allies can keep an actionable majority in Lebanon's 128-seat parliament.

Hezbollah, considered a "terrorist" organisation by many Western countries, retained all its seats, but its Christian allies, President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), suffered losses. The Lebanese Forces (LF) of former warlord Samir Geagea, which has strong ties with Saudi Arabia, won several new seats and should emerge as the largest Christian party.

New opposition candidates also booked some gains, pushing forward the agenda of a cross-sectarian protest movement that erupted in late 2019 against a

ruling elite widely seen as inept and corrupt.

Whatever the final election outcome, observers expect months of haggling over the next government line-up, and more political paralysis at a time Lebanon needs an IMF bailout. Election turnout was just 41 per cent-eight points lower than in 2018 — suggesting that the traditional sectarian parties that have shared power like a cartel for three decades failed to mobilise their supporters. "Abstention is partly linked to frustration with the political class and the feeling that the economic situation will not change," said Lebanese analyst Karim Bitar.

### 'Build a country'

Turnout was particularly low in Sunni Muslim areas, after former premier Saad Hariri triggered a de facto boycott in his community by pulling out of the elections. Some of the politicians most reviled by the reform camp suffered stinging losses, including several MPs who had traditionally represented the interests of neighbour and former occupying force Syria.

New opposition parties produced a strong showing in various parts of the country. While the reformists struggled to unite ahead of the vote, they could end up holding enough seats to have an unprecedented impact on the country's political game.

A presence of 10 or more lawmakers could disrupt the horsetrading between political barons that has characterised Lebanese politics for decades and leave reformists in a kingmaking position. Analyst Ziad Majed said that the economic context could play in favour of reformists who will for the first be pushing from within parliament, not just as outsiders.



### Reformists book gains

"This will create political and popular pressure for reformists and forces of change to cooperate," he said. Vote Jad Abdel Karim, 32, who backed opposition candidates, said "even if hopes of success are small, we voted to show them that they are not alone in the country. "We want to build a country even if it will take time."

### Presidential election

The election was held two years after Lebanon defaulted on its debt and as the currency has lost 95 percent of its value. The other major cataclysm suffered by Lebanon was the August 2020 Beirut port explosion that killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and devastated swathes of the city.

Political heavyweights across the party spectrum have obstructed any meaningful investigation into the blast. Two of the main suspects over the disaster, which is widely blamed on state negligence and corruption, even looked sure to have secured re-election in Sunday's polls. Several voting irregularities were reported, as well as scuffles and cases of voter intimidation.

The outcome of the vote could have an impact on a presidential election due later this year. President Aoun, 88, has long been expected to be succeeded by his son-in-law, FPM leader Gebran Bassil-but Bassil's bid suffered a massive blow with the surge of the Lebanese Forces. Marc Saad, an LF spokesman, voiced optimism about the coming electoral battle for the head of state. "We can say that the Lebanese people have punished the governing parties and have aligned with us, expressing their will for a new start in governance," he said. — AFP



LAGUNA WOODS, United States: Police investigate after a shooting inside Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California, on May 15, 2022. One person was dead and four people were "critically" injured in a shooting at a church near Los Angeles, law enforcement said Sunday. — AFP

## One dead, four hurt in California church shooting

LAGUNA WOODS, United States: One person was dead and four others in critical condition after a shooting at a church near Los Angeles, law enforcement said Sunday, just one day after a gunman killed 10 people at a grocery store in New York state.

Shortly before 1.30 pm (2030 GMT), parishioners were attending a banquet following a morning service at Geneva Presbyterian Church when the gunman began his rampage, authorities said. There were 30 to 40 people inside the building in Laguna Woods, about 45 miles (70 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles.

The churchgoers detained the shooter and "hogtied his legs with an extension cord and confiscated at least two weapons" before officers arrived at the scene to apprehend and arrest him, Orange County Undersheriff Jeff Hallock told a press conference.

"That group of churchgoers displayed what we believe is exceptional heroism, and bravery," Hallock said. "They undoubtedly prevented additional injuries and fatalities." "One person is confirmed deceased at the scene," Hallock said. "Four others are critical and one other victim sustained minor injuries." The victims were all of Taiwanese descent, Taipei's foreign ministry said, adding that it had "asked our representative office to express our most sincere and deepest condolences to those killed or injured in the shooting and their families." According to the sheriff's department, the victims were aged between 66 and 92. — AFP

## Sweden enters 'new era' with NATO bid

STOCKHOLM, Sweden: Sweden on Monday officially announced it will apply for NATO membership as a deterrent against Russian aggression, entering a "new era" as it reverses two centuries of military non-alignment. "The government has decided to inform NATO that Sweden wants to become a member of the alliance," Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told reporters a day after neighbouring Finland made a similar announcement.

"We are leaving one era and beginning another," Andersson said of the dramatic turnaround of her country's position less than three months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Sweden's NATO ambassador would "shortly" inform NATO, she said. Sweden and Finland have both expressed a desire to act in lockstep on NATO membership. They are expected to submit their applications jointly this week. Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday warned that NATO's expansion may trigger a response from Moscow.

The expansion poses "no direct threat for us... but the expansion of military infrastructure to these territories will certainly provoke our response," Putin said during a televised summit meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, a Moscow-led military alliance. Andersson acknowledged Sweden would be "vulnerable" in the interim period before its application is ratified. "We can't exclude that Sweden will be subjected for example to disinformation and attempts to scare and divide us", she said.

However, Stockholm has received security assurances from several key partners, including the United States, Britain, Germany, France and the Nordic countries, she added. She expected "it shouldn't take more than a year" for the alliance's 30 members to unanimously ratify Sweden's membership application.

### Soaring support

Sweden's announcement was expected after Andersson's Social Democratic party on Sunday backed membership, in a dramatic U-turn after having opposed the idea since the birth of the Western military alliance. The premier had earlier in the day consulted parliament on the issue by convening a debate, though lawmakers did not vote on the issue.

Six of eight parties in parliament, constituting a very broad majority, are in favour of membership. Swedish public support has also risen dramatically to around 50 percent-with about 20 percent against. In Helsinki, support for joining the alliance has surged even more dra-



STOCKHOLM, Sweden: Leader of the Left Party (Vansterpartiet) Nooshi Dadgostar speaks during the parliamentary debate about Swedish membership's bid to join NATO at the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm, Sweden, on May 16, 2022. — AFP

matically, with more than three-quarters of Finns in favour of joining, almost triple the level seen before the war in Ukraine began on February 24. Finnish lawmakers on Monday launched a marathon debate on the issue with over 150 of 200 MPs asking to speak, following a NATO membership proposal presented on Sunday by President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin. "Our security environment has fundamentally changed," Marin told parliament. "The only country that threatens European security, and is now openly waging a war of aggression, is Russia", she said.

### Memories of war

Finland, which shares a 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) border with Russia, has a long shared history with Russia. It spent more than a century as part of the Russian empire until it gained independence in 1917. It was then invaded by the Soviet Union in 1939.

Finns put up a fierce fight during the bloody Winter War, but were ultimately forced to cede a huge stretch of their eastern Karelia province in a peace treaty with Moscow. An overwhelming majority of Finland's 200 MPs-at least 85 percent-back the decision to join NATO.

During the debate in Sweden's parliament, Andersson acknowledged that Sweden's decision to join NATO was closely tied to Finland's. As the only country in the Baltic Sea region outside of NATO, Sweden would find itself "in a very vulnerable position", she told parliament. She also stressed Sweden's "extensive military cooperation" with Finland. If Sweden doesn't join, and "Finland as a NATO member focuses more on its cooperation with NATO countries, Sweden's defence capability decreases at a time when it instead needs to be strengthened." — AFP

## Harris leads high-level delegation to meet new UAE president

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates: US Vice President Kamala Harris was Monday leading a high-level delegation to meet the United Arab Emirates' new president, who takes over after his half-brother's death, following months of strained ties between Washington and the oil-rich Gulf state. Harris, whose team includes Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and CIA chief William Burns, is heading the strongest delegation to visit UAE since President Joe Biden took office last year.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan or "MBZ", for years the de facto ruler, was chosen as president on Saturday, a day after the death of his long-ailing half-brother, former leader Sheikh Khalifa. "The United States takes quite seriously the strength of our relationship and partnership with UAE," Harris said before her departure to the capital Abu Dhabi.

"We are going there to express our condolences, but also as an expression of our commitment to the strength of that relationship and continuing to strengthen that relationship." World leaders have flocked to Abu Dhabi to pay their respects, demonstrating the rising prominence of the major oil exporter after the decline of some of the Middle East's traditional powers. The high-level US visit appears intended to repair a relationship that has deteriorated since Biden replaced Donald Trump in the White House in January 2021. Ties have soured over issues including Abu Dhabi's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Washington's reopening of nuclear talks with Iran, long accused by Gulf states of creating regional chaos. Yousef al-Otaiba, the Emirati ambassador to the US, admitted in March that relations were going through a "stress test".

Blinken, who arrived in Abu Dhabi early Monday morning ahead of the delegation, offered his "warm congratulations" to Sheikh Mohamed on becoming president. "He will carry on the legacy of Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed. I look forward to continuing our two peoples' close cooperation," Blinken tweeted on Sunday. John Kerry, the special presidential envoy for climate, and Brett McGurk, the National Security Council coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, are also in the US team. The UAE hosts US troops and has been a strategic partner to Washington for decades, but it has recently also grown closer to Russia economically and politically. — AFP



## International

# Somalia's foreign partners hail peaceful election of new president

## UN praises Somalia's political and security agencies for ensuring orderly, peaceful election

**MOGADISHU, Somalia:** Somalia's international partners on Monday welcomed the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who takes office after months of political instability and faces crises including a violent insurgency and devastating drought.

Residents in the capital Mogadishu raced through the streets banging metal cans and fired guns into the air in celebration as the result of the marathon poll was announced around midnight. Many hope the vote-an indirect process that concluded peacefully despite claims of irregularities-will draw a line under a political crisis that has lasted well over a year.



### Path to stability

Outgoing president Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed's term ended in February 2021 without an election. The protracted tussle for power that followed turned violent at times and caused divisions at the highest levels of government. Somalia's foreign backers had repeatedly warned that the election delays were a dangerous distraction from the fight against Al-Shabaab insurgents, who have been trying to overthrow the government for over a decade.

The United Nations on Monday congratulated

Mohamud and praised Somalia's political and security agencies "for ensuring the orderly, peaceful and secure presidential election". In a statement on Twitter, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSO) also commended Farmajo "for honoring the Somali tradition of immediately accepting the election results and pledging support to his successor".

The UK's minister for Africa, Vicky Ford, pledged to work closely with Mohamud, who ruled Somalia between 2012 and 2017, and is the first president to win a second term in the troubled Horn of Africa nation. African Union Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat sent his congratulations, as did the leaders of Somalia's immediate neighbours Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. Mohamud has promised to transform Somalia into "a peaceful country that is at peace with the world". The East African regional bloc IGAD said his victory was "a clear testimony of the trust and confidence that the people of Somalia have in his leadership qualities".

### Hope for change

Somalia has not held a one-person, one-vote election in 50 years and few of its 15 million people played any part in choosing Mohamud. Instead, polls follow a complex indirect model, where state legislatures and clan delegates pick lawmakers for the national parliament, which in turn chooses the president.

Still, in the capital there were celebrations that stretched into the early hours, and some expressed relief that the long-running election saga was finally over. "This country seriously needed leadership



**MOGADISHU, Somalia:** Newly elected Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (L) sits next to former president Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed in the capital Mogadishu, on May 16, 2022. — AFP

change to avoid bloodshed... that's why this election was so important," said Habiil Ali, a resident from Mogadishu's Wadajir district.

A former academic and peace activist, Mohamud's first election in 2012 raised hopes that Somalia was on the path to stability. But his administration was dogged by high-profile corruption scandals and political turmoil, with two of his three prime ministerial appointees forced out, and two central bank governors resigning.

"I know the new president has not got the best record," said Abdinasir Mohamed, another Mogadishu resident. "But we are hoping he changes this time around."

### Immediate challenges

In addition to tackling a looming famine caused by drought, Mohamud will also need to repair the damage done by months of political fighting, both at the executive level and between the central government and state authorities. At his swearing-in after midnight on Sunday, he hailed his predecessor for enabling a peaceful transfer of power. "We must move forward and never backwards. We have to heal any grievances," he said. The heavily indebted country is also at risk of losing access to a three-year \$400-million (380-million-euro) aid package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was set to automatically expire on Tuesday if a new administration was not in place by then. The government has asked for a three-month extension until August 17, according to the IMF, which has not yet responded to the request. Over 70 percent of Somalia's population lives on less than \$1.90 a day.

In a reminder of the country's treacherous security situation, explosions were heard on Sunday near Mogadishu's heavily-guarded airport complex, where lawmakers were voting. Police said no casualties were reported. Earlier this month, an attack on an African Union (AU) base killed 10 Burundian peacekeepers, according to Burundi's army. It was the deadliest raid on AU forces in the country since 2015. Twin suicide bombings in March also killed 48 people in central Somalia, including two local lawmakers. The Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabaab controlled Mogadishu until 2011 when they were pushed out by an African Union force, but still hold territory in the countryside. — AFP

## New Thatcher statue egged in hometown

**GRANTHAM, United Kingdom:** A new statue of Britain's late former prime minister Margaret Thatcher was fenced off on Monday following an egg-throwing protest shortly after it was installed in her hometown. The Conservative prime minister known as the Iron Lady led the country from 1979 to 1990 and was the first British female premier. Due to her policies of privatisation, breaking the power of trade unions and selling off public housing she continues to deeply divide opinion, nearly a decade after her death in 2013. The statue was funded through donations raised by a British historical charity and reportedly cost £300,000 (352,000 euros or \$367,000).

It was originally destined for London but the authorities there rejected a proposed site in a square opposite parliament, over concerns about "potential vandalism and civil disorder". The small town where Thatcher grew up, Grantham in Lincolnshire in central England, agreed to take the statue instead. Local newspaper the Grantham Journal reported that the bronze statue was egged shortly after its installation on a plinth on Sunday. The Daily Telegraph newspaper posted a picture of a protester throwing an egg at the statue, naming him as Jeremy Webster, an administrator at a local arts centre.

On Monday, the statue was fenced off and had sacking taped round its plinth and inscription, an AFP photographer saw. The 10.5-foot (3.2-metre) figure shows a big-haired Thatcher in the ceremonial robes she wore in the House of Lords, without her famous handbag.



**GRANTHAM, United Kingdom:** Photograph taken on May 16, 2022 shows the newly installed statue of late Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in her hometown of Grantham, Lincolnshire. The statue was revealed on May 15, 2022. — AFP

The local South Kevesten district council backed the statue's installation, hailed by its leader, Kelham Cooke, as "a fitting tribute to a truly unique political figure". Labour councillor Lee Steptoe tweeted after the egg attack however: "I do not condone this but it was absolutely inevitable." The protest prompted varying reactions in British media.

The right-wing Sun tabloid described the egg-throwing protester as a "yob", while left-wing tabloid The Mirror wrote: "Statues should not be defiled but it's no surprise the one to Margaret Thatcher was, just 21 minutes after it was installed". "Those with long memories of her divisive, cruel rule will wonder how it took so long." Thatcher's father was a grocer in Grantham. She left to study at the University of Oxford.—AFP

## Drug crimes keep Ecuador community in grip of fear

**DURAN, Ecuador:** When Luis Sarmiento and his grandson went out early to buy bread one morning in March, they came across a shocking scene: A macabre message left by Ecuador's drug traffickers in the form of two headless bodies.

"I covered my grandson's eyes, went upstairs, and I don't know anything else," recalled Sarmiento, a 78-year-old former laborer who has lived in the Duran municipality-near Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city-for 16 years. Drug traffickers have long targeted this hilly area to groom young recruits at their "school of assassins," a retired police chief told AFP under condition of anonymity.

The cartels recruit children as young as 10 to sell drugs. "First they sell, then they give them a weapon and convert them into killers," said police colonel Jorge Hadathy. At a hideout used by the Los Lagartos gang-one of Duran's cartels-police found a collection of cuddly stuffed crocodiles.

They believe gangs use toys to attract children, particularly ones that allude to the criminal group-Los Lagartos means "the lizards" in Spanish. The majority of the 230 people arrested in Duran between January and April of this year were aged 17 or 18, said Hadathy. The group, he said, was responsible for "four or five deaths."

The Cerro Las Cabras hill where Sarmiento lives has a reputation for violence in Duran. In February,

two dead bodies that had been shot were found hanging from a pedestrian bridge. And another five mutilated bodies appeared between October and when the two decapitated ones showed up in March. The killings are believed to be linked to cruel score-settling in the style of Mexican mafias.

The murders are part of battles between rival micro-trafficking gangs, who move around \$1.8 million a month in Duran alone, according to official figures.

### 'Playing cat and mouse'

About 30 police officers search vehicles for drugs and weapons along the sloping side of the Cerro Las Cabras hill. Inside the community, when police on horseback seize a man in a cap, residents follow events out of the corner of their eyes, but don't leave their homes or talk openly about what they have seen.

The traditional mafia code of silence reigns. In their most recent incursion into the community, the police received support from the military for their operation.

Three of Ecuador's provinces, including Guayas, where Duran is located, are under a state of emergency as the government looks to tackle gangs.

"The gangs are playing cat and mouse with us," said Sergeant Washington Reyes. The cartels employ the use of "bell-ringers"-children who use radios the size of a lighter to alert the mafiosos to police movements. The whole place is "a drug supermarket," says Hadathy. "Families live off sales or receive money from the mafias, and the rest keep quiet out of fear." Teenagers are easy prey for drug traffickers, said Duran community leader Alexandra Saavedra. "If they don't have places to play sports and live in a depressed place, of course they will join a gang," she said. "Sometimes a wolf is not bad out of desire, but because it has no options." — AFP

## Massive dust storm engulfs...

Continued from Page 1

of oxygen, said health ministry spokesman Seif Al-Badr. AFP correspondents saw around 20 patients, most of them elderly men, at Baghdad's Sheikh Zayed Hospital. One of them was Hadi Saada, 70, lying on his side on a bed in the intensive care unit hooked to a respirator. He struggled to breathe. "It is his third time in hospital" since the sandstorms began in April, said his son Mohammed Saada, adding that his father had a heart condition.

Another patient, Khaled Jassem, 70, was also hooked to an oxygen tank. "We've been here since 8:00 am... My father has a heart ailment, diabetes, hypertension and is suffocating on the dust," said his son Walid Jassem. At least 75 people struggling to breathe were admitted Monday to Sheikh Zayed, said Talib Abdelmoneim Nejm, one of the ICU officials.

## Saudi expects 13m bpd oil...

Continued from Page 1

Those results helped Aramco dethrone Apple last week as the world's most valuable company by market capitalization. They continued a string of positive economic news for Saudi Arabia, which in early May reported that growth in the first quarter had risen 9.6 percent over the same period in 2021. Yet Aramco has faced security challenges stemming from the war pitting a Saudi-led military coalition against Yemen's Houthi rebels who have repeatedly targeted the kingdom, including Aramco sites.

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, has resisted US entreaties to raise output in an attempt to rein in prices that have spiked since the Ukraine war broke out on Feb 24. As the war got underway, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates stressed their commitment to the

The sandstorm drastically reduced visibility to just 300m at Baghdad airport, prompting authorities to close airspace and halt flights, state-run INA news agency reported. Airports in Najaf and Sulaimaniyah were also closed for the day, the agency said. Schools nationwide were also shuttered and end of year exams postponed to Tuesday. Universities also delayed exams. The latest sandstorm was expected to gradually dissipate by Monday evening, weather services said.

The Middle East has always been battered by dust and sandstorms but they have become more frequent and intense in recent years. The trend has been associated with overuse of river water, more dams, overgrazing and deforestation. Iraq is rich in oil and is known in Arabic as the land of the two rivers - in reference to the legendary Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

But the supply of water has been declining for years and Iraq is classified as one of the world's five countries most vulnerable to climate change and desertification. In April, an environment ministry official warned that Iraq could face "272 days of dust" a year over the next two decades. — Agencies

OPEC+ oil alliance, which Riyadh and Moscow lead, underscoring Riyadh's and Abu Dhabi's increasing independence from long-standing ally Washington.

Last year, ahead of the COP26 climate-change summit, Saudi Arabia pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2060, sparking skepticism from environmental campaign group Greenpeace. With increasing global urgency to limit global warming, experts warn of the urgent need to reduce fossil fuel use. But Saudi officials' stated targets indicate "they still believe in oil as a source of energy for the coming decade", Mazen Alsudairi, head of research for Al Rajhi Capital, a financial services firm in Riyadh, told AFP. "They are not following the global trend by reducing exposure to hydrocarbons."

Also at Monday's conference in Bahrain, Iraqi Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul-Jabbar Ismail said his country was accelerating its production capacity goals, targeting six million bpd in 2027 and eight million bpd in 2029. Iraq's current daily production is just under 3.5 million. — AFP

## First commercial flight in 6 years leaves Sanaa

**SANAA:** The first commercial flight in nearly six years took off from Yemen's rebel-held capital Monday, a major step forward in a peace process that has provided rare relief from conflict. The Yemenia plane carrying 126 passengers, including hospital patients needing treatment abroad and their relatives, took off from Sanaa for the Jordanian capital Amman just after 9:00 am (0600 GMT).

Before take-off, the plane with red-and-blue tail livery taxied through an honor guard of two fire trucks spraying jets of water. It landed in Amman before 0900 GMT. Sanaa's airport has been closed to commercial traffic since Aug 2016 because of air strikes by the Saudi-led military coalition, who are fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

"I'm so happy with the opening of Sanaa airport," said Lutfiyah, a wheelchair-bound passenger who did not want to give her full name. "Today is a day of celebration, and I hope that it remains open." Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, has been wracked with war since the coalition stepped in to support the government in 2015, a year after the Houthis seized control

of the capital.

According to UN figures, more than 150,000 people have died in the violence and millions have been displaced, creating the world's worst humanitarian crisis. But a truce has been in place since April 2, coinciding with the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Five days after it took effect, Yemen's Saudi-based president handed his powers to a leadership council tasked with holding peace talks with the rebels.

Resuming flights from Sanaa, working to reopen roads to the rebel-besieged city of Ta'ez and allowing fuel tankers into the Houthi-held port of Hodeida - a lifeline for Yemen - were all part of the truce agreement. UN special envoy Hans Grundberg called Monday's flight an "important and long-awaited step". The agreement provides for two return flights to Amman and Cairo. "I hope this provides some relief to the Yemenis who need to seek medical treatment abroad, pursue education and business opportunities, or reunite with loved ones," he said in a statement.

While fuel tankers have docked in Hodeida and flights have now resumed from Sanaa, the main routes into Ta'ez remain cut off. The United States also welcomed the flight, with National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson thanking Saudi Arabia "for its leadership in helping to overcome obstacles". "Yemen today is witnessing its calmest period since the war began, and these flights are an important step in further improving the lives and opportunities for the Yemeni people," Watson said. — AFP



**AMMAN:** Yemeni passengers leave Queen Alia Airport following their arrival on May 16, 2022 on the first commercial flight in nearly six years from Sanaa. — AFP



## International

## Sri Lanka's PM wins support for 'economic war cabinet'

## Government announces a six-hour night curfew from Monday

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's new prime minister won crucial support from two main opposition parties Monday, easing the pressure on the ruling Rajapaksa clan in the face of the island's worsening economic crisis.

The main opposition SJB party appeared to drop its demands that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa should step down before backing a coalition to manage the crumbling economy. The SJB, or Samagi Jana Balawegaya, declined to join a unity government led by new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, but said it would "unconditionally support the positive efforts to revive the economy".

"It is important to save the country from the grave economic crisis," it said in a brief statement. And the second-largest opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), said it would join the cabinet. Even so, thousands of protestors remained camped outside the sea-front office of 73-year-old President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose brother Mahinda quit as premier last week, demanding his resignation in turn.

Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along with record inflation and lengthy blackouts, have brought severe hardships to the country's 22 million people, in the worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948. Wickremesinghe's appointment last week - his sixth turn as prime minister - has so far failed to quell public anger at

the government for bringing Sri Lanka to the brink of economic collapse.

Troops patrolled the streets as consumers queued up for scarce supplies and the government announced that a six-hour night curfew will be reimposed from Monday after a 24-hour break. The curfew was relaxed on Sunday, the first day of a two-day holiday for Vesak, the anniversary of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

## Dollar shortage

Wickremesinghe has struggled to form a "unity government" and a cabinet swearing-in scheduled for Monday afternoon was pushed back as talks continued on sharing portfolios. Four ministers were sworn in on Saturday, all from Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podu Jana Peramuna (SLPP) party.

But there is no finance minister yet, and it is widely expected that Wickremesinghe will retain the crucial portfolio to lead ongoing negotiations with the IMF for an urgent bailout. The new prime minister has called for international support and was scheduled to address the nation later Monday to outline his economic revival plan, his office said.

He held talks Sunday with World Bank and Asian Development Bank representatives in Colombo on medicine, food, fuel and fertiliser supplies, his office said in a statement. "The government is facing the immediate challenge of securing



**COLOMBO, Sri Lanka:** Protestors take part in an anti-government demonstration outside the Sri Lanka police headquarters in Colombo on May 16, 2022, demanding the arrest of government supporters who allegedly assaulted peaceful demonstrators who had been demanding the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa amid ongoing economic crisis. —AFP

funds to pay for the fuel requirement for this coming week," it said, adding the government was "exploring other options" in the face of dollar shortages at banks.

Long queues stretched outside the few fuel stations that were still open on Monday as motorists

waited for rationed petrol. Heavily armed troops were patrolling the streets with a state of emergency still in effect after at least nine people were killed in violence last week. Police said over 350 people have been arrested in connection with last week's mob violence. —AFP

## Beijing students protest against COVID controls

**BEIJING:** Hundreds of students at an elite Beijing university have protested against strict COVID-19 curbs on campus, in a rare show of defiance as anger mounts over virus controls. China is the only major country adhering to a rigid zero-COVID policy and its restrictions have prompted frustration with lockdowns, spartan quarantine facilities and heavy handed enforcement.

In Beijing—which has reported more than 1,000 infections in recent weeks—most restaurants and public spaces have been shut and millions face daily testing and working from home. Anger boiled over at the weekend at Peking University after the school tried to impose tight new movement restrictions including a ban on food deliveries.

Locked-down students were already confined to just one part of the campus, banned from receiving visitors and tested daily. Students who wanted to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals told AFP that at least 300 students crowded outside one dormitory on the university's Wanliu campus and chanted in protest on Sunday.

"Everyone was really angry when the campus was fenced off at night and went to protest," one said, adding that the restrictions had "totally destroyed everyone's normal lives". She said the rules were much stricter for students than teaching staff, whose living quarters were separated by a fence that was later torn down by students.

Videos verified by AFP show hundreds of masked students gathered outside, chanting and heckling a university official. Peking University vice principal Chen Baojian eventually addressed the crowd through a megaphone, according to a video provided by a protester, telling them to "go back to your dormitories in an orderly fashion".

After the crowds dispersed, officials agreed to make it easier for students to travel out of the Wanliu campus to other parts of the university, and to provide grocery deliveries. "They've made it so that everyone... must do whatever the government tells you to do, and all your rights and personal freedoms are stripped away," a student told AFP.

On Monday AFP reporters saw two police vans parked outside a quiet campus. When contacted by AFP the university said it was not a protest but "just students expressing their demands". The incident was rapidly censored on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, where many evoked memories of the country's May 4 movement-mass protests by students in 1919.

tained minor and serious injuries," Mojokerto police chief Rofiq Ripto Himawan told reporters on Monday, adding that authorities were still investigating the cause of the accident. Earlier, a spokesman for the East Java police blamed the crash on driver error.

"This accident was caused by human error, the driver was exhausted or tired," Dirmanto, who goes by a single name, told Metro TV. A police report stated that both weather and traffic were clear when the accident occurred on Monday morning.

The driver survived and has been taken to a hospital for his injuries, the police report said. Deadly traffic accidents are common in Indonesia, where vehicles are often old or poorly maintained and road rules are routinely ignored. Last month, 16 people were killed when a truck carrying miners crashed into a cliff in West Papua province, police said. In February, 13 people died and dozens more were injured after a tour bus carrying factory workers to a popular beach holiday tipped over and crashed on Java island, according to police. —AFP



**GUANGZHOU, China:** This photo taken on May 15, 2022 shows people queuing to undergo nucleic acid tests for the COVID-19 coronavirus in Guangzhou in China's southern Guangdong province. —AFP

Peking University was also the birthplace of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. "Today we witnessed Peking University students' tradition of struggle rise from the ashes," read one post.

Steve Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute in London, said Peking University is a politically important institution and the government would "react swiftly and strongly to put an end to protests (there) before they can gather momentum". —AFP



**MOJOKERTO, Indonesia:** Medical workers load a victim's body into a vehicle after a bus crash, to transport to their family at a hospital in Mojokerto on May 16, 2022. At least 14 people were killed and more than a dozen others injured when a bus carrying domestic tourists crashed into an advertising sign in Indonesia's East Java province early on May 16, police said. —AFP

## Indonesia tourist bus crash kills 14

**SURABAYA, Indonesia:** At least 14 people were killed and more than a dozen others injured when a bus carrying domestic tourists crashed into an advertising sign in Indonesia's East Java province early on Monday, police said. The bus—which was carrying 31 passengers, the driver and a crew member—hit the pole and then rolled over on a toll road connecting the town of Mojokerto to the country's second city, Surabaya.

The victims were from Benowo, a village near Surabaya, and were returning home after a long weekend at popular holiday destination Dieng Plateau, about 400 kilometres away in Central Java, local official Ridwan Mubaran told Indonesian television station Metro TV.

"Fourteen people have died and 19 others sus-

## Extreme temperatures compound poverty in Pakistan's hottest city

**JACOBABAD, Pakistan:** By the time Pakistani schoolboy Saeed Ali arrived at hospital in one of the world's hottest cities, his body was shutting down from heatstroke. The 12-year-old collapsed after walking home from school under the burning sun, his day spent sweltering in a classroom with no fans. "A rickshaw driver had to carry my son here. He couldn't even walk," the boy's mother Shaheela Jamali told AFP from his bedside.

Jacobabad in Pakistan's arid Sindh province is in the grip of the latest heatwave to hit South Asia — peaking at 51 degrees Celsius (124 Fahrenheit) at the weekend. Canals in the city — a vital source of irrigation for nearby farms — have run dry, with a smattering of stagnant water barely visible around strewn rubbish.

Experts say the searing weather is in line with projections for global warming. The city is on the "front line of climate change", said its deputy commissioner Abdul Hafeez Siyal. "The overall quality of life here is suffering."

Most of the one million people in Jacobabad and surrounding villages live in acute poverty, with water shortages and power cuts compromising their ability to beat the heat. It leaves residents facing desperate dilemmas.

Doctors said Saeed was in a critical condition, but his mother — driven by a desire to escape poverty — said he would return to school next week. "We don't want them to grow up to be labourers," Jamali told AFP, her son listless and tearful at her side.

Heatstroke — when the body becomes so overheated it can no longer cool itself — can cause symptoms from lightheadedness and nausea to organ swelling, unconsciousness, and even death. Nurse Bashir Ahmed, who treated Saeed at a new heatstroke clinic run by local NGO Community Development Foundation, said the number of patients arriving in a serious condition was rising.

"Previously, the heat would be at its peak in June and July, but now it's arriving in May," Ahmed said. Labourers forced to toil in the sun are among the most vulnerable. Brick kiln workers ply their trade alongside furnaces that can reach up to 1,000 degrees Celsius. "The severe heat makes us feel like throwing up sometimes, but if I can't work, I can't earn," said Rasheed Rind, who started on the site as a child.

## 'Water mafias'

Life in Jacobabad is dominated by attempts to cope with the heat. "It's like fire burning all around. What we need the most is electricity and water," said blacksmith Shafi Mohammad. Power shortages mean only six hours of electricity a day in rural areas and 12 in the city.

Access to drinking water is unreliable and unaffordable due to scarcity across Pakistan and major infrastructure problems. Khairun Nissa gave birth during the heatwave, her last days of pregnancy spent wilting under a single ceiling fan shared between her family of 13.

Her two-day-old son now occupies her spot under its feeble breeze. "Of course I'm worried about him in this heat, but I know God will provide for us," said Nissa. Outside their three-room brick home, where the stench of rotting rubbish and stagnant water hangs in the air, a government-installed water tap runs dry.

But local "water mafias" are filling the supply gap. They have tapped into government reserves to funnel water to their own distribution points where cans are filled and transported by donkey cart to be sold at 20 rupees (25 cents) per 20 litres. "If our water plants weren't here, there would be major difficulties for the people of Jacobabad," said Zafar Ullah Lashari, who operates an unlicensed, unregulated water supply.

## 'Nothing we can do'

In a farming village on the outskirts of the city, women wake up at 3am to pump drinking water all day from a well — but it is never enough. "We prefer our cattle to have clean drinking water first, because our livelihood depends on them," said Abdul Sattar, who raises buffaloes for milk and sale at market.

There is no compromise on this, even when children suffer skin conditions and diarrhoea. "It is a difficult choice but if the cattle die, how would the children eat?" he said. Pakistan is the eighth most vulnerable country to extreme weather caused by climate change, according to the Global Climate Risk Index compiled by environmental NGO Germanwatch.

Floods, droughts and cyclones in recent years have killed and displaced thousands, destroyed livelihoods and damaged infrastructure. Many people choose to leave Jacobabad in the hottest months, leaving some villages half empty.

Sharaf Khaton shares a makeshift camp in the city with up to 100 people surviving on a few meagre rupees that male family members earn through menial labour. They usually relocate the camp in the hottest months, 300 kilometres away to Quetta, where temperatures are up to 20 degrees Celsius cooler. —AFP

## Modi skips opening of Nepal's Chinese built airport

**LUMBINI, Nepal:** Nepal on Monday opened a Chinese-built airport intended to capitalise on Buddhist tourism as India's prime minister landed a few kilometres away to mark the birth, enlightenment and death of the religion's founder.

But Narendra Modi flew by helicopter directly from a nearby Indian airport to the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini, bypassing the new facility as his Nepali counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba inaugurated it. The sequence of events illustrates the competition for influence in the landlocked Himalayan country by its two giant neighbours.

Nepal has traditionally done a balancing act between New Delhi and Beijing, but analysts believe Indian influence over Kathmandu has been dwindling as China pours heavy investment into the landlocked Himalayan country. The \$76 million airport project in Bhairahawa, the closest city to Lumbini, is funded by the Asian Development Bank and OPEC Fund for International Development but built by China's Northwest Civil Aviation Airport Construction Group.

India's foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra on Friday said he could not comment on the prime minister's travel logistics and they "involve many parameters, including security", when asked about the plans to directly fly to Lumbini, skipping the airport inauguration.

It is only Nepal's second international airport after Kathmandu, which Pradeep Adhikari, the chief of Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority, told AFP was full to capacity. "Nepal's air passengers are growing every day... we cannot add more flights in Kathmandu, he said. "So, we hope this new airport will be able to cater those flights and passengers."

It has a capacity of two million passengers a year and is expected to ease travel for pilgrims to one of the holiest sites in Buddhism. Lumbini, a UNESCO world heritage site, is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year and Nepal plans to establish direct air links between Lumbini and countries with significant Buddhist communities, such as Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and India. —AFP



TUESDAY, MAY 17, 2022

# Wheat prices hit record high after India's ban on export

## Heatwave hits production amid supply fears after Ukraine invasion



AMRITSAR, India: In this file photograph taken on April 12, 2022, an Indian farmer poses as he harvests wheat crop in a field on the outskirts of Amritsar, in the northern Indian state of Punjab. — AFP

PARIS: Wheat prices surged to a new record high on Monday after India decided to ban exports of the commodity as a heatwave hit production. The price jumped to 435 euros (\$453) per ton as the European market opened.

Global wheat prices have soared on supply fears since Russia's February invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, which previously accounted for 12 percent of global exports. The spike, exacerbated by fertilizer shortages and poor harvests, has fuelled inflation globally and raised fears of famine and social unrest in poorer countries. India, the world's second-largest wheat producer, said on

Saturday that it was banning exports after its hottest March on record.

New Delhi said factors including lower production and sharply higher global prices meant it was worried about the food security of its own 1.4 billion people.

Export deals agreed before the directive issued on May 13 could still be honored but future shipments needed government approval, it said. However, exports could also take place if New Delhi approved requests from other governments "to meet their food security needs".

India, which possesses major buffer stocks, previously said it was ready to

help fill some of the supply shortages caused by the Ukraine war. The export ban drew sharp criticism from the Group of Seven industrialized nations, which said that such measures "would worsen the crisis" of rising commodity prices.

The reasons given were runaway inflation and food security in the nation of 1.4 billion people. Some parts of India, Commerce Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam said on Sunday, have seen prices in wheat and flour jump 20 to 40 percent in recent weeks. Because of the sharp rise in global prices, some farmers were selling to traders and not to the government.

This got the government worried about its buffer stock of almost 20 million tons—depleted by the pandemic — needed for handouts to millions of poor families and to avert any possible famine. "We don't want wheat to go in an unregulated manner where (wheat) may either get hoarded and is not used for the purpose which we are hoping it will be used for which is serving the food requirements of vulnerable nations and vulnerable people," Subrahmanyam said.

India recorded its warmest March on record—blamed on climate change—and in recent weeks has seen a scorching heatwave with temperatures upwards of 45

degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). This hit farmers in wheat-producing northern India, prompting the government to predict output would fall at least five percent this year from 109 million tons in 2021.

G7 agriculture ministers meeting in Germany said that such measures "would worsen the crisis" of rising commodity prices. "If everyone starts to impose export restrictions or to close markets, that would worsen the crisis," German Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir said.

Wheat prices surged to a new record high on Monday, jumping to 435 euros (\$453) per ton as the European market opened. — AFP

## Facebook changing with times a decade after stock debut

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg rang the opening bell remotely to cheers 10 years ago as the beloved social network made its stock market debut, culminating an all-night hackathon that included street hockey, costumes and music. The Silicon Valley tech colossus rebranded as Meta has since seen its image tainted by accusations it has become a tech tyrant, putting profit over user privacy and even the good of society.

Meanwhile, the likes of TikTok, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter and even Apple now vie with Meta for people's online attention as Facebook social network is increasingly seen as a place for older people.

"At the time it went public, Facebook was con-

sidered to be young, edgy and connecting people," Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi told AFP. "Now to most people it sounds like political manipulation and advertising; Facebook is considered a data-hungry company."

When Facebook became publicly traded on May 18, 2012, it was seen as a darling of the internet generation, connecting people in a "pure" way, Milanesi said. But like other free online platforms, Facebook makes its money from ads targeted at people's interests.

The company tapped into information about people's online activities to become a digital advertising behemoth, raking in billions of dollars. Critics say Meta focused on growth at the expense of safeguarding people's data as the

number of users on its "family" of apps climbed into the billions.

In 2016, Facebook was embroiled in controversy over Russia's alleged use of it and other social media platforms to influence the outcome of the election that put Donald Trump in the White House.

The social network was caught up in scandal anew two years later after it was revealed that British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica stealthily harvested data of millions at Facebook and used it for political purposes, including trying to rally support for Trump. Regulators in Europe passed a groundbreaking law to give people more control over their online data.

Apple tweaked its mobile software to stymie apps like Facebook from snatching up people's data essential to effective ad targeting. Last year, the company changed its name to Meta in a nod to the metaverse—the virtual world which Zuckerberg sees as the future of the internet. — AFP



MENLO PARK, United States: In this file photo taken on October 28, 2021 a person takes a selfie in front of a newly unveiled logo for "Meta", the new name for Facebook's parent company, outside Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park. — AFP

## EU struggles to clear path to Russian oil ban

BRUSSELS: EU foreign ministers on Monday sought to break through Hungary's opposition to an embargo on Russian oil over the Ukraine war, but warned little progress was expected.

"We will discuss about it and we will do our best to de-block the situation," EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said at the start of a gathering in Brussels. "I cannot ensure that it is going to happen because the positions are quite strong." Budapest has been holding up a push by Brussels to ban Moscow's crucial oil exports as part of a sixth package of sanctions, arguing that it would hammer the Hungarian economy.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said: "There are still a few things that need to be clarified in the final stages. There will be no final clarification here today." But she added that she was confident that "in the next few days we will come to a joint result."

Brussels is desperate to avoid the appearance of

division in the face of the Kremlin's onslaught on Ukraine, and officials are scrambling behind the scenes to patch up a compromise. "I think that if we understand the particular situation of some member states and all of us make an effort to present a united front against Russia, we will succeed," Borrell said.

"It is an objective situation that some member states face more difficulties because they are more dependent, because they are landlocked, because they do not have the possibility of receiving tankers directly," he added. "They only have oil through pipelines—coming from Russia."

Brussels has offered Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia long grace periods to phase out Russian oil imports but that has not yet convinced Budapest to budge. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, often the odd man out in EU decision making, has demanded to be exempted from the embargo for at least four years and wants 800 million euros (\$830 million) in EU funds to re-tool a refinery and boost the capacity of a pipeline to Croatia.

"The whole union is being held hostage by one member state who cannot help us find the consensus," said Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis. — AFP

## Vodafone shares rally; UAE becomes biggest investor

LONDON: Shares in Vodafone jumped Monday after the British telecoms giant confirmed that state-controlled Emirates Telecommunications Group Company had become its biggest investor.

Vodafone announced in a statement that the group—known also as Etisalat or "e&" and whose majority stake holder is the United Arab Emirates government—had bought 9.8 percent of the British company. The news sent Vodafone stock rallying 2.4 percent to 120.7 pence around midday on London's top FTSE 100 shares index, which was flat overall.

The UAE company on Saturday said it had bought 2.766 billion Vodafone shares for \$4.4 billion (4.2 billion euros). It stressed, however, that it would not launch a takeover.

"e& plans to be a long-term and supportive



shareholder in Vodafone and is not seeking to exert control or influence the company's board or management team," it said in a statement.

"Similarly, e& has no intention to make an offer for Vodafone." The group decided to invest in Vodafone to gain "significant exposure" to a global leader in connectivity and digital services, it added. Vodafone on Monday said it looked "forward to building a long-term relationship with Etisalat". — AFP



## Business

# US, EU to ramp up chip making and raise pressure on Russia

## Joint forum seeks to counter China's growing position in technology sector

**SACLAY, France:** The United States and the European Union announced on Monday a joint effort to boost microchip manufacturing and tackle Russian disinformation around the war in Ukraine. The two sides met outside Paris as part of the Trade and Technology Council, a forum created last year aimed partially at countering China's increasingly powerful position in the technology sector.

But EU and US officials focused much of their efforts instead on the difficulties created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, particularly with disinformation. In its final statement, the council accused Russia of an "all-out assault on the truth" in Ukraine and promised an "early response framework" to tackle disinformation in future crises. And it promised action over Russian disinformation elsewhere in the world, accusing Moscow of seeking to deflect blame over food supply shortages caused by its war in Ukraine.

"We see the damage from the Russian invasion spreading across the world," said Margrethe Vestager, the European Commissioner for Competition. The council's statement said practical actions could include funding or other support to promote access to "trustworthy and fact-based information".

The council said its work had already been instrumental in limiting exports of advanced technology in aerospace and cyber-surveillance to undermine Russia's war effort.

### 'Early warning system'

The forum's other main focuses-on chip manufacturing and the supply of substances vital for the tech industry such as rare earths-put it on a collision course with China. "Companies from the European Union and the United States do not have prominent positions in the supply chain," said the final statement on rare earth magnets, vital for tech products including electric vehicles.



PARIS: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, European Commission Vice President and Commissioner for Trade Valdis Dombrovskis, France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and other guests pose for a family photo ahead of a dinner at the US-European Union Trade and Technology Council summit in Paris on May 15, 2022. — AFP

cles. "Nearly all production stages are concentrated in China." The forum pledged to give the chip industry the maximum possible subsidies. "We hope to agree on high levels of subsidies-that they will not be more than what is necessary and proportionate and appropriate," Vestager told reporters on Sunday.

The forum also announced an "early warning system" for disruptions in the supply of semiconductors, substances used to make chips, hoping to avoid excessive competition between Western powers.

### No 'subsidy race'

The chip industry has suffered from a shortage of

components for chipmaking blamed on a boom in global demand for electronic products and pandemic-snarled supply chains. The aim is that "as both Washington and Brussels look to encourage semiconductor investment in our respective countries, we do so in a coordinated fashion and don't simply encourage a subsidy race", a US official said separately, speaking on condition of anonymity. The United States already put in place its own early warning system in 2021 that looked at supply chains in Southeast Asia and "has been very helpful in helping us get ahead of a couple of potential shutdowns earlier this year," the US official said.

The official added that the two sides are looking ahead to supply disruptions caused by pandemic lockdowns in China-the only major economy still hewing to a zero-Covid strategy. The European Union and United States will also announce joint measures on fighting disinformation and hacking, especially from Russia, including a guide on cybersecurity best practices for small- and medium-sized companies and a task force on trusted technology suppliers, the US official said.

"It's not a European matter but a global matter," she said. US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai are visiting for the talks. —AFP

## EU cuts eurozone growth forecast as Ukraine war bites

**BRUSSELS:** The European Commission on Monday sharply cut its eurozone growth forecast for 2022 to 2.7 percent, blaming skyrocketing energy prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war also spurred the EU's executive to revisit its eurozone inflation prediction for 2022, with consumer prices forecast to jump by 6.1 percent year-on-year, much higher than the earlier forecast of 3.5 percent.

"There is no doubt that the EU economy is going through a challenging period due to Russia's war against Ukraine, and we have downgraded our forecast accordingly," EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis said. "The overwhelming negative factor is the surge in energy prices, driving inflation to record highs and putting a strain on European businesses and households," he added.

The EU warned that the course of the war was highly uncertain and that the risk of stagflation-punishing inflation with little or no growth-remained a real risk going forward. If Russia, the EU's main energy supplier, should cut off its oil and gas supply to Europe completely, the commission warned that the forecast would worsen considerably.

"Our forecast is subjected to very high uncertainty

and risks," EU commissioner Paolo Gentiloni told reporters. "Other scenarios are possible under which growth may be lower and inflation higher than we are projecting today. In any case, our economy is still far from a normal situation," he said. For the EU as a whole, including the eight countries that do not use the euro as their currency, the commission had also forecast growth of four percent in February, but has now cut this to 2.7 percent, the same level as for the eurozone.

The sharp reduction in expectations is in line with the forecast made in mid-April by the International Monetary Fund, which predicted 2.8 percent growth for the eurozone this year. The EU's warning for the months ahead lands as the European Central Bank is increasingly expected to increase interest rates in July to tackle soaring inflation. Critics warn that this could put a brake on economic activity just when the economy faced the headwinds from the war in Ukraine. — AFP



## IBS begins risk management leaders program

**KUWAIT:** The Director General of the Institute of Banking Studies, Prof Yaqoub Al-Refaei announced the start of training in the "Risk Management Leaders Program" on May 16, 2022. It will be attended by a distinguished group of Kuwaitis, and the 15 participants will come from all Kuwaiti banks and other local institutions.

This program is one of the "Kafa'a" initiative launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and under the management of the Institute of Banking Studies. The training program was designed in line with the requirements of the banking and financial sector in Kuwait and in cooperation with international institutions specialized in this field. The program aims to qualify and develop national cadres, through training and developing employees in risk management departments, which has great importance in enhancing the banking work environment and fortifying financial operations.

This program aims to enhance participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to take appropriate decisions and develop effective strategies in risk management in the banks and financial institutions, by training them over a period of six months - non-continuous - distributed over four different phases, consisting of training programs, practical lectures, graduation projects and workshops. It is an advanced level program, and the fourth phase has been allocated to include international field training in one of the most important and prestigious educational institutions in the United Kingdom, The London Institute of Banking and Finance, where participants shall receive a specialized training in the field of risk management, which will give them practical experience and a high level of professional competence.

During the opening of the program Al-Refaei welcomed the attendees and thanked them for their participation in the program, which aims to prepare a generation of leaders, specialized in risk management, in accordance with international best practice.

Al-Refaei also thanked Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait, chairman of the board of directors of the Institute of Banking Studies, and the board members, for supporting this program, also he thanked the HR managers in the participating banks, for their efforts and annual follow-up for the success of this program and other important training programs.

## Afghan money exchangers reopen after strike

**KABUL:** Thousands of money exchangers in Afghanistan ended their strike on Monday, the brokers commission said, a day after they shut their shops to protest a steep hike in license fees imposed by Taliban authorities. Afghanistan's formal banking system collapsed when the Taliban swept back to power in August last year, ending two decades of US-led military intervention in the deeply impoverished nation. Since then money exchangers-who swap currencies, make informal cash transfers and even give loans-have played a key role in meeting the financial needs of many of Afghanistan's 38 million citizens mired in humanitarian crisis.

"Today, the money exchange markets across Afghanistan are open," Abdul Rahman Zeerak, spokesman for Afghanistan's Money Exchange Commission, told AFP. "They (Taliban leaders) requested that we should open the markets and that they will resolve our problems fully."

Money exchangers in Kabul and other cities, including Herat and Kunduz, went on strike on Sunday after the central bank raised their license fees to five million Afghanis (\$56,000) from 300,000.

Zeerak said the central bank had also told currency



KABUL: Customers at a money exchanger in Kabul. — AFP

traders to conduct transactions online, and that they must have a minimum of 50 million Afghanis to operate. On Tuesday the commission will have a meeting with the finance ministry and the governor of Afghanistan's central bank, he said.

Experts said the central bank's new directives were motivated by the Taliban's desire to cut off funding paths to militant groups. Many foreign nations have made assistance to Afghanistan conditional on the Taliban regime guaranteeing human rights and preventing international terror groups from operating in the country. Afghanistan's money market had been volatile for several months after the US seized billions of dollars in Afghan assets during its hasty withdrawal when the Taliban seized power. Since then there has been a shortage of dollars as international donors also suspended the massive aid inflows that had propped up the Afghan economy for two decades during the US presence in the country. — AFP

## Liberal pipe-dream: 3 myths about electric cars

**PARIS:** Skeptics say that far from helping save the planet, electric cars are a liberal pipe-dream whose environmental benefits are exaggerated.

But even if there is no such thing as an all-green car, studies show that battery-powered ones cause fewer harmful greenhouse gas overall than their petrol-driven ancestors. AFP Fact Check examined three common claims about them.

### 'Coal-powered'

"Coal Powered Electric Cars.... Helping liberals pretend they are solving a make-believe crisis," reads a text shared on Facebook, with a photo of cars plugged in at a charging station. The humorous meme implies that electric cars do not help lower climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions because coal is burned to feed the electricity grid. The US Environmental Protection Agency has a calculator tool on its website to compare a petrol car's emissions with those of an electric one depending on where it is charged.

It calculates that an electric car charged in St Louis, Missouri-part of the subregion that relies the most on coal-on average will produce 247 grams of carbon dioxide per mile, lower than the average 381 grams of a gasoline vehicle. Experts at Carbon Brief agree an electric car's emissions depend on what region or country it is charged in. They would be higher in Poland or in an Asian country where more coal is burned than in France, where most electricity comes from nuclear power.

Overall, the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) found electric cars are lower-emitting than their petrol-driven equivalents across their life cycle, from mining components to recycling.

An electric car is also much more efficient in its use of energy than a petrol-powered one, according to the US Department of Energy and other sources.

### '200 tons of earth'

Making the vehicles' batteries is an energy-intensive process that includes mining and trucking raw materials, assembly in factories, and shipping worldwide. Recycling them is costly. Another viral text shared on Facebook

claimed that 500,000 pounds (227 metric tons) of earth are dug up to extract the metals for one electric car battery. The estimate appeared to originate from a 2020 analysis by the Manhattan Institute, a climate-skeptic research group.

Several experts consulted by AFP said the figures were misleading. Peter Newman, professor of sustainability at Australia's Curtin University, judged it a "gross exaggeration" and said the quantity mined would vary depending on geography and the type of battery. Mining has other impacts not immediately related to the global climate. About 70 percent of cobalt-a battery ingredient-comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where use of child labor in mines has been documented. Access to the ingredients also raises strategic supply concerns, with many of the raw materials held by China, according to the International Energy Agency.

Georg Bieker, a Berlin-based researcher at the ICCT, said the environmental damage from oil-drilling made gasoline production no better. The risk of devastation driven by greenhouse gas emissions, projected in recent reports by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, would be even worse.

"It is correct to demand improvements, e.g. as considered by voluntary standards in the industry and by mandatory due diligence requirements that are foreseen in the upcoming EU battery regulation," he said. "In any case, it's clear that the social and environmental impact of global warming is catastrophic, at a different scale than the mining of battery raw materials."

### 'Stuck in snow'

After a snowstorm stranded hundreds of motorists in Virginia in January, users on Facebook shared posts warning that electric vehicles would run out of power and make the traffic jam even worse. "All those people would be stuck in freezing temperatures without a heated vehicle. And all the cars would be stuck unable to move because you can't bring a charging station to them," read the text. "All those electric cars would become road-blocks to the gasoline powered vehicles."

Several fact-checking organizations scrutinized the claim. They found there was no evidence that electric cars would fare worse in a storm. Studies such as one published in 2015 by the American Chemical Society have found that electric vehicles do consume energy less efficiently when driving in the cold. However various experts said that if stuck in a storm, an electric vehicle would consume less power than a gasoline one, which would have to keep its engine running to power the heating. —AFP



## Business

## Al-Shall Weekly Economic Report

# Individuals remain the largest trading group on Boursa Kuwait

## Boursa Kuwait gained 2.6% in April

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Clearing Company issued its report on the "Trading Volume according to Nationality and Category" for the period 01/01/2022 to 30/04/2022, published on the official website of Boursa Kuwait. The report indicated that individuals are still the largest trading group. Their contribution to sold shares has increased to account for 44.3 percent of total value of sold shares, compared with 44.17 percent for the same period in 2021.

However, their contribution to purchased shares has decreased to 42.7 percent of total value of purchased shares, compared to 44.15 percent for the same period in 2021. Individual traders sold shares worth KD 2.495 billion and bought shares worth KD 2.406 billion, resulting in a net sale of KD 88.404 million. The second largest contributor to market liquidity is the institutions and corporate sector, with an increased share of purchasing yet a decreased share in terms of selling. It accounted for 29.4 percent of total purchased shares (26.1 percent for the same period 2021) and 25.2 percent of total sold shares (26.8 percent for the same period 2021).

This sector bought shares worth KD 1.658 billion and sold shares worth KD 1.418 billion, making its net trading the only-purchasing sector of KD 240.058 million. The third contributor is the customer accounts sector (portfolios) with increased sales yet decreased purchased shares. It accounted for 25.8 percent of the total value of sold shares (24.9 percent for the same period 2021) and 24.1 percent of the total value of purchased shares (25.3 percent for the same period 2021). This sector sold shares worth KD 1.454 billion while buying shares worth KD 1.355 billion, resulting in the highest net sale position of KD 98.484 million. The last contributor to market liquidity is the investment funds sector. Its sales increased and purchases decreased, as it accounted for 4.7 percent of the total value of sold shares (4.2 percent for the same period 2021) and 3.7 percent of the total value of purchased shares (4.4 percent for the same period 2021).

This sector sold shares worth KD 263.786 million and bought shares worth KD 210.615 million, bringing its net selling position to KD 53.171 million. One of the characteristics of Boursa Kuwait is that it continues to be a local stock exchange. Kuwaiti investors were the largest participants as they sold shares worth KD 4.952 billion, representing 88 percent of the total value of sold shares (83.3 percent for the same period 2021) and buying shares worth KD 4.641 billion, acquiring 82.4 percent of total value of the purchased shares (84 percent for the same period 2021). Therefore, their net position was the most-selling sector with KD 311.162 million sold shares. 4 The share of GCC

investors out of total value of sold shares reached 3.6 percent (3.4 percent for the same period 2021), i.e. KD 200.068 million, while their share of purchased shares amounted to 3.1 percent (2.4 percent for the same period 2021), i.e. KD 172.873 million, resulting in a net sale of KD 27.194 million.

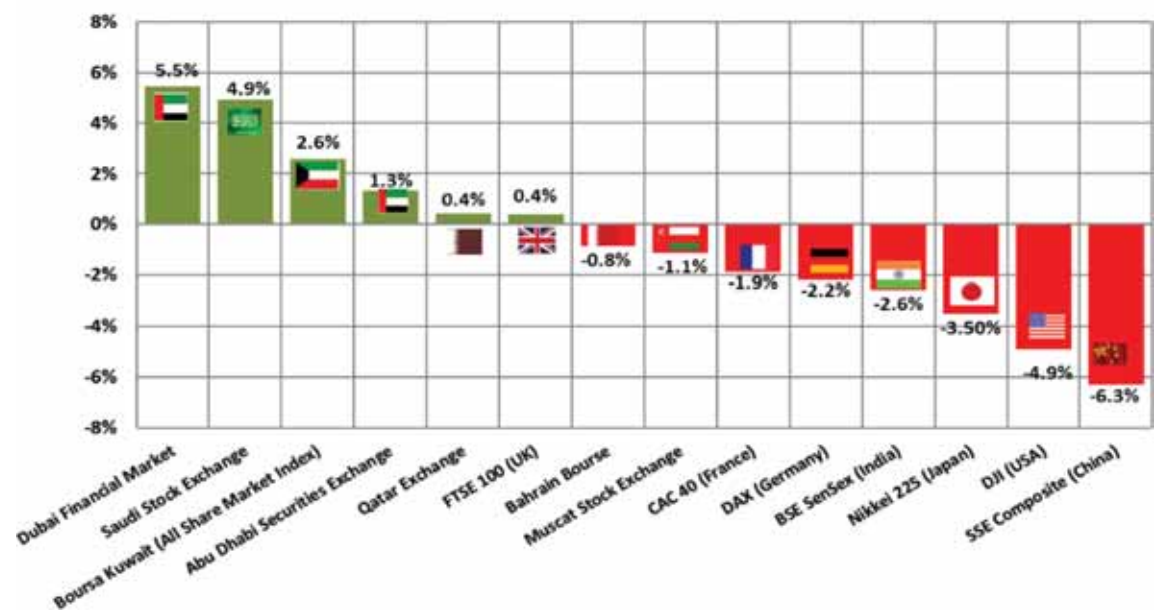
The share of other investors out of total value of purchased shares was at 14.5 percent (13.6 percent for the same period 2021) in the amount of KD 816.077 million, while the value of their sold shares amounted to KD 477.719 million or 8.5 percent of the total value of sold shares (13.3 percent for the same period 2021), thus becoming the only investors with a net purchase of KD 338.357 million. The relative distribution between nationalities has changed from the previous reporting period, as it became 85.2 percent for Kuwaitis, 11.5 percent for traders of other nationalities and 3.3 percent for GCC traders, compared to 83.7 percent for Kuwaitis, 13.4 percent for traders of other nationalities and 2.9 percent for GCC traders for the same period in 2021.

In other words, Boursa Kuwait remained a local stock exchange with local investors being the most active participants, and other investors from outside the GCC still exceeding those from within the GCC countries, and the majority of the trading remaining for individuals. Number of active trading accounts increased by 2.3 percent between the end of December 2021 and the end of April 2022, compared to a decrease of -10.4 percent between the end of December 2020 and the end of April 2021. The number of active trading accounts at the end of April 2022 reached 20,764 accounts or 5 percent of the total accounts, compared to 20,963 accounts at the end of March 2022 or 5.1 percent of total accounts, a decrease of -1 percent during April 2022.

### Selected financial markets

The performance of the month of April was negative for the majority of the selected markets, during which 8 markets recorded losses and 6 markets achieved gains compared to their performance during March. By the end of April, the first third of the current year ended with a positive outcome, as 8 markets achieved gains compared to the levels of their indices at the end of last year, with GCC stock exchanges occupying the first six positions, while six markets recorded losses. The biggest gainer in April was the Dubai market with gains of 5.5 percent, bringing its total gains since the beginning of the year to 16.4 percent. The second largest gainer during April was the Saudi market whose gains amounted to 4.9 percent, thus becoming the

### Performance of Selected Stock Markets End of April 2022



largest gainer since the beginning of the year by 21.7 percent, followed by Boursa Kuwait with 2.6 percent gains. Total gains since the beginning of the year reached to 18.7 percent, i.e. the third largest gainer. Abu Dhabi market came next with 1.3 percent gains during April, ranking second since the beginning of the year with gains of 18.8 percent. Next are the Qatari and British market with 0.4 percent gains for both during April.

The biggest loser in April was the Chinese market whose index lost by -6.3 percent, remaining at the bottom of the negative zone with -16.3 percent losses since the beginning of the year. The second largest loser during the month of April was the American market declining by -4.9 percent, and becoming the third largest loser since the beginning of the year by -9.2 percent. The Japanese market followed by -3.5 percent losses, then the Indian, German and French markets by -2.6 percent, -2.2 percent and -1.9 percent respectively.

It does not seem that the risks that caused the losses of the eight markets in April will recede in May. With the geopolitical risks remaining the main driver of performance and still very difficult to predict, they remain valid drivers of

the performance of the upcoming months. Moreover, the performance of the mentioned economies has direct and indirect impacts on the performance of the global markets. The consequences of the Ukrainian war are significant: as much of a great it has had on the performance of the Russian economy; it has equally affected all the other economies. It has caused pronounced inflationary pressures, rising interest rate and cost of debt in addition to repercussions on asset prices. Therefore, the most probable outcome for the month of May is a negative performance for the major and emerging stock markets with a mixed performance for the Gulf stock markets.

### Boursa Kuwait weekly performance

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was mixed, where the traded value, traded volume and number of transactions increased, while the general index (AlShall Index) decreased. AlShall Index (value weighted) closed at 707.1 points as of last Thursday, showing a decline by 49.5 points or by 6.5 percent compared with its level last week. While it remained higher by 84.3 points or by 13.5 percent compared with the end of 2021.

## Why did India suddenly ban wheat exports?

**NEW DELHI:** India has banned wheat exports, sending bushel prices to record highs and drawing criticism from the Group of Seven worried about protectionism as inflation soars in the wake of the Ukraine war.

### What did India announce?

The world's second-largest producer of wheat said that traders could only enter into new export deals with express government approval. Still permitted are requests approved by New Delhi from other governments reeling from record high prices "to meet their food security needs", according to an order dated May 13.

### What was the policy before?

India previously said it was ready to help fill some of the supply shortages caused by the February invasion of Ukraine, which had accounted for 12 percent of global exports. It planned to increase exports this financial year to 10 million tons from seven million tons.

"Our farmers have ensured that not just India but the whole world is taken care of," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had said in April.

Only last week India said it would send delegations to Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere to discuss boosting wheat exports. It was unclear whether these visits will now go ahead.

### Why did India do this?

The reasons given were runaway inflation and food security in the nation of 1.4 billion people. Some parts of India, Commerce Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam said on Sunday, have seen prices in wheat and flour jump 20 to 40 percent in recent weeks. Because of the sharp rise in global prices, some farmers were selling to traders and not to the government. This got the government worried about its buffer stock of almost 20 million tons-depleted by the pandemic — needed for handouts to millions of poor families and to avert any possible famine. "We don't want wheat to go in an unregulated manner where (wheat) may either get hoarded and is not used for the purpose which we are hoping it will be used for-which is serving the food requirements of vulnerable nations and vulnerable people," Subrahmanyam said.

### What about the heatwave?

India recorded its warmest March on record-blamed on climate change-and in recent weeks has seen a scorching heatwave with temperatures upwards of 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit). This hit farmers in wheat-producing northern India, prompting the government to predict output would fall at least five percent this year from 109 million tons in 2021.

### What was the reaction?

G7 agriculture ministers meeting in Germany said that such measures "would worsen the crisis" of rising commodity prices. "If everyone starts to impose export restrictions or to close markets, that would worsen the crisis," German Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir said. —AFP

## Elegance on your wrist: Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro

**KUWAIT:** Huawei on Monday released their newest and best-looking smartwatch - the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Series. This absolute gorgeous masterpiece embodies elegance on your wrist! It uses remarkable and high-end materials and features a stunning moon phase complication. On top of that, everything that we love about other Huawei smartwatches has gotten even better in the HUAWEI WATCH GT 3 Pro, like the up-to 14 days battery life, professional health management[SK(1)], all-new workout modes, and convenient life-assistant features.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro series is compatible with Huawei devices as well as other Android and iOS devices. The smartwatch is available in two variants - Titanium Edition and Ceramic Edition. Huawei's latest smartwatch will be available in Kuwait for pre-orders on the 12th of May, 2022 for KWD 119.9. It will be available in retail on the 19th of May, 2022 on Huawei's official website and select retailers.

### Elegance on your wrist

Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro premium design is inspired by nature, focusing on the beauty of nature and the integration of cutting-edge technologies. Its high-end design is complemented by a moon phase display; a signature of classic and luxurious watches; that not only adds to premium look and feel of the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro series, but it also brings to users unique watch faces from which they can observe the different phases of the moon as it changes.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Titanium Edition brings a fresh look and feel with a premium design and uses luxury-grade polishing to create a classy look. This edition features a 1.43-inch AMOLED high-definition color display and is equipped with a titanium metal case, sapphire glass lens and ceramic back case.

Meanwhile, the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Ceramic Edition sports a soft and elegant finish. Featuring a 1.32-inch AMOLED HD color display, the watch is a testimony to ingenious craftsmanship and fine polishing techniques that make it lightweight and dazzling. The warm white and the sparkling gold and silver endow it with quality and style. It has a soft natural gloss that highlights its elegant, feminine features. Finished with state-of-the-art craftsmanship, the watch's lasting ceramic luster sparkles with every flick of your wrist. It features an exclusive flower dial with dynamic effects: the five different dial effects show various shapes of the flower as time goes. The dynamic flower dial changes with time embodies design ingenuity with artistry. The vivid blossoming of flowers not only symbolises the passage of time in a fascinating way but also adds a beautiful twist to its presentation.

### Long battery life

One of the biggest perks of this watch is its long-lasting battery life! Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Titanium Edition comes with 14-days battery life and 7-days of battery life in intense usage scenarios and the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro Ceramic Edition with 7 days of battery life. The long battery life ensures that you can wear it all day long and even when sleeping. As the watch supports wireless fast charging, it can give you enough power for an entire day with just 10 minutes of charging.

## solutions by stc partners with LEAN to launch cloud services

**KUWAIT:** solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced its strategic partnership with LEAN, a Kuwait-based cloud service provider specializing in Virtual Data Center and Data Protection services, with the aim of providing innovative cloud based solutions in Kuwait. The partnership builds on solutions by stc's goal of enabling the digital transformation strategies of its corporate customers.

With the increasing number of organizations shifting or considering to shift to the cloud, the combination of solutions by stc's WAN and internet capabilities coupled with LEAN's cloud solutions aim to provide a unique offering selection in the local market. The newly formed partnership provides a local cloud infrastructure in Kuwait, option to localize data, in-depth knowledge and technical knowhow, as well as customer support services. Customers will have the option to select the services they need on demand, making this solution a cost-effective, agile, and secure

cloud infrastructure model that can assist them in pursuing their digital transformation strategies.

Through the partnership, solutions by stc will offer its corporate customers, especially SMEs, with Virtual Data Centers (VDC), Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS), and Backup as a Service (BaaS) through a flexible prepaid payment scheme. Replacing traditional hardware based IT infrastructure, the VDC will provide customers with a more secure cloud-based solution that requires no upfront hardware investment or long-term financial commitments. As for DRaaS, the service is designed to protect an organization's network and mission-critical systems from hardware failures, human error, and malware attacks. BaaS will assist organizations in safeguarding their data with built in encryption capabilities that can be accessed through pre-defined recovery parameters.

solutions by stc indicated in a statement that considering the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) regulations regarding public and private cloud hosting, data classified as 'sensitive private information' may only be stored on public, private, or hybrid clouds located within the country. This decision, which falls in line with Kuwait's 2035 vision, reflects positively towards solutions by stc's ongoing commitment to expand its offering line, which in this case focuses on cloud solu-

tions. Through its strategic approach to partner with local and international organizations, the Company mentioned that its strategic partnership with LEAN will bring pioneering cloud-based IT infrastructure, disaster recovery, and data protection services to serve the local market. The local cloud services will be built from the ground up with the highest enterprise-grade standards. While there were several key attributes to establishing the relationship, solutions by stc highlighted that LEAN is the first VMware Cloud Verified Service Provider in Kuwait. LEAN is also ISO 27001 and ISO 27017 certified, and is in full compliance with Kuwait's regulatory requirements.

solutions by stc is proud to offer the innovative cloud solutions to its B2B customers who will greatly benefit from the various features that suit their requirements. Following its strategy to offer business solutions all under one roof, solutions by stc has taken great strides to introduce new products that cater to the growing and diverse customer base. These included a range of connectivity solutions through stc such as fixed or wireless services, 5G technology, as well as ICT, IoT, AI, and other IT products and services. solutions by stc will continue to introduce pioneering technology enabled solutions based on the latest innovations in this digital era, serving as the preferred gateway to its customers through digital transformation.



### Professional health management on your wrist

In terms of health, Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro series supports Electrocardiogram (ECG) data collection, which can accurately provide single-lead ECG measurements, real-time analysis, sinus rhythm and atrial fibrillation detection, and premature atrial and ventricular beat reminders for users and supports arterial stiffness detection, allowing users to actively prevent the risk of vascular diseases. It also offers all-round health management in heart rate monitoring, blood oxygen, sleep, respiratory health, and pressure, which helps keep tracking the changes in your body. With the Huawei Health App on the phone, you can synchronize real-time exercise and health monitoring data to pay close attention to the health of you and your family.

Huawei TruSeen 5.0+ does not only fur-

ther improves the accuracy of heart rate monitoring, but also improves the accuracy of SpO2 monitoring.

### Stay active with all-new workout modes

Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro offers several professional workout modes like golf driving range mode, running, walking, mountain climbing, hiking, cross-country running, cycling, open water swimming, triathlon, skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, free training, elliptical machine and rowing machine. If you love free diving, the new professional Free Diving Mode on the watch might get you excited. The watch achieves the EN 13319 standard, a ground-breaking diving-level waterproof performance, which can support free dives up to 30 meters deep, accompanying you to explore underwater wonders.



## Business

# China's retail sales slump as lockdowns cause chaos

## Factory output plunge to lowest levels in around two years

**BEIJING:** China's retail sales and factory output slumped to their lowest levels in around two years, official data showed Monday, capturing the dismal economic fallout from Beijing's zero-COVID policy. The world's second-largest economy has persisted with strict virus measures, choking up global supply chains as dozens of Chinese cities—including key business hub Shanghai—grapple with restrictions.

Although officials have said they plan to gradually reopen the city, there is no sign of Beijing shifting from the strict zero-COVID approach which analysts warn is severely hitting the economy.

The latest cut came Monday when the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) announced data showing that retail sales shrank 11.1 percent on-year in April. It is the biggest slump since March 2020, as consumers remained cooped up at home or jittery over restrictions as China battles its worst COVID outbreak since the early days of the pandemic. "In April, the epidemic had a big impact on economic operations," NBS spokesman Fu Linghui told reporters Monday, adding that the outbreak had a "significantly larger-than-expected" effect.

But he stressed that the hit would be "short-term". Industrial production growth sank 2.9 percent on-year, reflecting damage from shuttered factories and transportation woes as officials ramped up COVID restrictions last month. This is down from 5.0 percent growth in March. "The prolonged Shanghai lockdown and its ripple effect through China, as well as logistics delays resulting from highway controls...have severely affected domestic supply chains," said Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics.

He added that household consumption was "hit



**SHENYANG, China:** This photo taken on May 15, 2022 shows people selling items from the trunks of their cars along a river in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

even harder" and disruptions could extend into June.

Home sales dropped 32 percent on-year in the first four months, NBS data showed, reflecting weakness in the key property sector which was struggling even before the latest lockdowns. Several Chinese developers have sagged under the weight of massive borrowing and defaulted on million-dollar debt repayments.

### Shanghai shutdowns

Shanghai came under heavy restrictions in early April with some 25 million ordered to stay home in what was originally portrayed as an eight-day lockdown across two halves of the city.

But the shutdowns have dragged for weeks and wreaked havoc on supply chains, spreading frustra-

tion among residents. Officials promised over the weekend to start reopening the city in phases in the next month, while Xinhua news agency said US electric car giant Tesla had made its second overseas shipment after suspending production for nearly three weeks.

But small business owners remain skeptical. "I don't have even the slightest expectation about (being able to reopen soon)," one restaurant owner told AFP, asking to remain anonymous.

"Why are people still believing them?" The urban unemployment rate also climbed in April to 6.1 percent—the highest in more than two years.

Beijing has announced measures to help young people find jobs, including social insurance subsidies for smaller firms that hire more graduates, and officials have lowered the mortgage rate for first-time homebuyers. But there is fear that stifling restrictions will hamper growth plans.

Financial services firm Gavekal said in a recent note that previous suggestions that "meaningful policy easing is on the horizon have not played out."

"As Shanghai and Beijing struggle to reopen...officials may yet be forced to crank up stimulus sooner," Gavekal added. Economic experts urged support for businesses and consumers at a forum on Saturday, with a top university professor saying the industrial chain cannot be forgotten while reducing infections. But China cannot "rely on expanding investment and launching large projects," or on handouts to boost consumption, Premier Li Keqiang said in a speech published by state media Saturday. Instead, he said, practice has proved that tax and fee reductions are "effective, fair and inclusive". — AFP



**MOSCOW, Russia:** In this file photo, employees serve clients in a McDonald's restaurant on Pushkin square in Moscow. American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, the company said May 16, 2022. — AFP

## McDonald's to exit Russia and sell its business in country

**MOSCOW:** American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, the company said Monday. Many Western businesses have pulled out of Russia since its invasion of Ukraine in February.

And earlier on Monday, French automaker Renault announced it had handed over its Russian assets to the government in Moscow, marking the first major nationalization of the economic disentanglement.

McDonald's in March closed all of its 850 restaurants in the country, where it says it employs 62,000 people. But on Monday it went a step further, saying in a statement: "After more than 30 years of operations in the country, McDonald's Corporation announced it will exit the Russian market and has initiated a process to sell its Russian business." "The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, and the precipitating unpredictable operating environment, have led McDonald's to conclude that continued ownership of the business in Russia is no longer tenable, nor is it consistent with McDonald's values."

It said it was looking to sell "its entire portfolio of

McDonald's restaurants in Russia to a local buyer". The company added that after the sale, the restaurants would no longer be able to use the McDonald's name, logo, branding or menu.

Russia, where McDonald's directly manages more than 80 percent of the restaurants bearing its name, accounts for 9 percent of the company's revenue and 3 percent of its operating profit. Chief executive Chris Kempczinski said in a statement: "We're exceptionally proud of the 62,000 employees who work in our restaurants, along with the hundreds of Russian suppliers who support our business, and our local franchisees. Their dedication and loyalty to McDonald's make today's announcement extremely difficult. "However, we have a commitment to our global community and must remain steadfast in our values. And our commitment to our values means that we can no longer keep the Arches shining there."

On February 24, Russia's President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into pro-Western Ukraine, triggering unprecedented Western sanctions against Russia and sparking an exodus of foreign corporations including H&M, Starbucks and Ikea.

The authorities said they were ready to nationalize foreign assets—as happened with Renault—and some officials assured Russians that their favorite brands would have domestic alternatives. Officials in Moscow have sought to downplay the gravity of the Western sanctions, promising that Russia will adapt and take steps to stop the flight of foreign currency and capital. — AFP

assets of the Renault Group to the Russian Federation and the government of Moscow," the industry and trade ministry said in a statement.

Under the agreement Renault will retain a six-year option to buy back the stake in AvtoVAZ. The deal also included Renault's Moscow plant, Avtoframos, which makes Renault and Nissan models. "Today, we have taken a difficult but necessary decision: and we are making a responsible choice towards our 45,000 employees in Russia, while preserving the Group's performance and our ability to return to the country in the future, in a different context," Renault chief executive Luca de Meo said in a statement.

Contacted by AFP, Renault refused to confirm whether it had sold its Russian assets for one ruble.

Thanks to AvtoVAZ, Russia was Renault Group's second-largest market behind Europe last year, with around half a million vehicles sold.

### 'New page in history'

Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin said production of passenger cars at the Renault plant would resume under the Soviet-era Moskvich (Muscovite) brand after the French automaker decided to close it. "This is its right, but we cannot allow thousands of workers to be left without work," Sobyanin said in a statement.

"In 2022, we will open a new page in the history of Moskvich," he added. "We will try to keep most of the team directly working at the plant and with its subcontractors." The first Moskvich cars were produced in 1946 and were inspired by Germany's Opel "Kadett K38." The models were notorious for their shoddiness and were eventually phased out in post-Soviet Russia.

Sobyanin said KamAZ truckmaker will be the Moscow plant's main partner which will in the future also make electric cars. — AFP

## Ryanair slashes annual loss as lockdowns lifted

**DUBLIN:** Irish no-frills carrier Ryanair on Monday announced a large reduction in annual net losses as the aviation sector recovered from pandemic lockdowns. Loss after tax dropped to €355 million (\$369 million) in the 12 months to the end of March, compared with a net loss of €1.0 billion in its previous financial year.

"This recovery, however, remains fragile" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, chief executive Michael O'Leary said in a statement. "Given the continuing risk of adverse news flows on" Ukraine and COVID, "it is impractical—if not impossible—to provide a sensible or accurate profit guidance range at this time", he added.

While Ryanair expects cost increases as a result of surging oil prices fuelled by the war, it hopes "to return to reasonable profitability" in its current financial year. It forecast passenger traffic of 165 million in its current year, compared with a pre-pandemic level of 149 million. The airline flew more than 97 million passengers last year compared with 27.5 million during the previous 12 months period when the pandemic struck. Group revenue almost tripled to €4.8 billion last year as travel demand recovered.

### Fares to rise

Despite surging inflation, Ryanair said its average fares fell more than a quarter to €27. But with demand for the summer peak season set to jump, prices were set to rise, according to O'Leary. "It seems to us that there will be higher prices into that peak summer period because there's so much demand for the beaches of Europe," he told BBC radio.

Ryanair had expected a much lower loss until the

Omicron variant struck in late 2021, hitting fares and causing fresh disruption across its European routes. The airline said it remained committed to restoring pre-COVID salaries for all its staff as soon as it returns to levels of profitability seen before the pandemic struck. As well as cutting salaries, Ryanair axed 3,000 pilot and cabin crew jobs, or 15 percent of staff, in the wake of the pandemic.



**MARIGNANE, France:** In this file photograph taken on February 1, 2011, Irish budget airline Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary poses for photographers after a press conference in Marignane near Marseille-Provence airport, southern France. — AFP

As travel recovers, however, airlines are in fierce competition to recruit staff and are in some cases offering welcome bonuses. Following the earnings update, Ryanair's share price slid three percent to €13.21 in Dublin trading. "There had been high hopes that by now the airlines would be riding high on a burst of pent-up demand from holiday makers but a warning from Ryanair that recovery remains fragile, has sent companies into a fresh bout of turbulence," noted Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. Shares in rival EasyJet dropped 1.5 percent to 491 pence in London. — AFP

## Renault hands Russian assets to Moscow

**MOSCOW:** French automaker Renault has handed over its Russian assets to the Russian government, both parties announced Monday, marking the first major nationalization since the onset of sanctions over Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine.

Renault controlled 68 percent of AvtoVAZ, the largest carmaker in Russia with the country's top brand Lada, but was under pressure to pull out of the country since the start of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in late February. Renault has funneled billions of euros into the Soviet-era factory since the two automotive makers signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2008. No financial details were provided on Monday but Russian Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov said in April that Renault planned to sell its Russian assets for "one symbolic ruble".

"Agreements were signed on the transfer of Russian



## US carrier JetBlue launches hostile bid for Spirit Airlines

**WASHINGTON:** American low-cost carrier JetBlue Airlines announced on Monday a hostile takeover bid for its rival Spirit Airlines, which had rejected a previous bid in favor of a merger with Frontier. Earlier this month, Spirit reiterated its support for a merger with Frontier Airlines, saying it concluded the \$3.6 billion JetBlue offer involved excessive regulatory risk. It said the Department of Justice's challenge of JetBlue's alliance with American Airlines raised the odds that a takeover of Spirit by JetBlue might get blocked.

"JetBlue has filed a 'Vote No' proxy statement and commenced an all-cash tender offer," JetBlue said in a statement, asking Spirit shareholders to reject the proposed merger with Frontier at a meeting on 10 June. The company offered a cash buyout of Spirit shares at

a unit price of \$30 — adding that it was prepared to return to its original offer of \$33 per share if Spirit agreed to return to the negotiating table.

"The Spirit Board of Directors has failed to act in the best interests of their shareholders by refusing to engage constructively on our clearly superior proposal to acquire Spirit," JetBlue said in a Monday statement. "The Spirit Board failed to provide us the necessary diligence information they provided Frontier and then summarily rejected our proposal, which addressed their regulatory concerns, without asking us even a single question about it." "They based their rejection on unsupported claims that are easily refuted." In Wall Street trade ahead of the open, Spirit shares soared by 20 percent, while JetBlue and Frontier were both also up. In early February, budget carriers Spirit and Frontier announced they were combining to create a competitive low-cost carrier that aims to test the dominance of larger rivals.

The merger would create the nation's fifth-largest airline by seat capacity, behind American, United, Delta and Southwest. But in April, JetBlue challenged the deal, bidding to buy Spirit and offering a similar argument about challenging larger US carriers. — AFP





Zion Ricks-Gaines, who is totally blind, poses for a photo with his skateboard at a skateboard park in San Francisco, California. — AFP photos



Zion Ricks-Gaines gets air while executing an ollie at a skateboard park in San Francisco.



Dexter Lotz (left) helps Zion Ricks-Gaines (right) navigate a skateboard park in San Francisco.

## SHOT TWICE, COMPLETELY BLIND: US TEEN IS STILL SKATEBOARDING

Being shot in both eyes and completely blinded didn't stop Zion Ricks-Gaines from skateboarding. It made him want to do it even more. "I still want to go pro, I still want to accomplish being a professional skateboarder," the 19-year-old said as he readied a kickflip at a skatepark in San Francisco. And now he wants to share that enthusiasm with everyone he meets.

"I want to start more skate after-school programs for students. I feel like I wouldn't have really looked in that direction if I had my sight." Zion's life was derailed outside a bar late last year when a man who had been drinking began shooting at him and his friends as they made their way home. He was hit

twice. One bullet destroyed his right eye; the other smashed the socket around his left, puncturing the eyeball and leaving it deflated and withered.

Days are now lived in darkness ("It's like night-sky purple... with no stars.") There was a long stretch in the hospital and he was fitted for a prosthetic eye. Not content with a regular iris and pupil, he opted instead for an eye with the logo of his favorite skate brand, Spitfire, a grinning head of flames. He pops the prosthetic in and out of his socket on demand.

Very soon he was back out at the skatepark, doing what he had been doing since he was 12. "When I hopped on my skateboard, I felt like I had some-

thing to connect to my old life," he said. "I felt a weight off my shoulders." Anyone who has spent time at a skatepark will have marveled at the improbable feats of balance and daring on casual display.

Helmetless skaters race over wooden ramps, hurling themselves several feet in the air as their board twists and pivots at their feet, before magically correcting itself to land right side up. Metal rails offer six feet of board sliding glory—or rib-shattering pain if it all goes wrong.

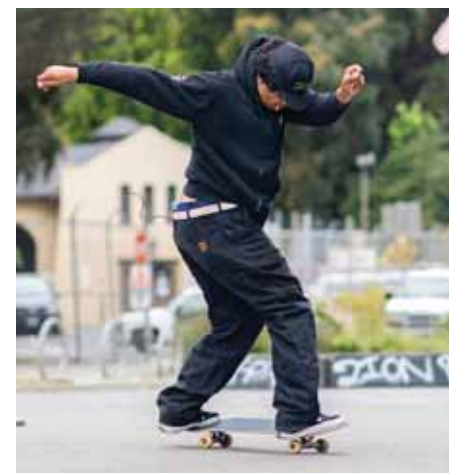
It's tricky, even in ideal circumstances, but harder if you can't see the banks, ledges and curbs you are attempting, or even the board you are riding. "When I approach a new obstacle, I usually feel it out with my cane, or

ask friends what they see, how it's set up, what should I try to look out for. "And I just work my way up and find what I'm most comfortable with." It helps that with seven years of skating, a lot of what his body needs to do is muscle memory, he says. "If I want to land a trick, I know I can do it by committing and not being scared to fall." Though fall he does.

"All the time," he laughs. "But that's just a part of it. I fall now more than I used to, but it's not from skating. "I'll try to skate a ledge, the grind won't work and then I'll pick my board up and start walking, and walk into the ledge and fall." Fellow skaters—who spray-painted a ramp with his name the day after he was shot—happily guide Zion through the park. Dexter Lotz says being blinded has made Zion an even better version of himself.

"He's always been positive, but now he's super positive," said the 24-year-old, who has been a friend for six years. "He seems like he got a second chance and he really needs to use it... he seems like he wants to share that with everybody around him. "It's obviously unfortunate what happened, but what he's doing is beautiful."

With a criminal case against his alleged attacker under way, Zion shows no signs of bitterness towards the man who took his sight, focusing his anger instead on the gun violence that blights America, and which claims tens of thousands of lives every year. "I personally believe we don't need guns," he says. "I



Zion Ricks-Gaines skates past a platform with his name tagged on it at a skateboard park.

feel like we would be a way better society if we learn to do jujitsu or any style of fighting and handled it that way and put the guns down."

Zion says that one day he wants to have children, and to be able to tell them about his experience. But what he tells them is never going to be negative. "I could sit at home and just be sad because I have no vision, but that's not gonna do shit for me, you know? "I just appreciate everything I've got. Ninety percent of what you have is how you respond to it. "I feel like I really am so blessed to just be where I'm at in life." —AFP



Zion Ricks-Gaines falls after attempting a maneuver at a skateboard park in San Francisco.



Zion Ricks-Gaines, who is totally blind, displays his custom glass eye at a skateboard park in San Francisco.

## Ukrainians embrace tattoos amid patriotic outpouring

From odes to embattled military units to expressions of love for the motherland, Ukrainians are embracing tattoos amid the ongoing war with Russia. At the "Art Weapon" festival, dozens chose to show their love for their nation by getting inked, with payments for the tattoos going straight to the Ukrainian military as donations. The event took place at an abandoned Soviet-era factory on Saturday, where droning electronica clashed with crunchy garage rock and the buzzing sound of tattoo needles.

A 20-year-old soldier, who spoke on condition of anonymity, was getting inked for the first time. His new tattoo was dedicated to Ukraine's Azov regiment and the group's fighters—many of whom are under attack at a steel plant in the besieged port city of Mariupol, including two of his friends. "It's very difficult for me, but I can't imagine what they feel," he told AFP as he prepared to go under the needle. "They told me they will stand for Ukraine until they die."

For actress and musician Marusia Ionova, 27, her new tattoo—which simply says "Kyiv"—serves as a reminder of the time when she was forced to flee her home at the beginning of the war and the wave of emotions she has felt since. "That's why I decided to get the name of

my favorite city in the world," she said. "The level of emotions are so different... it's really hard to explain," she said of her new-found connection with Ukraine following the outbreak of the war. Tattoo artist Zhenia, 27, said he had seen a major uptick in requests for patriotic tattoos from customers, including from many first-timers.



A Ukrainian man gets a tattoo during the 'Art Weapon' festival in Kyiv.

### 'Intense emotion'

"The war changed them and they started getting tattoos. And their first tattoos are patriotic ones," he added. These include chest-sized Ukrainian tridents and more brazen slogans like "death to the enemy". The Russian invasion and war that followed has triggered an outpouring of Ukrainian patriotism, drawing a clear distinction between the lives they led before the conflict and the spirit and unity they have felt in its wake.

Since the war began, large swathes of the population have voluntarily offered their services to Ukraine's war effort—from making Molotov cocktails to weaving camouflage nets and making donations en masse to the country's armed forces. —AFP



Ukrainian servicemen get tattoos during the 'Art Weapon' festival in Kyiv. — AFP photos

## French city rekindles burkini row with pool rule change

The Alpine city of Grenoble is set to reignite one of France's most explosive debates on Monday by authorizing the wearing of the "burkini" by Muslim women in state-run swimming pools. The all-in-one swimsuit, used by some Muslim women to cover their bodies and hair while bathing, has become a controversial talking point during the holiday season in recent years. Seen as a symbol of creeping Islamism by its critics and an affront to France's secular traditions, many right-wingers and some feminists would like to ban it outright.

It is prohibited in most state-run pools for hygiene, not religious reasons—where strict swimwear rules apply to all, including men who are required to wear tight-fitting trunks. Grenoble's city council, dominated by the EELV green party, is set to scrap its bathing dress code in a vote at a meeting on Monday starting at 1300 GMT. The move would effectively authorize long body coverings alongside beach shorts for men and topless bathing for women.

"All we want is for women and men to be able to dress how they want," mayor Eric Piolle told broadcaster RMC Monday. Opponents see it differently, including the influential conservative head of the wider Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes region, Laurent Wauquiez, who has promised to withdraw funding from the city. "I am convinced that what Mr Piolle is defending is a dreadful dead-end for our country," Wauquiez said at the beginning of May, accusing him of "doing deals with political Islam" to "buy votes".

### 'Harm to Republican values'

The regional spat has put the burkini back in the headlines nationally, animating French talk shows and the political class ahead of parliamentary elections next month. The issue of how people dress for the pool touches on highly sensitive topics in France, including fears about the influence of Islam and threats to the country's cherished secularism.

"It seems to me that [mayor Piolle]

doesn't realize the harm he is doing to our Republican values," Prisca Thevenot, a spokeswoman for President Emmanuel Macron's party, told Radio J on Monday. "This would be breaking with the rules to respond to political desires based on religion," she added. Opposition councillors in Grenoble wrote in an open letter last week that "the burkini aims, purely and simply, to impose Islamist values at the

### 'Fight against Islamophobia'

Monday's vote in Grenoble "is an important moment for everyone concerned and their allies, but also in the fight against Islamophobia and control over women's bodies", local campaign group Citizens' Alliance wrote on its Facebook page. Demonstrations supporting and opposing the move are also planned in the city following the council



heart of bathing areas and public leisure pursuits".

Attempts by several local mayors in the south of France to ban the burkini on Mediterranean beaches in the summer of 2016 kicked off the first firestorm around the bathing suit. The rules, introduced after a string of terror attacks in France, were eventually struck down as discriminatory. Three years later, a group of women in Grenoble caused a splash by forcing their way into a pool with burkinis, leading the prime minister at the time to insist that the rules should be followed. French sports brand Decathlon also found itself at the centre of a similar row in 2019 when it announced plans to sell a "sports hijab" enabling Muslim women to cover their hair while running.

meeting where mayor Piolle is expected to succeed in pushing through the change. Grenoble would not be the first to change its rules, however.

The northwestern city of Rennes quietly updated its pool code in 2019 to allow burkinis and other types of swimwear. The debate about the burkini comes as French Muslim women footballers are battling to overturn a ban on the wearing of religious symbols during competitive matches. The French Football Federation currently prevents players from playing while wearing "ostentatious" religious symbols such as the Muslim hijab or the Jewish kippa. A women's collective known as "les Hijabeuses" launched a legal challenge to the rules in November last year. —AFP



## Lifestyle | Features

## Iran film-makers condemn arrest of fellow directors



Prize-winning Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof

A group of Iranian actors and film directors have published an open letter condemning the questioning and arrest of several film-makers in recent days as well as raids on their homes. The letter, published on the Instagram account of prize-winning Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, also condemned the current climate for making films in Iran. It has emerged as protests continue in Iran over price hikes for basic goods including bread that have left at least one dead but it was not immediately clear if there was a connection.

The letter said that Iranian security agencies had "raided the homes and offices of several film-makers, confiscated their personal and business belongings, and 'begun interrogations and arrests'". Over the last years, interference by security services in Iranian cinema as well as censorship has "reduced the job security of film-makers to the lowest possible level", it said, saying this was a "violation of freedom of expression". The statement did not identify the film-makers arrested but posts on social media said the documentary film-makers Firoozeh

Khosravani and Mina Keshavarz were among those detained. Both women were said to be in Tehran's Evin prison. There was no immediate comment from Iranian officials.

IranWire, a news website based outside Iran, said it had also received information about "a new wave of arrests of documentary film-makers and cinematographers" and that Khosravani and Keshavarz had both been arrested on May 9 at their homes on the basis of arrest warrants issued by a court. Rasoulof won the Golden Bear top prize

at the 2020 Berlin film festival with his film "There is no Evil"—a lacerating study of the use of the death penalty—but was unable to accept the prize in person as he was barred from leaving Iran. He has been sentenced to one year in prison but has yet to go to jail. Also among the signatories was another prize-winning film-maker, Jafar Panahi, who is barred from the country and making films but has continued to make movies acclaimed abroad in defiance of the authorities. — AFP

## 'Doctor Strange' slips but stays atop N America box office

Marvel and Disney's "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" saw a sharp dropoff this weekend from its blockbuster opening, but still reported \$61 million in estimated ticket sales to top North America's box office, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. The superhero sequel, again starring Benedict Cumberbatch, had opened last weekend to a year's best \$187 million. It has now earned \$292 million domestically and an additional \$396 million abroad for a global total of \$688 million.

Far behind in second place for the Friday-through-Sunday period was Universal's animated action-comedy "The Bad Guys." The DreamWorks Animation production, with a voice cast led by Sam Rockwell, Awkwafina and Anthony Ramos, took in \$6.9 million. In third for the second straight weekend was Paramount's family-

friendly "Sonic the Hedgehog 2," at \$4.6 million.

"Firestarter," a new release from Universal based on the Stephen King horror-thriller, took in \$3.8 million, a disappointing opening for a major-studio thriller. It stars Zac Efron (the onetime "High School Musical" heartthrob) and Sydney Lemmon (of "Fear the Walking Dead" fame) as parents who have been trying to hide daughter Ryan Kiera Armstrong from a shadowy federal agency that wants to use her, um, matchless ability to start fires using only her mind.

The film has received a dismal 12 percent rating on the Rotten Tomatoes website, in sharp contrast to the fifth-place film, A24's sci-fi yarn "Everything Everywhere All at Once," which scored 96 percent on the site and earned \$3.3 million in its eighth weekend out. Michelle Yeoh stars in "Everything" as a beleaguered laundromat owner who must resolve some messy family issues while doing existential battle in a bizarre and chaotic multiverse.

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore" (\$2.4 million) "The Lost City" (\$1.7 million) "The Northman" (\$1.7 million) "Family Camp" (\$1.4 million) "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent" (\$1.1 million)—AFP



In this file photo British actor Benedict Cumberbatch arrives for the Los Angeles premiere of "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" held at Dolby Theater in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

## Amber Heard to return to witness stand as defamation trial resumes

Johnny Depp's ex-wife Amber Heard returns to the witness stand on Monday as the celebrity couple's bitter defamation trial resumes in a Virginia courtroom after a one-week hiatus. Heard's attorneys are expected to wrap up their questioning of the 36-year-old



US actor Johnny Depp waves as he departs at the end of the day of a defamation trial at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia.



US actress Amber Heard testifies at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP photos

actress before turning her over to Depp's legal team for what is expected to be a grueling cross-examination. The first four weeks of the multi-million dollar defamation case being heard by a seven-person jury in Fairfax, near Washington, have exposed the couple's volatile relationship in excruciating detail.

In her two days of testimony, a frequently tearful Heard accused Depp of becoming a physically abusive "monster" when he had been drinking and abusing drugs and of being obsessively jealous of her co-stars. "He hated, hated James Franco," she said. Depp, during his four

days on the witness stand, denied ever striking Heard and claimed she was the one who was frequently violent.

During a particularly heated argument between the couple in Australia, an "irate" Heard severed the tip of one of his fingers by throwing a vodka bottle at him, Depp said. Heard alleged that Depp sexually assaulted her with a bottle during the fight which occurred in March 2015, a month after their marriage. He then used blood from his severed finger to write messages on walls and mirrors throughout the home where the couple had been staying during filming of the fifth installment of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise, she said.

## Closing arguments on May 27

The 58-year-old Depp brought the suit against Heard over an op-ed she wrote for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse." Heard, who had a starring role in "Aquaman," did not name Depp in the op-ed, but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. The Texas-born Heard countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands.

Judge Penney Azcarate has scheduled closing arguments in the case for May 27, after which it will go to the jury. Depp's lawyers have put experts on the stand who testified that he has lost millions because of the abuse accusations, including a \$22.5-million payday for a sixth installment of "Pirates."

Depp filed the defamation complaint in the United States after losing a separate libel case in London in November 2020 that he brought against The Sun for calling him a "wife-beater." Depp, a three-time Oscar nominee, and Heard met in 2009 on the set of "The Rum Diary" and were married in February 2015. Their divorce was finalized two years later. — AFP



## Brazilian dance star's Bolshoi exodus brings him home

Former member of the Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, Brazilian dancer David Motta (left), who left the Russian company due to the war in Ukraine, performs during the rehearsal of 'Swan Lake' at the Municipal Theatre of Rio de Janeiro.

The day Russia invaded Ukraine, Brazilian dancer David Motta, then a leading soloist at the renowned Bolshoi ballet, knew he had to leave the country where he had lived half his life. It was an "obvious" decision—his heart went out to the people of Ukraine—but "the hardest one of my life," he said. The gracefully lanky 25-year-old had called Russia home for 13 years. The Bolshoi Academy had taken him in as a boy and turned him into an international star. "It was a whirlwind of emotions," Motta said, after wiping the sweat from his face following a recent rehearsal in Rio de Janeiro.

"I couldn't sleep for days. I didn't know where I would go or how to start again." Fearing the borders would close, he hatched an "escape plan," flying to Istanbul, then Milan and finally Brazil. Now back in Rio, Motta will say a symbolic goodbye to Moscow with a limited run of performances of "Swan Lake," the iconic Tchaikovsky ballet that premiered at the Bolshoi in 1877. It is a short homecoming: Motta, who opens Saturday, will dance the role of Prince Siegfried for just three nights in Rio. Then, he will turn a page, moving to Berlin to start a new contract with the Staatsballet.

## 'Caught in the crossfire'

Motta was among the first foreigners at the Bolshoi to announce his departure. Now all the company's expatriate dancers have left the country, he told AFP in an interview after an intense dress rehearsal at Rio's Municipal Theater, still dressed in his white tights and gold-embroidered top. He said he regrets that artists have been "caught in the crossfire" of the Ukraine conflict, when their role should be "bringing cultures and countries together."

Russian artists, who have been hit by a series of international boycotts, are particularly suffering, he said. "Unfortunately, all Russians are being

blamed for one person's actions," he said, referring to President Vladimir Putin. But he will "never criticize" Russia, he said. "I grew up there. It taught me so much. It will always be close to my heart." Motta was born in Cabo Frio, a coastal city north of Rio de Janeiro.

He discovered a passion for ballet at an early age, and won a scholarship

through the Bolshoi's ranks to the post of leading soloist—one step below principal dancer.

## 'The air I breathe'

"Ballet is everything to me. The air I breathe. I go to bed every night and wake up every morning thinking about ballet," he said. His short run in Rio will be "priceless," he said, because he will



Brazilian dancer David Motta (left) performs during the rehearsal of 'Swan Lake' at the Municipal Theatre of Rio de Janeiro.



Brazilian dancer David Motta (center) performs during the rehearsal of 'Swan Lake' at the Municipal Theatre of Rio de Janeiro.



## Sports

# Suarez bids farewell to Atletico as Sevilla qualify for Champions League

**MADRID:** Luis Suarez said he will always have Atletico Madrid in his heart after the striker waved goodbye to the club's home fans following a 1-1 draw against Sevilla on Sunday. The result meant Sevilla finally confirmed their place in La Liga's top four as a late equalizer by Youssef En-Nesyri at the Wanda Metropolitano secured qualification for the Champions League. "Thank you Lucho for making us champions", read a giant banner unfurled in the crowd before kick-off while Suarez was visibly tearful as he paraded the pitch with his family after full-time. The 35-year-old is set to leave Atletico when his two-year contract expires this summer. After being forced out by cash-strapped Barcelona in 2020, Suarez exacted revenge by proving instrumental in Atletico's monumental La Liga title triumph last season, when he scored 21 goals in 32 league appearances and finished as the team's top scorer.

The Uruguayan has been useful but less emphatic this term, scoring 14 goals in 48 appearances and his own dip from last year's high standards has been symptomatic of Atletico's malaise more generally. Suarez has often started on the bench since the turn of the year, with Joao Felix increasingly preferred by Atletico coach Diego Simeone.

"I thank all the Atletico fans, every one of them," said Suarez afterwards. "The love they gave me since I arrived has been amazing and I will not forget it. I tried to return it on the pitch, I gave myself 200 per cent to a club that opened its doors to me. I will always carry the affection of this club with me after not being able to enjoy myself the previous season. I will take Atletico with me in my heart." Jose Gimenez's first-half header looked set to give Atletico victory and with Real Betis beating Granada, Sevilla's fight for fourth would have gone down to a nail-biting final day. Instead, En-Nesyri nodded in Oliver Torres' cross with five minutes remaining to earn Sevilla the point they needed to

guarantee their top-four spot, after a hugely disappointing few weeks that has seen their coach Julen Lopetegui come under pressure. Instead, Lopetegui was tossed into the air by Sevilla's celebrating players after the final whistle. En-Nesyri's equalizer also prevented Atletico making sure of third place. Atletico sit a point ahead of Sevilla and have a tough trip away at Real Sociedad to finish the season next weekend. Sevilla will play at home to Athletic Bilbao. Real Sociedad came from behind to defeat Villarreal 2-1 at La Ceramica in what was billed as the sudden-death match for Europa League qualification.

Villarreal had to win to keep their hopes of finishing sixth alive and took the lead after Francis Coquelin's acrobatic effort just before half-time. But La Real came storming back in the second half, Alexander Isak tapping in at the back post before Martin Zubimendi prodded in after Villarreal failed to clear. It means Real Sociedad and Real Betis will play in the Europa League next season while Villarreal sit a point ahead of Athletic Bilbao and might need a result away at Barcelona on the last day to qualify for the Europa Conference League.

## Barca seal second place

Barcelona sealed second place although a drab, goalless draw away at Getafe extends an underwhelming end to the campaign for the Catalans. The result, though, suited both teams as a point guaranteed Getafe's survival while Barca qualify for the Spanish Super Cup, which earns them around eight million euros. Cadiz are right in the middle of the relegation fight and left the Nuevo Mirandilla disappointed, despite a 1-1 draw at home to already-crowned champions Real Madrid.

Carlo Ancelotti continues to rotate his team ahead of the Champions League final against Liverpool on



**MADRID:** Sevilla's French defender Jules Koude (left) challenges Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez during their Spanish league match at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium on May 15, 2022. — AFP

May 28 and Cadiz were the latest team to profit, with Karim Benzema, Thibaut Courtois and Luka Modric all left at home. Madrid took the lead when Mariano Diaz steered in and while Cadiz equalised through Ruben Sobrino, they could have won it when Andrey Lunin brought down Alvaro Negredo and the referee pointed to the spot. Lunin, though, made amends by saving Negredo's spot-kick.

Mallorca are level on points with Cadiz after they gave their survival hopes a major boost by beating Rayo Vallecano 2-1, Abdon Prats scoring an incredible 92nd-minute winner at Son Moix. Granada, who are one point ahead of Mallorca and Cadiz, lost 2-0 away at Real Betis. Alaves join Levante in being relegated after they lost to Levante 3-1. — AFP

## Frankfurt ready to rock Rangers in Seville under Borre

**BERLIN:** Eintracht Frankfurt are ready to "rock" Wednesday's Europa League final as the "Bestia Blanca" (White Beast) when they take on Rangers in Seville spearheaded by the Spanish-speaking Colombia striker Rafael Borre. Frankfurt want to face the Scottish giants in their alternative white strip, now regarded as a lucky charm after being worn in impressive wins at Barcelona and West Ham during their European campaign.

"We must play in white. We rocked Europe in white," insists Axel Hellmann, spokesman for the Eintracht board. "We're the Bestia Blanca". Hellmann anticipates around 50,000 Frankfurt fans will descend upon Seville - "which the city has never seen before" - and predicts a "unique final, a unique encounter". "Glasgow is mythical for us. Playing against Rangers was always a dream at our club," he added.

Eintracht beat Rangers 6-1 and 6-3 in the semi-finals of the 1960 European Cup, but lost 7-3 to Real Madrid in the final held in Glasgow. Frankfurt's first European final since winning the UEFA Cup in 1980 will have a Spanish-speaking element in Seville. "Personally, it's been an unbelievable year, I never expected to experience so much with this club," Borre told Eintracht's website in Spanish. "I am really happy to be part of such success." The 26-year-old arrived from Argentinian club River Plate to replace Andre Silva, who hit 28 Bundesliga goals last season before leaving to join RB Leipzig. Yet after initially struggling to establish himself in the Bundesliga, Borre has scored two of the most important goals in the club's history.

### Dream goal at Camp Nou

A superb long-range effort with his right foot from 25 m at Camp Nou flew in off the underside of the crossbar to help Frankfurt win 3-2 at Barcelona for a 4-3 aggregate win in the quarter-finals. "The goal against Barcelona helped me personally, as well as the team," added Borre. "It was a real blow to Barcelona. It put the wind in my sails for the rest of the game. I am very grateful for it."

He then broke the deadlock to seal a nervy 1-0 home semi-final victory against West Ham and the 3-1 aggregate win fired Frankfurt into their first European final for 42 years. "I will never forget the fans' support," he said, referring to the electric atmosphere for the home semifinal. "The stadium was at fever pitch. I spoke to a few team-mates about it and we agreed that we needed it. The support pulls you through in weaker moments. The final is going to be awesome, Frankfurt and Ranger have fought hard to be there and we have to enjoy it," Borre added.

The Colombian has developed a good understanding with Frankfurt forwards Ansgar Knauff and Filip Kostic. Borre's cross at London's Olympic Park saw Knauff head Eintracht into the lead less than a minute into the first semi-final at West Ham. Knauff returned the favour with a cross which Borre converted to hit the winner in the return. "We understand each other better with each game," said Borre. "Ansgar fitted into the team very quickly and the whole team has a good harmony on the pitch."

Borre has impressed Eintracht coach Oliver Glasner, who is also in his first season in Frankfurt. "He is very important for our game, because he has a fantastic mentality, he works so hard for the team," said Glasner. "He's having a great season." — AFP

## Late goal spree takes Berkane to CAF Cup final

**JOHANNESBURG:** Moroccan club Renaissance Berkane scored three goals from the 79th minute to defeat Democratic Republic of Congo visitors TP Mazembe 4-1 on Sunday and qualify for the CAF Confederation Cup final. Bakr el Helali gave Berkane a 10th-minute lead that lasted just 60 seconds before Phillippe Kinzumbi equalised in northeastern Morocco.

Mazembe were reduced to 10 men midway through the second half when Tandi Mwape was sent off and the late goal rush began when captain Larbi Naji put Renaissance in front a second time. Youssef el Fahli converted an 88th-minute penalty to edge Berkane in front on goal aggregate and he put the outcome beyond doubt with another goal six minutes into added time.

Beaten 1-0 in the first leg last Sunday after conceding an added-time goal, Berkane triumphed 4-2 on aggregate and face Orlando Pirates from South Africa this Friday in the title decider in Uyo, Nigeria. An hour before the match in Berkane kicked off, Pirates suffered a shock 1-0 home defeat by Al Ahly Tripoli from Libya, but advanced 2-1 on aggregate.



**SOWETO:** Ahli's Muayid Jadour vies the ball from Pirates' Deon Hotto during the CAF Confederation Cup second leg semifinal between South Africa's Orlando Pirates and Libya's Al Ahly Tripoli at the Orlando Stadium on May 15, 2022. — AFP

## Liverpool assess Salah, Van Dijk ahead of match

**LONDON:** Jurgen Klopp said Liverpool were assessing the fitness of Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk as they prepare for their must-win Premier League match against Southampton on Tuesday. The quadruple-chasing Reds were given fresh hope they could pip Manchester City to the title when Pep Guardiola's team dropped two points in a 2-2 draw at West Ham on Sunday. Defending champions City, with one game remaining, are four points clear at the top of the table with a significantly better goal difference than their rivals, who have two games left. Liverpool beat Chelsea on penalties in the FA Cup final at the weekend to complete the second leg of a potential quadruple.

But Klopp is waiting to find out the extent of injuries to top-scorer Salah and defensive talisman Van Dijk, who were both forced off at Wembley on Saturday. Brazilian midfielder Fabinho, who missed the cup final

Berkane were runners-up in the 2019 Confederation Cup, won the competition the following season and are now appearing in a third final in four years. Pirates came closest to winning the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League in 2015 when they finishing runners-up to Etoile Sahel from Tunisia.

### \$1.25 million up for grabs

Apart from pocketing \$1.25 million dollars, Confederation Cup winners qualify for a CAF Super Cup match against the CAF Champions League winners. The Super Cup clash could be an all-Moroccan affair as Wydad Casablanca from the northwest African kingdom have qualified to meet Al Ahly of Egypt in the May 30 Champions League decider.

Berkane will be favorites against Pirates while the Champions League final will, controversially, be staged in Morocco. El Helali half-volleyed a cross past goalkeeper Siadi Baggio to send a capacity crowd in the 10,000-seat Stade Municipal into a frenzy. The celebrations were continuing when Mazembe levelled as Kinzumbi punished a poor first touch by Issoufou Dayo to race forward and slam a rising shot past goalkeeper Hamza Hamiani Akbi.

It took several minutes before angry Mwape left the field after 66 minutes, having flung his shirt on the pitch, and 11-time CAF title winners Mazembe collapsed in the closing stages. Naji soared at the far post to nod a free-kick into the net. El Fahli calmly placed his penalty into the corner and then scored perhaps the easiest goal of his career with a tap into an unguarded net. — AFP

## Chelsea see off Man City to win women's FA Cup

**LONDON:** Chelsea completed a Women's Super League and FA Cup double as Sam Kerr struck twice to see off Manchester City 3-2 in a thrilling final at Wembley after extra time. Emma Hayes' side exacted revenge for defeat to City in the League Cup final earlier this season, but were pushed all the way despite taking the lead three times.

The English champions took the lead when Kerr nodded Millie Bright's cross at the back post, but City equalized through Lauren Hemp just before the break. A long-range effort from Erin Cuthbert restored Chelsea's lead early in the second half. However, there was late drama when Hayley Raso brought City level again in the final minute. Kerr has also claimed the personal accolades as player of the year for an exceptional season and it was fitting the WSL's top scorer had the final stay in extra time in front of a record crowd of 49,000 for a women's FA Cup final. The Australian broke clear from inside her own half and her shot took the aid of a deflection off Alex Greenwood as it sneaked in at the near post. — AFP

## Mbappe: Decision 'almost' made over PSG future

**PARIS:** Kylian Mbappe says he has "almost" made up his mind about whether to stay at Paris Saint-Germain or leave the French champions for Real Madrid. "Yes, yes almost" he replied when quizzed about whether he had made a choice yet after picking up his third straight best player of the season award in Paris on Sunday. The waiting to see whether the 23-year-old moves to the Spanish capital or stays with PSG to help them in their protracted quest to land the Champions League "is almost over" he added. He plans to "announce" his decision before France play Denmark in the Nations League on June 3. Refusing to divulge anything further despite being given ample opportunity to do so at the awards ceremony he thanked "PSG, which enabled me to be here, my teammates and coach."

He added: "My story goes on, I keep on winning. I'm never satisfied, and that's good." Also attending the awards dinner was his PSG captain Marquinhos whose only comment on the issue keeping PSG fans and their Real counterparts awake at night was: "I hope that next season he will win this trophy again."

Last week a French newspaper reported that the French World Cup winner had agreed in principle to remain at PSG for up to another three years. This was quickly denied by his mother. Mbappe has made no secret of his desire to play one day for Real, who are in the Champions League final after securing a 35th Spanish title. But PSG, who have won the Ligue 1 title for a record-equaling tenth time but angered their hardcore supporters with their limp exit to Real in the last 16 of the Champions League, are battling to hold onto their biggest asset. — AFP



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe receives the Best Ligue 1 Player award during a TV show on May 15, 2022, as part of the 30th edition of the UNFP (French National Professional Football players Union) ceremony. — AFP

with a muscle injury, is not yet ready to return, but Scotland defender Andy Robertson should be available after suffering a hamstring injury on Saturday.

"This process has not finished yet because we only played the 120 minutes two days ago," Klopp told reporters on Monday. "So when the boys arrive today I have to make a lot of decisions. Then we will line up a team. What I can promise and definitely say is we will line up a team only for one reason - to try to win the game at Southampton, as difficult as it is, because that obviously is the job to do. We have to see who is able to help. The 30 extra minutes (at Wembley) made a big difference, but we have to see." Liverpool, who face Real Madrid in the Champions League final on May 28, cut City's lead to a single point with victory at St Mary's, but Klopp does not expect Guardiola's side to slip up again. City host Aston Villa next Sunday while Liverpool play Wolves at Anfield. "I'm looking forward to the game tomorrow," said Klopp. "Is it a chance, a big chance? I wouldn't say so because I don't know when City dropped points the last time two games in a row historically. So Aston Villa has to play in midweek when they are not used to that. As much as I'm sure they're all professionals and these kind of things, they want to go at City, but City is a pretty good football team. So, I don't expect City to drop points there." — AFP



Sports

# Zain official sponsor of third GCC Games

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its official sponsorship of the third GCC games hosted by the Kuwait Olympic Committee. The regional games come under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Zain took part in a special visit to the Kuwait National Futsal Team's training camp, attended by Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammed Al-Rajhi, President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Al-Sabah, Kuwait Olympic Committee board member and Head of Sports Committees Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, Deputy General Manager of the Public Authority for Sports Dr Saqr Al-Mulla and Zain Kuwait's Public Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Musaibeeh.

Zain is proud to support this grand regional sporting event in collaboration with the Kuwait Olympic Committee. The company is keen on supporting the various sports programs and official competitions hosted in Kuwait with the aim of elevating the Kuwaiti sports scene. The company strongly believes in the role played by the sports sector in progressing national economy and developing the local touristic scene.

The third GCC Games features wide participa-

tion from GCC national teams in 16 different sports, including fencing, esports, table tennis, swimming, karate, judo, athletics, tennis, shooting, cycling, ice hockey, futsal, basketball, volleyball, handball, and padel.

The games feature the participation of over 1,800 players from across the GCC and are held across 12 sporting venues in Kuwait. The competition also features 300 gold medals, 300 silver medals, and 300 bronze medals to winners. The third GCC games have selected the fox Salmi as the event's official mascot, inspired by the Fennec fox (Al Hesni), one of the icons of Kuwaiti wildlife, known for its ability to live in Kuwait's harsh desert environment and extreme heat.

The company's support to this event springs from its corporate sustainability strategy towards supporting Kuwaiti sports. Zain is a strong believer in the talents and capabilities of the nation's young athletes and continues to support a great number of local athletes who represent Kuwait in local, regional, and international arenas.

As a leading private sector company in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti sports and athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition and support they deserve.



**KUWAIT:** Mohammed Al-Rajhi with Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Faisal, Saqr Al-Mulla and Hamad Al-Musaibeeh.

## Action continues at Gulf Games



By Abdelatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The third Gulf Games enter the second day with the start of shooting competitions at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. Competitions will start with trap, as shooters will shoot a round of 75 targets, with the 10m air pistol at 10:30 am followed by the finals. The morning period will witness the 50m rifle three positions competition, while the finals will be held at 2:00 pm.

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi welcomed the Gulf teams that are participating in the Gulf Games, adding that everything is ready for the competitions under the new law that will be implemented for the first time at the Gulf Games, adding that the changes will be implemented officially during the Paris 2024 Olympics.

He said Kuwait Shooting Federation and Club are keen on providing all participating teams with their requirements in cooperation with Kuwait Olympic Committee and its President Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah and Public Authority for Sport and its Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh.

Meanwhile, Head of the Shotgun Referees Committee Hamad Al-Ruwaisan said the games will apply the new law of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) in both the skeet and trap events.

He said six shooters qualified for the final round under the previous rules to compete for the medals, but the new rules allow the best eight shooters to enter the final rounds in two groups of



four shooters each, with the first and second place shooters of each group competing for the medals.

The athletics competition will have three morning events for men including the 100m dash (decathlon 1), long jump (decathlon 2) and shotput (decathlon 4). Meanwhile, in the evening, there will be the finals of the discus throw, long jump (decathlon 4), 400m hurdles, triple jump, 800m race, 3000m hurdles and 400m hurdles.

The second round of the men's basketball preliminaries will be held on Tuesday with Kuwait meeting Bahrain at 8:00 pm, while Saudi Arabia and UAE will face each other at 5:00 pm.

Media committee official of the games Sattam Al-Sahali welcomed the media personnel who accompany the delegations and colleagues who are representing various media. He said the Higher Organizing Committee was keen on providing all the necessary facilities for media covering the events.

He announced the opening of media centers to



serve media delegations at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex in Sabah Al-Salem and the other at the Avenues Hilton, in addition to other mobile centers.

Director of the padel competitions at the Gulf Games Abdelghafour Teefouni said padel has started to impose itself lately among the most popular games around the world and the region, so it was not strange for officials to include the game, as padel associations are being established in rapidly in the Gulf.

He thanked the Olympic Committee for including the game for the first time as it enjoyed vast expansion in the region and around the world. He said Kuwait Padel Association made available all the necessary requirements to make sure everything is ready to organize the first official competition of this magnitude under its supervision. He said the men's round robin matches will be held at Yarmouk Club, while the women's matches will be held at Kuwait Sports Club.

## Indian badminton heroics knock even cricket off front pages

**NEW DELHI:** India's historic first Thomas Cup crown was splashed across front pages Monday with some people saying it can be a turning point for badminton much like the country's maiden cricket World Cup title in 1983. Coming in as underdogs against 14-time champions Indonesia, a ruthless India won the final of the men's team championship on Sunday in Bangkok to propel badminton to a rare place on center stage in the cricket-crazy nation.

World number 11 Kidambi Srikanth defeated higher-ranked Jonatan Christie to wrap up a 3-0 victory and trigger wild celebrations in the Indian camp as their players stormed the court with the national flag. "Team India scales the peak," read the headline in The Indian Express. "Our Highness On Court," said the Hindustan Times. "I would rate this as the biggest ever achievement (for Indian badminton)," former international and team manager Vimal Kumar told reporters from the Thai capital. When you call a nation a top badminton nation, all singles and doubles players perform. That is exactly what happened."

Kumar, who won the Asian Games bronze in the team event, said: "I know in 1983 when we won the



**BANGKOK:** Members of the Indian men's badminton team celebrate after defeating Indonesia in the men's finals of the Thomas and Uber Cup badminton tournament on May 15, 2022. —AFP

cricket World Cup the things turned around for the sport to such an extent. So I think expect that to happen for Indian badminton as well. And I am very happy that I could get to see that in my lifetime."

All-rounder Kapil Dev's India sparked a cricket revolution in 1983 when they beat overwhelming favorites West Indies in the final at Lord's, a journey that has been captured in a recent Bollywood movie. "Unforgettable red-letter day for Indian badminton. We have now truly arrived," said Prakash Padukone,

who won the prestigious All England title in 1980.

"It was a brilliant team effort. The performance of this team is not a flash in the pan, they have worked very hard for it. It is no small feat to beat Malaysia, Denmark and Indonesia in a week." India's cricket icons joined in the celebrations. "Historic moment for all Indians! What a day for Indian Badminton," Sachin Tendulkar tweeted. "A historic achievement and a massive moment for Indian badminton," Virat Kohli wrote on Twitter. —AFP

## Boult's 2-18 helps Royals jump to second in IPL

**MUMBAI:** New Zealand's Trent Boult led an inspired bowling attack to help Rajasthan Royals down Lucknow Super Giants by 24 runs and edge closer to an IPL play-off berth on Sunday. Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal made 41 off 29 balls to guide Royals to 178 for six, a total their bowlers defended by restricting Lucknow to 154-8 in the second match of the day at Mumbai.

Boult, a left-arm quick, struck twice on successive deliveries to send back Quinton de Kock, for seven, Ayush Badoni, for nought, to dent Lucknow's chase and returned impressive figures of 2-18. "Some days better than others. Nice to get wickets at the top," Boult said after being named man of the match. "The boys did talk about some intensity as this was a crucial game for us."

Royals, who won the inaugural Indian Premier League title in 2008 under late Australian legend Shane Warne, replaced Lucknow at second with both teams on 16 points and a win needed in their remaining match to confirm a play-off spot. Fast bowler Prasad Krishna sent back skipper KL Rahul for 10 before Krunal Pandya, who made 25 before falling to Ravichandran Ashwin off a relay catch between Jos Buttler and Riyan Parag, put together 65 runs with Deepak Hooda.

Hooda kept up the charge in his 39-ball 59 but fell stumped off leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal and took with him Lucknow's hopes of a chase. Obed McCoy took two more including Jason Holder, for one, to expose Lucknow's tail and Prasad Krishna took down Marcus Stoinis, for 27, as Lucknow, one of the two newcomers alongside Gujarat Titans, remained short of their target.

"If we can hold our nerves and give ourselves a chance to play the new ball or a good spell. If you get through that spell you always have enough time to make up," said Rahul, whose team has lost two straight games. We've got power in our batting line, so it is just about playing smart when the bowlers are bowling a good spell." —AFP

## Lee holds off Spieth for second straight Byron Nelson crown

**LOS ANGELES:** Lee Kyoung-hoon fired a career-low nine-under par 63 on Sunday to win the US PGA Tour Byron Nelson tournament for a second straight year at TPC Craig Ranch in McKinney, Texas. South Korea's Lee, who won his first US tour title at the tournament in suburban Dallas last year, made his second victory a successful defense as he erased a four-shot overnight deficit to build a 26-under par total of 262 and beat three-time major winner Jordan Spieth by one stroke.

"Feels like a dream again, like last year," said Lee, who was greeted at the 18th green by his wife, Yu Joo-yeon and their baby daughter Celine, who was born weeks after Lee won last year. "It's an amazing feeling." On a windy day north of Dallas, Lee got going early with a 51-foot birdie putt at the second hole.

After a seven-foot birdie at the third he blasted out of a greenside bunker to two feet for birdie at the fifth, then added birdies at six and nine before sticking his approach at the par-five 12th within five feet for an eagle that put him atop the leaderboard. He added a 14-foot birdie at the 13th, then sealed the victory with a birdie at the par-five 18th - where his 25-foot eagle putt stopped an inch from the cup. —AFP



Lee Kyoung-hoon





KUWAIT: Former Brazilian World Cup winner and footballer Gilberto Silva unveils the FIFA World Cup trophy during a trophy tour at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre on May 16, 2022. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## World Cup trophy displayed in Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** For the first time ever in Kuwait, the FIFA World Cup original trophy was unveiled in Kuwait City on Monday, giving Kuwait fans a chance to experience football's most coveted prize, as the fifth FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola continues its journey to 51 countries and territories.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yusuf Al-Sabah, President of Kuwait Football Association, FIFA Ambassador Gilberto Silva and Khalid Al-Muzaire, CEO, Refreshment Trading Company (RTC), Coca-Cola's bottling partner in Kuwait, came together at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre for a special VIP press event to reveal the most prized trophy in the world and celebrate the real magic of the world's largest, most anticipated sporting event - the FIFA World Cup 2022. Also in attendance was Salah Eissa Al-Qenaei, General Secretary of Kuwait Football Association and international team player Bader Al-Mutawaa.

Khalid Al-Muzaire said: "We are excited to help bring the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola to the State of Kuwait to give fans a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the original FIFA World Cup Trophy. Like when in 1982, the Kuwait national team became the first from the Gulf to qualify for the FIFA World Cup, we hope this event will inspire a spirit of

hope and optimism for a bright future for the youth of the country, who we at Coca-Cola are keen to support. We express our sincere thanks and gratitude to FIFA and the Kuwait Football Association for their partnership in making today's event a success and we look forward to seeing the impact it has on everyone who is here today."

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yusuf Al-Sabah said: "In the world of sports, no symbol stands stronger than the FIFA World Cup Trophy. It is an honor to host the FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola in Kuwait - it provides an incredible opportunity for football and sports fans across Kuwait to experience this iconic symbol in person. This is the first time that FIFA World Cup Original Trophy arrives in our country, and it will undoubtedly be a source of inspiration for our existing and future football stars."

Bader Al-Mutawaa expressed his happiness for having the trophy in Kuwait. "I feel honored to be one of those welcoming the FIFA World Cup original trophy during its tour in Kuwait along with Kuwait's veteran football stars on its arrival at the airport. It was a dream to have the trophy in Kuwait and this dream came true. We hope that the upcoming World Cup will be the best edition, as Qatar has hosted many international championships and events before, and all were successful and always received positive feedback, so we expect the same for the World Cup. We wish them

success," he said.

Gilberto Silva noted that he knows firsthand how lifting the FIFA World Cup trophy can excite millions of fans across the world. "It is an honor to be here in Kuwait. I've seen firsthand the passion for football across the Middle East. With 51 stops across the world, I've no doubt the Tour by Coca-Cola will inspire and engage an unprecedented number of fans and future rising stars from this region," he said.

"This tour of the trophy gives an opportunity for people to see the trophy closely. I'm glad to be in Kuwait due to their achievements in football. There are many fans of Brazilian football here. I hope this trophy will inspire future generations," added Silva. Kuwait's passion for football is well-known, and the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre was a fitting location to continue the global tour.

The FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola will visit 51 countries and territories, bringing Coca-Cola and FIFA one step closer to visiting all 211 Football Nations by 2030. For the first time ever, the tour will visit all 32 FIFA World Cup qualifying countries, inspiring fans across the world through exclusive consumer experiences. As well as Kuwait, the tour will make several debut stops across the Middle East, visiting UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Lebanon. The tour will visit Saudi Arabia as the penultimate destination, before reaching the host country Qatar.

## Mavs, Celtics advance as Bucks, Suns exit playoffs

**LOS ANGELES:** Luka Doncic led a stunning Dallas Mavericks rout of the top-seeded Phoenix Suns while the Boston Celtics eliminated the defending champion Milwaukee Bucks on a day of NBA playoff upsets on Sunday. In Phoenix, Slovenian superstar Doncic led a total eclipse of the Suns as Dallas clinched a 4-3 series victory with an extraordinary 123-90 thrashing of the Western Conference favorites.

The Suns had entered the playoffs boasting the best record in basketball after a 64-win regular season and were tipped by many to return to the NBA Finals for a second straight season. But the Suns' dreams of a championship were incinerated by a red-hot shooting performance from Doncic and the Mavs, who will now advance to a Western Conference finals showdown with the Golden State Warriors starting on Wednesday.

Doncic finished with 35 points, 10 rebounds and four assists while teammate Spencer Dinwiddie provided scoring support with 30 points, including five three-pointers. Jalen Brunson also posted double figures while Phoenix were left pondering a no-show by their two stars Devin Booker (11 points) and Chris Paul (10).

The Mavericks led from start to finish and at one stage in the second half had sprinted into a 46-point lead. Their 57-27 half-time lead was the biggest ever in a decisive game seven in the NBA playoffs. "Amazing," Doncic said. "I don't know what to say but this was amazing to win. Everybody played as hard as they can. We didn't have any days off. An incredible team win. I don't have nothing more to say."

### Williams stuns Bucks

Phoenix coach Monty Williams said his team had saved their worst performance of the season for their most important game. "I just told them how badly I hurt for them." Williams told reporters shortly after addressing his team. "I know they didn't want to play that way. We basically played our worst game of the season tonight. I know how bad they wanted it, they just could not execute tonight, could not make a shot early on. And that messed with us a little bit, and Dallas played their tails off from start to finish. It's a part of manhood. There are days when it doesn't go your way and you've got to stand there and show character and integrity and take it. That's life."

There was a similar sense of deflation amongst the Bucks



BOSTON: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks drives to the basket against Marcus Smart #36 of the Boston Celtics during the fourth quarter in Game Seven of the 2022 NBA playoffs Eastern Conference semifinals at TD Garden on May 15, 2022. —AFP

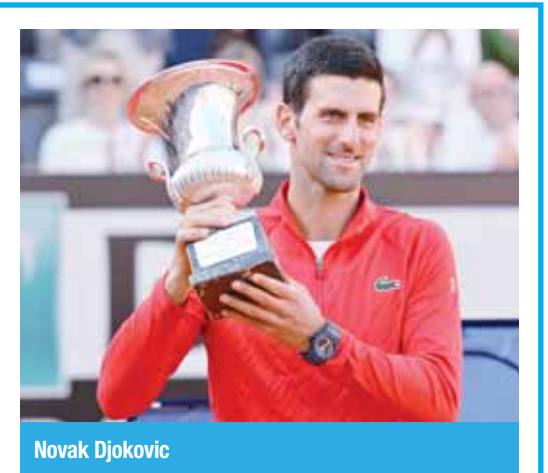
players after their reign as NBA champions ended in a convincing 109-81 game seven defeat to the Celtics in Boston. Celtics forward Grant Williams produced a deadly display of scoring from three-point range at the TD Garden as Boston advanced to a conference finals showdown with the Miami Heat with a 4-3 series win.

Williams' shooting from beyond the arc was emblematic of Boston's superiority from the field as the Bucks missed a slew of wide-open looks. Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 25 points, 20 rebounds and nine assists for Milwaukee. But the Celtics' three-point shooting accuracy proved the difference between the two teams as Boston completed a comeback from 3-2 down in the best-of-seven series.

Boston dropped 22 of 55 from downtown, in stark contrast to Milwaukee, who converted just four of 33 attempts from beyond the arc. Williams led the three-point blitzkrieg with seven threes in his 27-point haul. Jayson Tatum made five-of-nine threes to finish with 23 points. Payton Pritchard also got in on the act, with four three-pointers from the bench in a tally of

14 points. Only one Milwaukee player, Bobby Portis, made multiple three-pointers. Portis finished with two in his 10-point haul. Celtics coach Ime Udoka revealed he had encouraged Williams to shoot more aggressively, suggesting the Bucks had "disrespected" the forward by allowing him so much room to operate. "I told him let it fly. I said 'They're disrespecting you more tonight than earlier in the series.'" Udoka said. Williams said he was only too happy to accept the challenge. "Everyone kept saying 'Let it fly, keep shooting'. So I thought 'All right, they're encouraging it, might as well take advantage.' It was fun. It was just great that we got a win," Williams said.

Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer made no excuses for the defeat, saying Boston had been the better team over the series. "I couldn't be prouder of our team," Budenholzer said. "We've had a lot of success together and tonight we hit a wall and met our end." Boston face top seeds Miami in game one of the Eastern Conference finals on Tuesday in a rematch of their 2020 series. Miami won that series 4-2 to advance to the NBA Finals. —AFP



Novak Djokovic

## Djokovic 370 weeks at no. 1; Swiatek cements top spot

**PARIS:** Novak Djokovic extended his record at the top of the ATP rankings to 370 weeks on Monday while Rafael Nadal drops down a place to number five. The Spaniard was knocked out of the Italian Open in the last 16 and is leapfrogged by the Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas who made it all the way to the final where he was turned over in straight sets by an inspired Djokovic.

The Serb, who claimed his sixth Italian Open title, has now spent 60 weeks more at number one than the next man on the list Roger Federer (310). Nadal is sixth on the all-time list with 209. With the French Open starting on Sunday, Djokovic is guaranteed top seeding at Roland Garros and will retain the top spot for at least another two weeks.

Norwegian Casper Ruud climbs two places from tenth to eighth after reaching the semi-finals in Rome while Italian Matteo Berrettini, who had an operation on his right hand at the end of March and will miss the French Open, goes the other way.

Meanwhile, Iga Swiatek, who won her fifth tournament in a row in Rome on Sunday, will go into the French Open as top seed after consolidating her place as world number one on Monday. The 20-year-old Pole, who won the title at Roland Garros in 2020, is over 2,000 points ahead of defending French Open champion Barbora Krejickova in the new WTA rankings.

Tunisia's Madrid Open champion Ons Jabeur, who lost to Swiatek in the Italian Open final, climbed to a career-high sixth. Coco Gauff dropped three places to 18th while former number one Simona Halep returned to the top 20 at 19. —AFP



Iga Swiatek