

**3** Kuwait parliament speaker receives UK and EU officials



**8** Insurance giant slumps after biggest-ever IPO



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**15** 3rd Gulf Games: Kuwait grabs gold; Bahrain remains on top



# Thousands hospitalized as sandstorms hit Middle East

## Kuwait schools closed; flights delayed; marine and air traffic suspended

### Amir congratulates King of Saudi Arabia



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Tuesday a cable to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to congratulate him on the successful medical check-ups he underwent recently. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished the Saudi King everlasting wellbeing and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia more progress and prosperity under his wise leadership. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA

**RIYADH:** Sandstorms across the Middle East have delayed flights, closed schools and hospitalized thousands—a phenomenon experts say could worsen as climate change warps regional weather patterns. Saudi Arabia on Tuesday became the latest country blanketed with dust that slowed traffic and made iconic towers in the capital difficult to see from more than a few hundred meters away.

Electronic signs along Riyadh's highways warned drivers to reduce their speed because of the lower visibility, even as life largely went on as usual in the kingdom. The national meteorology centre predicted that "surface dusty winds" originating in the east and bringing a thick grey haze would continue west towards the Muslim holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

Other countries have been grappling with the problem for longer: Neighboring Iraq has experienced eight sandstorms since mid-April, fuelled by soil degradation, intense droughts and low rainfall linked to climate change. The country's latest sandstorm on Monday enveloped the capital Baghdad in an orange glow, sent at least 4,000 people to hospital with breathing problems and led to the closure of airports, schools and public offices across the country.

Iran announced that it, too, was closing



**MANAMA:** Cars drive on a highway in the Seef district during a dust storm in Bahrain's capital Manama, on May 17, 2022. — AFP

government offices and schools Tuesday, citing "unhealthy weather" conditions and sandstorms. Average airborne concentration of the

finest and most hazardous particles (PM2.5) was at 163 micrograms per cubic meter

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### 'NEOM will not be country within a country': Saudi

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia on Monday rejected claims that its planned futuristic megacity known as NEOM will have different rules from the rest of the conservative kingdom and function like a "country within a country". In an interview published last week by the UAE's The National newspaper, Andrew McEvoy, head of NEOM's tourism sector, was quoted as saying that residents of the \$500 billion Red Sea project would be known as "Neomians" rather than Saudis and that alcohol-long banned in Saudi Arabia—could potentially be sold there.

"NEOM will be treated as a country within a country, with its own economic zone and its own authority. We need to make sure its laws and regulations match the ambitions of those we are trying to attract to work and live here," McEvoy said. The company developing NEOM responded with a statement stressing the site was "absolutely subject to the sovereignty and systems of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", according to a report by the official Saudi Press Agency.

NEOM will be "subject to all rules that are applied to any part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in terms of issues related to security, defense and border protection", the report said. The report allowed, though, that NEOM "will enjoy some special regulations related to investment". NEOM is part of de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 plan to diversify Saudi Arabia's oil-dependent economy. It has been billed as a futuristic cityscape evocative of a sci-fi blockbuster—with everything from flying taxis to robot-maids.

It will operate under its own founding law that is still being formulated. A senior official told AFP last October that NEOM was on track to welcome its first businesses and residents by 2025. Officials say its population will eventually top one million people. In his interview with The National, McEvoy said NEOM's first tourist attractions would open in 2024, and that alcohol was "definitely not off the table". "We need to be competitive, and to do that, we have to match what competing destinations are offering," he said. — AFP

### Hezbollah, allies lose majority as reformists surge

**BEIRUT:** Shiite group Hezbollah and its allies lost their majority in Lebanon's parliament, official results showed Tuesday, while independents achieved a surprise breakthrough. Full results announced by the interior ministry two days after the election revealed that no bloc will control the 128-seat assembly, a deadlock observers fear could usher in a tense period of political jostling.

The polls, the first since Lebanon was ravaged by its worst ever economic crisis and a cataclysmic explo-

sion at Beirut port in 2020, were seen as a prerequisite for a crucial IMF bailout. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah and its main allies had the support of around 70 lawmakers in the outgoing parliament but will now fall just short of the 65 seats needed to retain a majority. Their strongest opponents in parliament will be led by the Christian Lebanese Forces party of former warlord Samir Geagea, that raked in several new seats on the back of a virulent anti-Hezbollah campaign.

New reformist faces who entered the legislative race on the values of a 2019 anti-establishment uprising made a stronger showing that many had predicted.

At least 13 independents who backed the 2019 protest movement won seats. Twelve of them will sit in

Continued on Page 6



**BEIRUT:** Electoral delegates for Lebanon's Shiite groups Amal (left) and Hezbollah sit in front of a polling station during Lebanon's parliamentary elections in Beirut. — AFP

### Gunfights in Tripoli; rivals vie for power

**TRIPOLI:** Libya's capital was rocked early Tuesday by gunfights between backers of two rival administrations, threatening another escalation in the war-torn North African country. Supporters of a government endorsed by Libya's parliament and by an eastern-based military strongman had tried to move into the western city of Tripoli by force. That sparked pre-dawn clashes with armed groups supporting interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

Hours later they pulled out, citing the "security and safety of citizens", as the United Nations, European Union and United States appealed for calm. There were no immediate reports of casualties from the fighting, but AFP correspondents saw burned-out cars and military convoys on a major thoroughfare later Tuesday morning.

Dbeibah was appointed under a troubled UN-led peace process early last year to lead a transition to elections set for December, but the vote was indefinitely postponed. In February this year, the eastern-based parliament appointed rival premier and former



**TRIPOLI:** This picture taken in Libya's capital Tripoli shows a view of vehicles destroyed during fighting between forces loyal to the Tripoli-based Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah and rival forces of the Tobruk-based government. — AFP

interior ministry Fathi Bashagha to take his place, arguing that Dbeibah's mandate had ended.

Dbeibah has refused to hand over power except to an elected administration. Both men are from the western city of Misrata and are backed by different armed groups in the capital. Bashagha's press service had announced overnight "the arrival of the prime minister of the Libyan government, Mr Fathi Bashagha, accompanied by several ministers, in the capital Tripoli to begin his work there".

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### Qatar Amir visits Spain as EU eyes gas alternatives

**MADRID:** Qatar's Amir began a state visit to Spain on Tuesday as Europe seeks to diversify its natural gas supply sources to reduce its energy dependence on Russia. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani was welcomed by King Felipe VI at Madrid's royal palace at the start of his two-day visit, his first to Spain since he ascended the throne in 2013.

The Amir, who is accompanied by Qatar's foreign and energy ministers, is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Wednesday. Spain and Qatar are expected to sign a dozen economic and commercial contracts during his visit, mainly regarding energy, according to a Spanish government source.

The visit comes as the European Union is aiming to cut its reliance on Russian gas by two-thirds this year due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russia currently supplies around 40

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## Local

# Deputy Amir confident in Turkish judiciary to protect Kuwaiti investors

## Sheikh Mishal receives Turkish Supreme Judicial Council President



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets President of the Court of Cassation in Turkey Mehmet Akarca. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the US Central Command Chief of Staff Major General Michael Kurilla.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Yasunari Morino.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Moroccan Ambassador Ali Ibn Essa.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Tuesday President of the Court of Cassation in Turkey Mehmet Akarca and the accompanying delegation, currently on an official visit to the country. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince also received President of the Kuwaiti Supreme Judicial Council and the President of the Court of Cassation Counselor Ahmad Al-Ajeel. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the visiting delegation, praising the bilateral relation the two countries share, and requested that greetings be relayed to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

During the meeting, His Highness Sheikh Mishal affirmed his full confidence in the judiciary institutions, emphasizing their independence and integrity as they are responsible for protecting rights of citi-

zens and residents alike. His Highness also expressed his aspiration for more measures to protect Kuwaiti investors in Turkey from real estate fraud, calling for finding appropriate ways to allocate a governmental department concerned with this matter to set up a safe Kuwaiti investment environment. The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan and Director of the Office of His Highness the Amir, Ambassador Ahmad Al-Fahad, Director of the Office of His Highness the Crown Prince, retired Lieutenant General Jamal Al-Thiab, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince Mazen Al-Eissa and Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Koytak.

### Deputy Amir receives US Central Command Chief

Ambassadors' credentials  
Earlier on Tuesday, His Highness the Deputy Amir



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Mali Republic's Ambassador Ali Ould Ahmad.

and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, at Bayan Palace, credentials of Japanese Ambassador to Kuwait Yasunari Morino, Moroccan Ambassador Ali Ibn Essa and Mali Republic's Ambassador Ali Ould Ahmad. Several senior officials attended the ceremony.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-

Ahmad Al-Sabah, Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) Chief of Staff Major General Michael Kurilla and his accompanying delegation. The meeting took place at Bayan Palace, in the presence of Kuwait's top officials.

Separately, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets the US Central Command Chief of Staff Major General Michael Kurilla. — Defense Ministry photos

### Defense Minister, US top military official discuss bilateral ties

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the US Central Command (CENTCOM) Chief of Staff Major General Michael Kurilla explored on Tuesday ways to bolster ties and topics of mutual interest. The Ministry of Defense said in a statement that they exchanged views on recent regional and international developments. The Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Sheikh Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief of Mission at US Embassy in Kuwait James Holtsnider attended the meeting.

The Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff meanwhile held a separate meeting with the US Central Command Chief, discussing ways to bolster ties and issues of mutual interest. According to the



Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Sheikh Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah presents a memento to the US Central Command Chief of Staff Major General Michael Kurilla.

Kuwaiti Army in a statement, the two top military officials also exchanged views on recent regional and international developments. Sheikh Khaled held a dinner banquet in honor of the visiting US delegation. —KUNA

### Kuwait Interior Minister expresses deep sorrow on UAE president's passing

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday offered his condolences to UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Al-Niyadi and the embassy staff on the demise of the UAE president Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The ministry information department, in a statement, said Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf, in a note at the UAE mission headquarters, expressed deep consolation and sorrow on the tragic event, recalling the late UAE President's noticeable role in his country's full-



Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah writes a message of condolences at the UAE embassy.

scale development. He also praised Sheikh Khalifa for his sincere efforts for serving causes of the Arab and Muslim nations. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah offers condolences to UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Al-Niyadi. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Sheikha Fadiya Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah offers condolences to Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub.

### Sheikha Fadiya offers condolences on Abu Akleh's loss

KUWAIT: Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub received Sheikha Fadiya Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Chairwoman of the Kuwait Union of Women Organizations, who conveyed condolences on the loss of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. She conveyed condolences to President Mahmoud Abbas, the family of Abu Akleh and Palestinian people.



Sheikha Fadiya Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah writes a message of condolences at Palestine's embassy.



Local

# Kuwait parliament speaker receives UK, EU officials

Kuwaiti women lead very active role in society: UK envoy



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets the British Minister of State for Asia, the Middle East and Commonwealth Affairs Amanda Milling. —KUNA photos



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah meets the British Minister of State for Asia, the Middle East and Commonwealth Affairs Amanda Milling.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets the European Union Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Sven Koopmans.

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received in his office on Tuesday the British Minister of State for Asia, the Middle East and Commonwealth Affairs Amanda Milling on her official visit to the country, and explored various topics of common interests. The meeting was attended by UK's Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis.

Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah also met with British Minister Milling, along with her accompanying delegation. The two sides discussed the special bilateral ties connecting the two nations, and ways of bolstering these relations across various fields, as well as mulling over latest developments on regional and

international fronts.

In the meantime, Speaker Ghanem received the European Union Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Sven Koopmans, who is currently paying an official visit to the country. EU Ambassador to Kuwait Cristian Tudor attended the meeting and praised international efforts to achieve justice and equality in the Middle East region.

Active role

Women in Kuwait lead a very active role in society, said British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis. The embassy in Kuwait hosted a workshop called "Women in Leadership" on Monday marking Kuwaiti Women's Day, which reflects the

Kuwaiti political leadership's belief in the role of women in all fields. "Comparing with many countries, women empowerment in Kuwait is good, I've seen a well-educated and motivated society," said the ambassador. On the other hand, the visiting United Kingdom Minister for Asia and the Middle East MP Amanda Milling said that women in Kuwait have reached high levels in business, public service and politics. During the workshop Nouf Al-Mazeedi and Abdullah Al-Khonaini presented research on political economy and gender issues, which shows that women need to be incentivized to become candidates and need support that sets them up for success. It added that the Kuwaiti society needs to view women as viable decision

makers, capable of winning seats and delivering positive incomes. It also pointed out that the Kuwaiti political system needs to be structured in a way that encourages women's political participation. Leanah Al-Awadhi and Asrar Hayat, co-founders of Madhawi's list, which offers support to women running for elected office positions, believe that increasing the number of women in leadership positions and fostering a civil workplace both help to alleviate domestic problems. On May 17, 2005, a bill was passed granting Kuwaiti women the right to vote and run for an elected office. Four years later, in May 2009, four female candidates won parliamentary seats in a general election out of 50 available seats. — KUNA

## Speaker hosts Turkish Supreme Judicial Council President



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets President of the Court of Cassation in Turkey Mehmet Akarca. — KUNA

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received on Tuesday President of the Kuwaiti Supreme Judicial Council and Court of Cassation Counselor Ahmad Al-Ajeel, accom-

panied by President of the Court of Cassation in Turkey Mehmet Akarca and the accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Koytak. —KUNA

## Suad Al-Sabah House announces 'Shireen Abu Akleh' media award

KUWAIT: Sheikha Dr Suad Mohammad Al-Sabah announced creating a new award on Arab media at Suad Al-Sabah Cultural House named after fallen Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. In a press statement released to announce the award, Sheikha Dr Suad Al-Sabah urged international organizations to condemn the criminal act against Abu Akleh. Furthermore, Dr Suad said in a message to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, "I was stricken and was angry when I watched the news about the assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh, with whom I had

a friendship for many years. Her blood is pleading with us, saying that heroism is not free, and that the occupier is so coward to face a woman who speaks the truth through her peaceful media means."

"As a founding member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, member of Kuwait Journalists Association, and member of Al-Quds Fund and Endowment, I condemn this treacherous, perfidious act, and demand that international organizations move to condemn this crime," she said in the letter. "I also announce the creation of Suad Al-Sabah Cultural House prize for Arab media in the name of Shireen Abu Akleh, and I am pleased to assign you as well as Al-Quds fund and endowment to supervise and manage this award." She concluded by conveying her condolences to the Palestinian people who Shireen was their free voice, to her family and loved ones.



KUWAIT: AUM's Chairman of the Board of Trustees Fahad Al-Othman recognizes Zain during the ceremony.

## Zain recognized at AUM Corporate Award 2022

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, was recognized during the American University of the Middle East's Corporate Award 2022 held at the AUM cultural center. The step came in recognition of the company's extended partnership with AUM and to highlight its efforts towards supporting and developing the local education sector.

The ceremony was attended by AUM's Chairman of the Board of Trustees Fahad Al-Othman, and featured a great number of leaders, executives, and experts from across local, regional, and international firms and companies operating in the Kuwaiti private sector who have attracted local talents and graduates from AUM throughout the past years, including Zain.

Zain expressed its gratitude to the American University of the Middle East for this recognition, which is an acknowledgment from one of the nation's top academic institutions of the company's role in contributing to develop the education and human resources sectors. Zain strongly believes in the importance of supporting education initiatives given that they play a crucial role in pushing the national economy wheel forward and help embrace, develop, and empower national talents.

Zain recently sponsored the American University of the Middle East's Career Fair, organized by AUM's Tawteen Career Development and Recruitment center. The event was the first of its

kind in Kuwait, having featured both virtual and in-person activities. This career fair witnesses high annual turnouts from over 15,000 students and graduates.

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

This career fair is considered the first of its kind in Kuwait, having introduced a new hybrid experience of both virtual and in-person programs. During its virtual segment, the event offered students and graduates a chance to learn about the participating companies, e-meet them, easily upload their CVs and share their details, and conduct interviews via video conferencing tools. The in-person career fair featured physical interviews, a chance to directly meet HR staff from companies, and many career development programs.

Zain is always eager to participate in career fairs all year round as part of its Human Resources strategy, which closely focuses on supporting the education sector hand in hand with various universities, colleges, and educational institutions in Kuwait (both public and private), with the aim of providing students and graduates with career opportunities in the private sector.

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

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## Local

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## News in brief

Mental health  
counseling online  
for students

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Education launched an online platform for mental health and social counseling for students. The service is currently offered in Arabic only and is accessible through the ministry's website at moe.edu.kw.

KRCS launches  
summer program  
for juniors

Dr Musaed Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society declared on Tuesday start of registration in the "junior volunteer club," for citizens of seven-12 ages, a project designed to engage the youth in voluntary work during the summer vacation. Dr Musaed Al-Enezi, the KRCS director of legal affairs and young volunteers' affairs, said that the summer activity would kick off on July 18 and proceed until August 15. The program includes training on first aid, how to fill free time, health and sports awareness, personal health, preserving land and marine environments, in addition to various educational and entertainment activities. He urged parents to encourage their children to register in the summer activity. Registration is available on the KRCS website.

Dr Musaed Al-Enezi, the KRCS director of legal affairs and young volunteers' affairs, said that the summer activity would kick off on July 18 and proceed until August 15. The program includes training on first aid, how to fill free time, health and sports awareness, personal health, preserving land and marine environments, in addition to various educational and entertainment activities. He urged parents to encourage their children to register in the summer activity. Registration is available on the KRCS website.

Salmiya shop  
closed for selling  
counterfeit goods

KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Ministry inspectors closed down two shops in a Salmiya Mall for selling counterfeit products of famous brands.

The emergency team confiscated large quantities of accessories and bags as legal action will be taken against the violators, the ministry said in a press statement.



## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive on a main street in Kuwait City Monday afternoon as traces of a dust storm that hit Kuwait a day earlier can still be seen.

— Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwait part of COVID study that finds lying  
on abdomen doesn't cut ventilators' need

## Study conducted on 400 patients including 49 from Kuwait

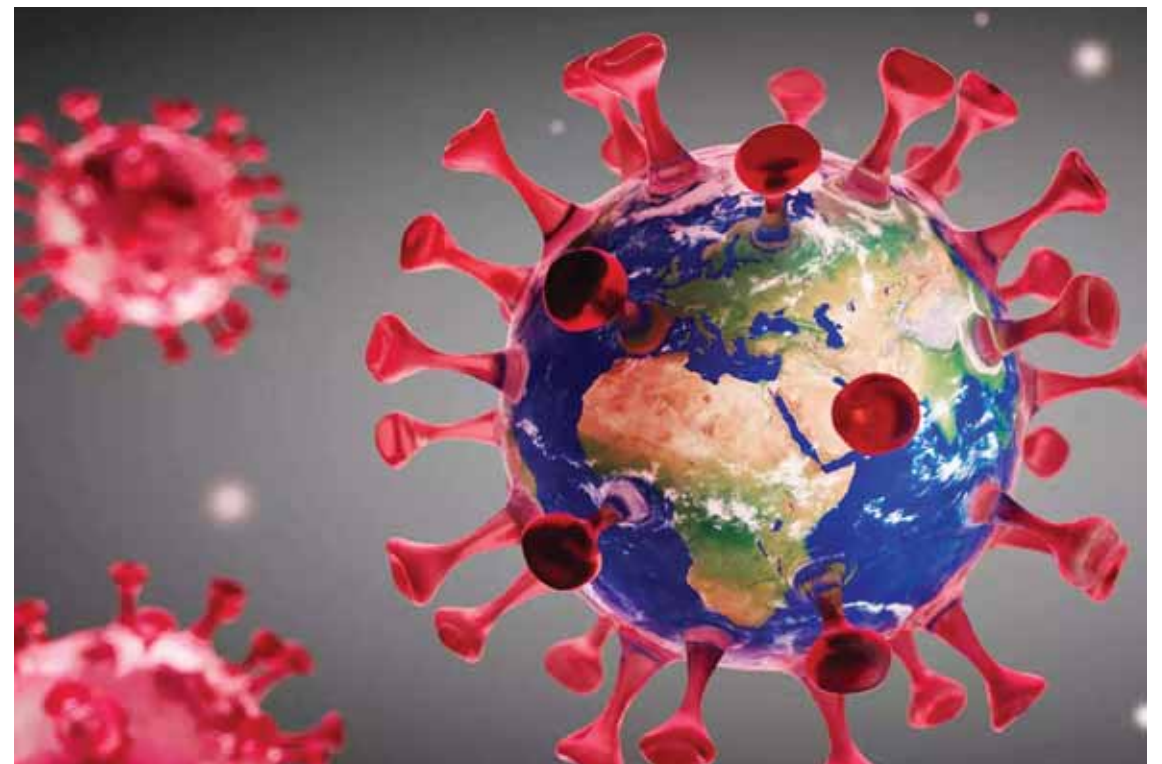
KUWAIT: Kuwait participated in an international scientific research study which concluded that lying on the abdomen in intensive care units for COVID-19 patients - one of the components of the treatment protocol - is not positive for reducing the need for ventilators or minimizing death chances, the Ministry of Health announced.

Head of the Department of Anesthesia and ICU at Al-Amiri Hospital Dr Abdulrahman Al-Fares said Tuesday that the study, titled "Effect of Awake Prone Positioning on Endotracheal Intubation in Patients with COVID-19 and Acute Respiratory Failure," was carried out in cooperation with international research centers from America, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. A team from the ICU at

Featuring Amiri,  
Jaber hospitals'  
teams

Al-Amiri Hospital and Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital participated in this study on intensive care patients, examining extent to which they benefit from lying on the abdomen or back and avoid the need for ventilators due to acute lung failure caused by COVID-19, he pointed out. The study, conducted on 400 patients including 49 from Kuwait, was published on Monday in an international scientific journal, he mentioned.

The randomized clinical study divided the patients into two groups, half of them lay on the



abdomen for certain hours, and the other half completed the treatment lying on their back, and the results were not positive for alleviating need for ventilators, he said. Importance of the study lies in updating the treatment protocols used globally for the care of patients with acute lung failure, he explained.

With the beginning of the increase in cases of coronavirus infections globally, many patients with pulmonary failure were lying on their stomachs in the ICU departments, called the prone

position, as it was believed that it would help patients by increasing the amount of oxygen they inhaled, he added. Resorting to this method has increased in treating people infected with COVID-19, whose cases require ICU to help the lungs expand and inhale a sufficient amount of air, but the results of the study have proven that it is not beneficial, he pointed out. Dr Sarah Buabbas and Fares participated in the study, with support from medical and nursing teams in the ICUs of both hospitals. — KUNA

Official stresses  
importance of  
health campaigns

KUWAIT: Director of the Health Promotion Department at the Ministry of Health Dr Abeer Al-Bahouh stressed on Monday importance of awareness campaigns to address chronic diseases and their causes to face the illnesses that many people suffer from. This came in a statement on the sidelines of an educational course held by the Health Promotion Department as part of the expanded campaign to raise awareness of chronic diseases. Chronic diseases are a global problem that witnessed a remarkable increase since the last decades of the 20th century, said Bahouh.

Bahouh stated that chronic diseases in Arab countries cause a challenge to decision makers tasked with health strategies, noting importance of providing primary health care to detect chronic diseases in early stages to improve quality of the life for individuals and reduce cost of treatment which would be greater if the disease develops. She added that Chronic diseases are usually silent, and the patient may not notice it until complications begin to occur, such as high blood pressure.

Bahouh noted that the course, where 70 participants participated, included several lectures on



KUWAIT: Director of the Health Promotion Department at the Ministry of Health Dr Abeer Al-Bahouh (right) attends a function held as part of an awareness campaign on chronic diseases. —KUNA

importance of preventing chronic diseases and reducing factors that cause them such as smoking, physical inactivity, obesity and unhealthy food. The lecturers from the Department of Health Promotion provided a definition of chronic diseases and reviewed information of previous courses, added

Bahouh, indicating that this course will last for two days. The course included a presentation on most important developments in tuberculosis, asthma and others, as well as a health exhibition in which several departments affiliated with the Health Ministry participated. —KUNA





Waiting for the water train in scorching India

## Rattled by Russia, Finns flock to military training

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BUFFALO: People leave messages at a makeshift memorial near a Tops Grocery store in Buffalo, New York, the day after a gunman shot dead 10 people. Grieving residents from the US city of Buffalo held vigils after a white gunman shot dead 10 people at a grocery store in a racially-motivated rampage. —AFP

# Biden visits site of mass shooting

## Presidents powerless to change laws in face of reluctant Congress

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden flew Tuesday to mourn at the site of America's latest deadly mass shooting, warning that the white supremacist ideology motivating the alleged gunman is tearing the country's "soul" apart. In the hastily organized trip to Buffalo, New York, Biden, accompanied by his wife Jill Biden, reprised the weary familiar role for presidents of consoler-in-chief.

He was to begin by meeting families of the 10 African Americans murdered allegedly by a white gunman in a neighborhood supermarket Saturday. Also scheduled were meetings with community leaders and first responders, as well as a visit to a makeshift memorial at the supermarket to offer "condolences and comfort to those affected by this tragedy," a White House official said.

Biden will then deliver a speech that, like so many he's given, will urge Congress to overcome division on restricting firearms ownership, a constitutionally protected right that has led to there being more guns than people in the world's richest nation.

After decades of mass shootings in schools, nightclubs, movie theaters and churches, many Americans are numb to each new outrage, while presidents have repeatedly discovered their powerlessness to change

laws in the face of a reluctant Congress.

In Saturday's rampage, the killer wielded an AR-15, a military style weapon which has been used repeatedly in mass shootings around the country while at the same time being one of the most popular rifles for legitimate gun enthusiasts.

Having long campaigned unsuccessfully to ban assault-style rifles, Biden will once more demand laws to "keep weapons of war off our streets," the White House official said. He will also highlight the failure to keep firearms away from people with serious mental illness who are "a danger to themselves or others."

**Racist ideology**

The most acute portion of Biden's remarks could be about a far wider threat to the nation—the racism and extremism that the 79-year-old Democrat cited as motivations for first coming out of retirement to take on Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

In a preview of the speech, the White House official signaled strong wording from Biden, who will "call this despicable act for what it is: Terrorism motivated by a hateful and perverse ideology that tears at the soul of our nation." "He'll call on all Americans to give hate no safe harbor, and to reject

the lies of racial animus that radicalize, divide us, and led to the act of racist violence we saw on Saturday," the official said.

Biden also will call on Americans "to seek a more perfect union that embraces the diversity that has made us the strongest and most dynamic nation in the history of the world."

The suspect captured after the shooting was said by police to have authored a lengthy manifesto promoting extreme, but increasingly widely held, white supremacist ideas. At the heart of the manifesto was a rant about what's dubbed "replacement theory," which purports the existence of a leftist plot to dilute the white population with non-white immigrants.

It is a conspiracy theory that, like the bizarre QAnon narrative, has spread from the furthest fringes of society to surprisingly mainstream areas—most notably Tucker Carlson's enormously influential nightly talk show on Fox News.

Prominent Republican members of Congress have also echoed "replacement theory" talking points, which in turn are not too distant from Trump's multiple speeches as president in which he demonized illegal immigrants as invaders, once calling them "animals." —AFP

## Man attacked US church over 'hatred of Taiwan'

LOS ANGELES: A man who padlocked a church and opened fire on its Taiwanese-American congregation, killing one person and injuring five others, was motivated by hatred of the island and its people, US investigators said Monday. David Chou jammed the doors shut using chains and superglue as dozens of parishioners enjoyed a post-service banquet at the church in Laguna Woods, near Los Angeles. The 68-year-old, an American citizen, also hid bags containing Molotov cocktails and spare ammunition around the building, before opening fire with two handguns, in what investigators say was a "methodical" attempt to cause carnage.

"We know that he formulated a strategy that he wanted to employ," Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes said. "It was very well thought out from how he had prepared, both being there, securing the location, placing things about the inside of the room to perpetuate additional victims if he had the opportunity," he added. Chou, who worked as a security guard in Las Vegas, launched the attack out of "politically motivated hate... (and) was upset about political tensions between China and Taiwan," Barnes said Chou "is a US citizen who immigrated from China." An official at Taiwan's trade office in Los Angeles told AFP that he was born on the island in 1953. Taiwan has been ruled independently since the end of a civil war in 1949. It has its own democratically elected government and a powerful military.

Authoritarian China claims the island as its own, insist-



CALIFORNIA: Deborah Kipers reacts as she remembers Dr John Cheng near a makeshift memorial outside his office in Aliso Viejo, California. Cheng, a family and sports medicine doctor was killed protecting others when a gunman opened fire at church services he was attending in nearby Laguna Woods, California. —AFP

ing it is a renegade province that will one day be brought to heel. Taiwan's president offered her "sincere condolences" to the victims' families.

"Violence is never the answer," Tsai Ing-wen said in a statement. Details emerged Monday of the heroism of one parishioner who tackled Chou as he began shooting. John Cheng, a doctor, charged the attacker in a bid to bring him to the ground, allowing others to hogtie him until police arrived. "Without the actions of Dr. Cheng there is no doubt that there would have been numerous additional victims in this crime," said Barnes. "Unfortunately, after Dr. Cheng tackled the suspect he was hit by gunshots and he was pronounced deceased at the scene." Five other people who were injured in the attack were taken to hospital. They ranged in age from 66 to 92. —AFP

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## International

## Ukrainian town of New York comes under Russian assault

## Ukraine's forces sending toughest units to hold off Russian advance on two cities

**NEW YORK:** The four-year-old recognised the low whistle of the Russian artillery shell hurtling toward the Ukrainian town of New York long before his mother had a chance to grab his hand. "Here comes one," the boy said matter-of-factly a few long moments before the blast of an exploding building echoed across the small town with the big American name. His exhausted 28-year-old mother did not even bother to duck. Valeria Kolakevych has heard so many shells whizz overhead in the third month of Russia's offensive that she knows instinctively how close each will land while it is still in the air. "It was terrible," Kolakevych said, without skipping a beat in her story about a round of fire that had badly damaged four neighbouring houses the previous night.

"And the most terrible thing is that there was nothing there—just civilians," she said as another artillery shell blew something up near the upper end of the hilly street. The second impact forced her 11-year-old daughter to utter a soft yelp and cover her ears. The little boy followed his sister's lead and hunched closer to the ground.

Kolakevych took her children's hands and walked off as more blasts rang out from fields that once made up the de facto border between government territory and lands overseen by Moscow-backed insurgents in Ukraine's industrial east.

## Shooting from three sides

Russia's February 24 invasion has reignited fighting along fronts that froze over once Ukraine's eight-year separatist conflict in the east settled into a dreary stalemate after claiming 14,000 lives. Russia initially prioritised seiz-

ing Kyiv and Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv in the north. Setbacks in both have put the onus on Russian and pro-Kremlin separatist forces to break through from a southern flank that stretches from Crimea to the destroyed city of Mariupol further east. This has spelled trouble for New York—a town of 10,000 mostly Russian speakers that attempted a fresh start last year by dropping its Soviet name Novgorodsk and adopting one first chosen by its German settlers in the 1800s.

Locals say there's no record of how the town first got its name. It was changed under the Soviet Union in 1951 and back again last year after an activist campaign. Residents say artillery fire began pelting New York a month ago and has grown heavier by the day.

"It is getting really bad. There was a bit of shooting here and there before but it did not really bother us," seamstress Valentyna Kanebalotskaya said while moving her belongings to her daughter's house in a slightly safer part of town. "But now they are shooting at us from the west, east and south," the 71-year-old said.

**'It is getting really bad'**

## Abandoned military base

Ukraine's stretched forces are sending in their biggest guns and toughest units to hold off a Russian advance on two important cities in the northeastern corner of the front. But the Ukrainian military presence verges on non-existent within the confines of New York itself.

A naked mannequin inexplicably stands next to the open door of an abandoned military base filled with sandbags on one of the town's main roads. A few forlorn soldiers appear to represent the main defence of a central



**NEW YORK:** A family walks close to a wall in the frontline town of New York, eastern Ukraine on May 16, 2022, on the 82nd day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian town of New York, in the eastern Donetsk region, founded by German settlers and members of the Mennonite Church in 1892, was renamed by the Soviet authorities to Novgorodsk in 1951. —AFP

square that has been bombed repeatedly in the past week. "You see that crater—a Russian jet did that," a soldier who agreed to be identified as Oleksandr said, showing off a yawning hole in the dirt road. Behind it stood the broken frame of a large factory and a chain of other ruined buildings comprising the town's industrial district.

## Chemical danger

Oleksandr's main worry is that the Russians might accidentally hit a neighbourhood plant that manufactures a raw material for paints and plastics called phenol. "That is a very frightening thing. Just one direct hit and it would react like a chemical weapon," the 36-year-old soldier said.

"It rolls along the ground and its consequences are

very tragic." Both sides have accused the other of planning chemical attacks—a charge that appears at least partially aimed at deflecting blame in case someone accidentally hits a hazardous site with stray fire. Yet residents appear more worried about more immediate problems, such as a lack of running water and gas. Some of the Russian speakers even blame the artillery attacks on Ukraine. "The Ukrainians come in to fire from the hills here and then leave. And then all of us get shelled," said pensioner Yelena Valeryanova. She and many other Russian speakers use patronymics instead of last names when talking to reporters out of fear of retribution from local Ukrainian officials. "The Donetsk (separatists) treat us better," she said. —AFP

## Kremlin critic Navalny appeals jail sentence

**MOSCOW:** Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Tuesday opened an appeal process for a nine-year prison sentence he was handed in March on charges that he and his allies say are politically motivated. After a brief start to the hearing on Tuesday morning, the court said it would resume the process on May 24 following a request to postpone from Navalny.

His hearing comes as Russian authorities seek to silence remaining government critics and Moscow pushes on with its military campaign in neighbouring Ukraine, with thousands killed and some 10 million displaced. A vocal critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Navalny in late March had his jail term extended to nine years after he was found guilty of embezzlement and contempt of court.

He is already serving two-and-a-half years in a prison some 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Moscow for violating parole on old fraud charges. On Tuesday, Navalny joined a hearing at a Moscow court via video-link from behind bars at his prison colony to appeal the extension of his jail term. Wearing a black prisoner uniform, Navalny asked the judge to postpone the hearing by a week so he can have a family meeting before being moved to a different colony, an AFP journalist reported. "If you confirm the sentence, I will be moved to a regime colony and transferred out of here. In that case my visit will be cancelled," he said.

He also requested extra time to listen to the audio recording of his verdict. If his new sentence comes into force, the 45-year-old opposition politician will be trans-



**MOSCOW:** Opposition leader Alexei Navalny appears on a screen set up at a courtroom of the Moscow City Court via a video link from his prison cell. —AFP

ferred to a strict-regime penal colony, which will place him in much harsher conditions, including allowing fewer family visits. The new sentence would replace the old one—which he was handed in February last year—meaning Navalny would remain behind bars for another eight years.

As part of the new charges, investigators accused Navalny of stealing for personal use several million dollars' worth of donations that were given to his political organisations. Navalny rose to prominence as an anti-corruption blogger and, before his imprisonment, mobilised anti-government protests across Russia.

In 2018, he campaigned as a presidential candidate but was eventually barred from running in the election that saw Putin secure a fourth term in power. In his absence, Navalny's team continues publishing investigations into the wealth of Russia's elites that have garnered millions of views on YouTube. —AFP

## Rattled by Russia, Finns flock to military training

**SANTAHAMINA, Finland:** On a windy military island off Helsinki, people from all walks of life are spending their weekend doing military training, as volunteer numbers soar and Finland readies to join NATO to protect itself from Russia. Finland's defence forces only have around 13,000 employed personnel but the country of 5.5 million boasts an impressive 900,000 reservists with a wartime strength of 280,000 troops.

Finland shares a 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) border with Russia. For many of the participants attending this weekend's training course on Santahamina Island, Moscow's February 24 invasion of another neighbour, Ukraine, was the deciding factor that got them to sign up.

"These recent events in Ukraine were the final sign that it is necessary to be prepared in one's own life, so that if something ever happens, one is better equipped for a crisis," said 30-year-old engineer Ville Mukka after learning how to fight off a knife attack. He and the other volunteers donned camouflage uniforms, some wearing helmets with branches tucked in them, as they trained in hand-to-hand combat, detecting explosives, and squad movement in the forest.

In the week after the war in Ukraine started, enrolment for the voluntary defence courses soared. "Interest in voluntary training was about 10 times higher than in normal years," said Ossi Hietala, 28, a representative of course organiser MPK, the National Defence Training Association of Finland.

While around 600 people usually register during a normal week, the number enrolling in MPK courses in the last week of February jumped to 6,000. To meet the increased demand, MPK received additional funding of nearly three million euros (\$3.1 million) from the state in April.

Finland fought two bloody wars against the Soviet Union during World War II, with the Nordic country ultimately ceding vast areas of land to its powerful eastern neighbour.

## 'Just ordinary Finns'

"You don't have to go too far back in history to find points of convergence (with what is happening today), which is quite worrying," said Tuomas Vare, 43, one of the participants on the course. "Perhaps that's part of the reason why I have become more active in training."

Less than three months after Russia launched its attack on Ukraine, the Finnish government on Sunday announced its official intention to apply for NATO membership, ditching its decades-old policy of military non-alignment as public and political support for membership soared.

For some volunteers, the decision was a welcome one. "I think that Finland as a small country has no other reasonable way to defend itself and its own sovereignty. Yes, I am in favour of the alliance," Mukka said. Finland's decision, taken in tandem with neighbouring Sweden, has angered Moscow, which has warned the two countries to expect a "response".

The courses organised by MPK, the coordinating body for Finland's volunteer national defence, offer a wide range of training aimed at preparing citizens for crises. "The participants in MPK's courses are just ordinary Finnish people. These people want to come to the courses to develop their skills, practice and learn new things," Hietala said. MPK trains around 40,000 Finns every year. —AFP

## Thousands hospitalized...

Continued from Page 1

Tuesday in Tehran, according to a government website. That is more than six times the World Health Organization's recommended maximum of 25 micrograms per cubic meter.

In Kuwait, meanwhile, air traffic at the main airport was suspended for an hour and a half due to a dust storm Monday, and marine traffic in all three ports remained suspended as of Tuesday afternoon. Kuwait's Ministry of Education said classes were suspended on Tuesday but would resume the following day.

## Response needed 'urgently'

The Middle East has always been battered by dust and sandstorms, but they have become more frequent and intense in recent years. The trend is associated with overgrazing and deforestation, overuse of river water and more dams.

## Gunfights in Tripoli; rivals...

Continued from Page 1

But his arrival sparked a battle that raised fears of a return to the chaos that followed a 2011 revolt that toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi—and to the all-out conflict that gripped the capital when pro-Haftar forces attacked in 2019-20. Several hours later, Bashagha's camp announced that he and his ministers had "left Tripoli to preserve the security and safety of citizens". Dbeibah's defense ministry said it would respond "with an iron fist" to anyone "attacking security and the safety of citizens".

Local media later broadcast footage of Dbeibah meeting members of the public in the streets of the capital. The education ministry announced that

Unseasonable masses of dry, cold air help explain the recent proliferation of sandstorms in eastern Syria and Iraq and "their transmission to the Arabian Peninsula", Hassan Abdallah from the WASM meteorological centre in Jordan told AFP. By the time the sandstorms reach Saudi Arabia they tend to be less intense, he added.

Sandstorms are worsening regionally because of factors including low water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, large fluctuations in annual rainfall and disintegrating soil, he said. As for how to mitigate them, Abdallah advised planting more trees and "addressing the low level of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers urgently". In central Riyadh on Tuesday, sand layered cars and buildings, and residents struggled to keep it out of their homes.

"Working outside is very difficult because of the dirt," a Pakistani construction worker who gave his name as Kalimullah told AFP as he installed tiles. "I try to wash my face from time to time," the 30-year-old added, wrapping a piece of cloth around his face to block the sand. Saudi office worker Abdullah Al-Otaibi, 39, said he was grateful he works indoors. "Dust storms are part of our culture and we are used to it, but some of them are severe," he said, rubbing his eyes as he hurried inside. —AFP

schools would be closed for the time being. Libya expert Emadeddin Badi said Bashagha's move had been "a failed attempt at a fait accompli".

Badi said Bashagha had "lost a large proportion of his constituency in his hometown of Misrata, tarnished his anti-crime brand and now tanked his popular support." "It'll be difficult to pick up the pieces after this," he tweeted. The UN's top in-country official, Stephanie Williams, in a tweet urged all sides to maintain calm, including avoiding "inflammatory rhetoric". Bashagha, in video footage broadcast by Libyan television stations, said he would deliver a "unity speech to the Libyan people" on Tuesday evening.

His interior minister Issam Abu Zariba pledged that their administration would assume its duties "peacefully" and "in compliance with the law". He called on "all security forces and concerned parties to cooperate" in ensuring a smooth transition. Pro-Bashagha armed groups had already deployed in March on the edges of the capital, raising fears that a fragile ceasefire in place since October 2020 would collapse. —AFP

## Hezbollah, allies lose majority as...

Continued from Page 1

parliament for the first time. Together with other non-aligned MPs who have sometimes supported the now-defunct protest movement's demands, they could find themselves in a kingmaking position but they would need the kind of unity they failed to achieve during the campaign.

Analyst Ziad Majed said that the economic context could play in favor of reformists who will for the first time be pushing from within parliament, not just as outsiders. "This will create political and popular pressure for reformists and forces of change to cooperate," he said. Only eight women were voted into parliament. One of the most notable victories notched up by independents was the election in southern Lebanon of Elias Jradeh and Firas Hamdan for seats that Hezbollah and its allies had not lost in three decades.

Another major satisfaction for those described in Lebanon as the "thawra" (revolution, in Arabic) candidates, was the defeat of several reviled MPs loyal to the Syrian government of Bashar Al-Assad. In what was interpreted by independents as a gesture of spite by Hezbollah, a group of youths on scooters descended on Martyrs Square overnight and burned down the "revolution fist". The temporary monument had become a visual symbol of the secular protests that swept Lebanon in October 2019 and had raised hopes of democratic change.

The movement lost momentum as Lebanon's ruling

## Qatar Amir visits Spain as EU eyes...

Continued from Page 1

percent of Europe's gas needs. Qatar, which has the third-largest natural gas reserves in the world, is currently Spain's fifth-biggest supplier of natural gas after the United States, Algeria, Nigeria and Egypt.

cartel of sectarian political barons bided their time and one of the sharpest economic downturns of our time muffled popular discontent. The parliamentary elections were a first major test for those in the protest camp who chose to enter the political fray. Hezbollah and its ally Amal retained all 27 parliament seats reserved for Shiite lawmakers but the Christian bloc led by President Michel Aoun and other coalition partners lost a little ground.

The main issue that polarises parliament is Hezbollah's right to keep an arsenal that is often described as equivalent to or better than the state's. Some see it as a historical right and the best defence for the small Mediterranean country while others consider Hezbollah's weapons to be the root of all of Lebanon's ills. Sami Nader, an analyst with the Levant Institute for Strategic Affairs, said that Hezbollah had suffered symbolic losses but was sceptical the polls could yield radical changes. "Hezbollah and the Iranian axis took a blow but will this pave way for change in Lebanon? I have doubts," he told AFP.

The formation of a government, the election of parliament's speaker and the presidential election could all be very contentious and lead to protracted political crises. Speaker Nabih Berri has held his job since 1992. President Michel Aoun, the world's third oldest head of state, had long planned for his son-in-law Gebran Bassil to take over but the Lebanese Forces' surge in the polls could disrupt that scenario.

Lebanon shares power among its religious communities, and politics is often treated as a family business. By convention, the president is a Maronite Christian, the premier a Sunni Muslim, and the parliamentary speaker a Shiite. Despite a turnout of 41 percent on Sunday, the UN envoy to Lebanon said "the elections were a vital expression of Lebanon's citizen engagement, which should serve to strengthen the country's institutions." —AFP

The country accounted for 4.4 percent of Spain's total gas imports in April and the Spanish government hopes this share could increase. "We are working closely with our European counterparts" on the long-term supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG), Qatar's ambassador to Spain, Abdullah Al-Hamar, told Spanish daily 20 Minutos. The Amir of Qatar's trip to Europe will also include visits to Germany, Britain, Slovenia and Switzerland, where he will attend the World Economic Forum which will run in the mountain resort of Davos from May 22-26. —AFP



## International

# Sri Lanka's embattled president side-stepped censure motion

## Negotiations still underway on sharing portfolios

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's beleaguered president side-stepped a censure motion on Tuesday after his fractured coalition rallied to delay a resolution blaming him for the country's worst economic crisis. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's shaky coalition voted against taking up the unprecedented "displeasure of parliament" motion.

The non-binding motion was proposed by the main opposition Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance, saying it echoed the demands of thousands of anti-government demonstrators who have for weeks been seeking Rajapaksa's resignation. Shortages of food, fuel and medicines, along with record inflation and lengthy blackouts, have brought severe hardships to Sri Lankans, in the worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948.



**Won crucial support from two main opposition parties**

The president's elder brother Mahinda stepped down as prime minister last week and in a bid to defuse mounting public anger, Gotabaya appointed opposition politician Ranil Wickremesinghe to replace him. Wickremesinghe has won crucial support from the two main opposition parties to form a

"unity government" to pull the country out of the dire economic crisis, but had yet to form a full cabinet on Monday afternoon.

He was expected to name a new cabinet later, but political sources said negotiations were still underway on sharing portfolios. In an address to the nation Monday, Wickremesinghe said the country had run out of petrol and that the "next couple of months will be the most difficult ones of our lives".

Most petrol stations in the capital were closed on Tuesday with long queues outside the few that were still open. Sri Lanka is in the throes of its worst-ever economic crisis with its 22 million people enduring severe hardships to secure food, fuel and medicines while facing record inflation and lengthy power blackouts.

Wickremesinghe assumed office Thursday after his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa was forced out after weeks of protests over the government's handling of the economic crisis turned deadly. "The next couple of months will be the most difficult ones of our lives," Wickremesinghe said. "I have no desire to hide the truth and to lie to the public."

However, he urged people to "patiently bear the next couple of months" and vowed he could overcome the crisis. He said the government had also run out of cash to pay the 1.4 million civil servants their salaries in May, and he will turn to money printing as a last resort.

"Against my own wishes, I am compelled to permit printing money in order to pay state-sector employees



COLOMBO: Police stand guard near the parliament building in Colombo on May 17, 2022. — AFP

and to pay for essential goods and services," he said. He also warned that fuel and electricity tariffs will be raised substantially and his government will also sell off its loss-making national carrier to reduce losses.

Sri Lanka has sought an IMF bailout and one of the key demands of the international lender is for Colombo to divest loss-making state enterprises, including Sri Lankan Airlines whose carried-forward losses exceed

a billion dollars.

Sri Lanka had run out of dollars to finance essential imports, Wickremesinghe said, and three oil tankers were waiting off Colombo to be paid before they would unload. The country was also out of 14 essential drugs including anti-rabies vaccines, the premier said, adding suppliers of medicines had not been paid for about four months. — AFP



GENEVA: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet is seen on a giant screen delivering a remote speech during a special session of the UN Human Rights Council on Ukraine, in Geneva. — AFP

## UN rights chief to visit China 'shortly'

GENEVA: The UN rights chief will be arriving in China "shortly" for a long-anticipated visit, including to the Xinjiang region where authorities stand accused of widespread rights abuses, a spokeswoman said Tuesday. After years of requesting "meaningful and unfettered" access to China's far-western Xinjiang region, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet is set to begin her visit before the end of this month, her office said.

"We've consistently said that it will be taking place by the end of May. We are approaching the end of May. So it will be happening shortly," spokeswoman Liz Throssell told reporters. An advance team was sent to China several weeks ago to prepare the visit, and has completed a lengthy quarantine in the country, gripped by fresh COVID outbreaks.

Bachelet herself is set to travel to Guangzhou and Xinjiang, but not to Beijing due to the COVID restrictions there, Throssell said, adding that the visit was due to last around a week. "She will be meeting high-level government officials," she said, adding that "the purpose of a visit is really... a dialogue with the Chinese government, with the Chinese authorities on a range of domestic, regional and global human rights issues."

"It's really hoped that the visit will allow to build further engagement between the UN Human Rights Office and China." There have long been calls for Bachelet to visit Xinjiang and to publish her office's findings on the situation there.

### 'Genocide'

The US government and lawmakers in a number of other Western countries have labelled China's treatment of the Uygur minority in Xinjiang "genocide"—a charge Beijing vehemently denies. Rights groups say that at least one million mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in "re-education camps" in the region, and face widespread rights abuses, including forced sterilisation and forced labour.

China says it is running vocational training centres in the region designed to counter extremism. In March, the UN rights office announced that an agreement had finally been reached towards a visit, although it still remains unclear when Bachelet's team would release its long-delayed report on the situation.

Rights groups, diplomats and others have recently stepped up their demands for the publication of the report, which sources say has been ready for months. But Throssell said Tuesday it would not be released before Bachelet's trip, and that there was no clear timing for when it would be made public.

"As with all the reports, China as the member state concerned will be provided with the report when it is

ready, so that it can express its views," she said. Bachelet and her team would "be raising issues relating to Xinjiang with the authorities, and of course the report will inform this discussion," she said. After that, the document would be "shared with the authorities for their views. So that's why I don't have a timeline for when it may be published." — AFP

## Taleban shut down Afghan human rights body

KABUL: Taleban authorities on Tuesday said they have dissolved Afghanistan's independent human rights commission as it was "not considered necessary". Since the hardline Islamists seized power last August they have closed several bodies that protected the freedoms of Afghans, including the electoral commission and the ministry for women's affairs.

"We have some other organisations to carry out activities related to human rights, organisations that are linked to the judiciary," deputy government spokesman Inamullah Samangani told AFP, without elaborating.

The work of the rights commission, which included documenting civilian casualties of Afghanistan's two-decade war, was halted when the Taliban ousted a US-backed government last year and the body's top officials fled the country.

The National Security Council and a reconciliation council that promoted peace were also shut down at the weekend as the government announced its first annual budget.

"These departments are not considered necessary, so they have been dissolved. But in the future if they are needed then they can resume their operations," Samangani said.

The Taleban are facing a financial deficit of about 44 billion afghanis (about \$500 million) in a country almost entirely dependent on foreign aid. Heather Barr, associate women's rights director at Human Rights Watch, said it was shocking to see Afghanistan backslide with the closures. "It mattered enormously to have somewhere to go, to ask for help and to demand justice," she tweeted. The Taleban previously promised a softer rule than their first regime from 1996 to 2001, but have steadily eroded the freedoms of many Afghans, particularly women, who face restrictions in education, work and dress. — AFP

## Waiting for the water train in scorching India

JODHPUR: Afroz misses school every day to spend hours waiting with a handcart full of containers for a special train bringing precious water to people suffering a heatwave in India's desert state of Rajasthan. Temperatures often exceed 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) here, but this year the heat came early in what many experts say is more proof of climate change making life unbearable for India's 1.4 billion people.

"It's always been very hot here and we have always struggled for water," Afroz, 13, told AFP as he waited in Pali district for the second time that day for the special train. "But I don't remember filling up containers in April." For more than three weeks now, the 40-wagon train-carrying some 2 million litres—has been the only source of water for thousands of people in the district.

### Untreated

Every day, dozens of people—mostly women and children—jostle with blue plastic jerry cans and metal pots to fill from hoses gushing water out of the army-green train into an underground tank. Water has been dispatched by train to Pali before, but according to local railway officials, the shortage this year was already critical in April so they started early. The wagons—filled in Jodhpur, around 65 kilometres (40 miles) away—are first emptied into cement storage tanks, from which the water is sent to a treatment plant for filtering and distribution. But for Afroz's family and many others like them, life is easier if they fill directly from the storage tanks, despite the water being untreated.

That their children skip school at times to ensure there is water in the house is what hits the families the most. "I can't ask the breadwinner of the family to help me. Otherwise, we'll be struggling for both food and water," Afroz's mother Noor Jahan said as she filled up an aluminium pot. "It is affecting my child's education, but what

do I do? I cannot carry all these containers on my own," she told AFP.

### Cracked feet

Hundreds of millions of people in South Asia have been sweltering in an early summer heatwave in recent weeks, with India seeing its warmest March on record. In India and Pakistan, "more intense heat waves of longer durations and occurring at a higher frequency are projected", the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in a recent landmark report.

The "cascading impacts" of heatwaves on agricultural output, water, energy supplies and other sectors are already apparent, World Meteorological Organization chief Petteri Taalas said this month. On Friday, India banned wheat exports—needed to help fill a supply gap due to the Ukraine war—in part due to the heat wilting crops. Together, high humidity and heat can create "wet-bulb temperatures" so vicious that sweating no longer cools people down, potentially killing a healthy adult within hours. "I have already made three trips from my house in the last one hour. And I'm the only one who can do it," said Laxmi, another woman collecting water, pointing to cracks on her feet. "We have no direct water to our homes and it is so hot. What are we supposed to do if something happens to us while we walk up and down to fetch water?"

### 'Extreme depletion'

In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched an ambitious Jal Jeevan (Water Life) Mission, promising a functional tap connection to all households in rural India by 2024. But less than 50 percent of the population has access to safely managed drinking water, according to UNICEF, with two-thirds of India's 718 districts affected by "extreme water depletion".

A little further from Pali, 68-year-old Shivaram walked on the cracked bottom of a dried-out pond in Bandai village, his bright-pink turban protecting his head from the scorching sun. The pond—which was the main source of water for both residents and their animals—has been dry for almost two years because of low rainfall. The shells of dead turtles litter the cracked mud. "Farmers have been severely impacted," Shivaram said. "Some of our animals have died too." — AFP



PALI, India: Photograph shows a man sitting near a special train carrying water for storage in the underground tanks for the usage by people on a hot summer day in Pali. Every day dozens of villagers, mostly women and children, wait with blue plastic jerry cans and metal pots for a special train bringing precious water to people suffering a heatwave in India's desert state of Rajasthan. — AFP

## Biden reestablishes US troop presence inside Somalia

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden has ordered the reestablishment of a US troop presence in Somalia to help local authorities combat the Al-Shabaab militant group, a senior American official told reporters Monday. The move reverses an order from Biden's predecessor Donald Trump, who in late 2020 pulled nearly all US forces from the East African nation as he sought to wind down US military engagements abroad during his final weeks in office.

Biden "approved a request from the Defense Department to reposition US forces in East Africa in order to reestablish a small persistent US military presence in Somalia," the official said. Fewer than 500 troops will be involved, the official said, adding that it will "take a little bit of time to reach that" level in

Somalia. That is slightly smaller than the original footprint of 750 US soldiers who spent years in the country conducting operations against Al-Shabaab, but were then removed under Trump and rebased in neighboring countries Kenya and Djibouti.

In December 2020, just before he left office, Trump directed the withdrawal from Somalia "against the advice of senior US military leadership," the official said. "Since then Al-Shabaab... has unfortunately only grown stronger," the official added. The official suggested that Biden's decision had more to do with the security of US forces than with the election on Sunday of a new Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, after more than a year of political instability and a drought crisis. Somali leaders over recent years have been constant in their support for cooperation with the US military in battling Islamic extremists, the official said, adding that Washington remains confident the new administration will continue to do so. Congratulating the newly elected president, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged him to develop "security forces to prevent and counter terrorism and assume full security responsibility from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia." — AFP



WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2022

# Business

## Indian insurance giant slumps after country's biggest-ever IPO

### Govt seeks to sell off state assets to bolster public finances

**MUMBAI:** Indian state-owned insurance giant LIC slumped on its market debut Tuesday following the country's biggest-ever initial public offering, closing nearly eight percent below the IPO price. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government raised \$2.7 billion by selling 3.5 percent of Life Insurance Corporation of India as his administration seeks to sell off state assets to bolster tattered public finances.

But it was forced to cut back the offer from a planned five percent after markets turned volatile following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's COVID lockdowns. The offer price of 949 rupees (\$12.22) had valued LIC at \$77 billion, but the stock traded under pressure all day, closing 7.75 percent lower at 875.45 rupees a share.

The muted debut could test market appetite as Modi seeks to privatize more shares in nationalized companies to plug an estimated 16.6 trillion rupee (\$214 billion) fiscal deficit. Market analyst Arun Kejriwal said the slump on LIC's first day of trading was a "learning" experience, adding that the government will have to do more to convince investors if it wants to sell more of its stake.

But the IPO saw enthusiastic participation from small investors—including many first-timers—and was oversubscribed nearly three times. "I knew it won't be a great listing but it doesn't matter to me," said 30-year-old Ayush, a recent market entrant, who was unbowed by the decrease in share price.

"I bought the shares for the long-term." Global equities have been tumultuous for most of 2022. Foreign investors have withdrawn a net 1.71 trillion rupees (\$22 billion) from Indian markets so far this year, stock exchange data showed, as US monetary

policy tightening further roiled sentiment.

#### Synonymous with life insurance

India was heavily regulated for decades after independence, and the state still retains an outside role in the economy. Hundreds of companies are owned by national or lower-level governments, operating in fields ranging from mining and resources to electricity and construction.

Modi has pledged to "monetize and modernize" the sometimes moribund sector, and the insurance giant's IPO followed a years-long effort by bankers and bureaucrats to appraise the mammoth firm and prepare it for listing. Founded in 1956 by nationalizing and combining more than 240 firms, LIC was a monopoly until private companies were allowed to enter the market in 2000.

It continues to lead the pack with a 61 percent market share and an army of 1.3 million "LIC agents" giving it huge reach, particularly in remote rural areas. But its dominance has declined steadily in the face of competition from net-savvy private insurers offering specialized products.

The firm warned in its regulatory filing that "there can be no assurance that our corporation will not lose further market share" to private companies.

#### 'Enormous' potential

In a country where only three percent of the 1.4 billion population has life insurance, analyst Kejriwal said LIC's potential remains "enormous". "It has actually bounced back in the last two-three years. And COVID has seen a turnaround in the fortunes of LIC," he told AFP, pointing to its digitization efforts.

Going public will also force more transparency on



MUMBAI, India: Mangalam Ramasubramanian Kumar (center), chairman of the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), poses with the bronze statue of a bull at the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) in Mumbai on May 17, 2022. — AFP

the insurance behemoth. "The IPO is going to galvanize LIC into being much more effective than it was," Kejriwal added. LIC is also India's largest asset manager, with 39.55 trillion rupees under management as of September 30, including significant stakes in Indian blue chips such as Reliance and Infosys.

LIC's real estate assets include vast offices at

prime urban Indian locations, including a 15-storey office in Chennai that was once the country's tallest building. The firm is also believed to own a large collection of rare and valuable artwork that includes paintings by MF Husain-known as the Pablo Picasso of India-although the value of these holdings has not been made public. —AFP

## Wheat-laden trucks, ships stranded at Indian port

**AHMEDABAD:** Hundreds of thousands of tons of wheat were stranded at a major port in India on Tuesday after New Delhi's surprise ban on exports over inflation and food security worries.

India, the world's second-largest grower of wheat, last week ordered that traders could not enter into new export deals without government approval. The snap announcement has led to chaos at the port in Kandla, in Gujarat, where about 4,000 trucks are stuck in queues outside, according to the port operator.

Four ships partially loaded with about 80,000 tons of wheat are also docked at the facility. Port officials said trucks that arrived before May 13, when the government announced the export ban, would be allowed to unload the grain onto ships waiting to take it to countries including Egypt and South Korea under prior agreements.

"However, those wheat-laden trucks that arrived at the port after May 13 will have to return with the commodity," said Om Prakash Dadlani, spokesman for operator Deendayal Port Trust.

The Gandhidham Chamber of Commerce estimated that about 400,000 tons of wheat from Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and other wheat-growing states were stranded. Between 500 and 700 warehouses near the port were "full of wheat for export", said Teja Kangad, president



AHMEDABAD: Trucks loaded with tons of wheat lie stranded at a port in Ahmedabad.

of the chamber.

The government should have given prior notice before announcing the ban, he said. "This has led to a chaotic situation where the truckers and traders are left uncertain of what will happen to the goods. Also, wheat being a perishable commodity, it can't be kept in the open for long," Kangad told AFP.

The wheat ban has drawn criticism from the Group of Seven nations worried about protectionism as inflation soars in the wake of the Ukraine war. India had previously said it was ready to help fill some of the supply shortages caused by Russia's February invasion of Ukraine, which had accounted for 12 percent of global exports. While India is a small exporter, its assurances of supplies from its large buffer stocks had provided some support to global prices and soothed fears of major shortages.

India's wheat production has been hit by searing temperatures—the country recorded its warmest March on record—prompting the government to predict output would fall at least five percent this year from 109 million tons in 2021. Wheat prices surged to a record high on Monday, jumping to 435 euros (\$453) per ton as the European market opened.

Meanwhile, the United States hopes India will reverse its ban on wheat exports, Washington's top diplomat to the United Nations said Monday, warning the move would worsen global shortages of the commodity. "We're encouraging countries not to restrict exports because we think any restrictions on exports will exacerbate the food shortages," Linda Thomas-Greenfield said during a ministerial gathering on food security ahead of a meeting of the UN Security Council. —AFP

## US retail sales rise in April amid rising prices

**WASHINGTON:** Americans spent increasing amounts on their shopping for the fourth straight month in April with inflation running at a 40-year high, as auto sales rebounded, according to government data released Tuesday. US retail sales rose 0.9 percent in the month to \$677.7, as auto sales rose 2.2 percent in April after declining in March, the Commerce Department said.

But when vehicles and parts are stripped out, sales jumped 1.3 percent, far higher than analysts were expecting. With gasoline prices on the rise due to the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia, sales at gasoline stations fell 2.7 percent, after surging in the prior two months, the report said.

The healthy US consumer has underpinned the strong recovery in the world's largest economy following the slowdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the surge in demand also has strained supply chains and helped push inflation to its fastest rate since the early 1980s. "Looking ahead, consumers' tolerance to high inflation will continue to be tested and the renewed spike in gasoline prices, along with tighter financial conditions, will weigh on households' willingness to spend on big-ticket items," said Kathy Bostjancic, a chief US economist



WASHINGTON: US retail sales rose 0.9 percent in the month to \$677.7, as auto sales rose 2.2 percent in April after declining in March, the Commerce Department said.

at Oxford Economics.

Total retail sales were 8.2 percent higher than April 2021, while the increase excluding autos was 10.9 percent, according to the data. The biggest increases in the month were for electronics, home furnishings and clothing, while restaurants and bars saw a 2.0 percent increase and online sales increased by a similar amount. It was a strong start to the second quarter US growth, which underscores the need for the Federal Reserve to continue on its path of raising borrowing rates to cool demand and tamp down inflation pressures, economists say.

"For the Fed, these data are still showing upward momentum in growth and combined with decades-high inflation, warrant a removal of policy accommodation," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US econo-

mist at High Frequency Economics.

Meanwhile, US industrial output accelerated in April driven higher by the continued ramp-up in auto manufacturing, the Federal Reserve said Tuesday. Total industrial production increased 1.1 percent compared to March, the fourth consecutive monthly increase—and double what analysts had been expecting—as motor vehicle output jumped 3.9 percent, the report said. US industry, including automakers, had been struggling to keep up with strong demand amid strains in the global supply chain, notably a shortage of critical computer chips, as well as the struggle to find workers. Factory output increased 0.8 percent, but excluding autos was up only 0.5 percent, while utilities rose 2.4 percent, according to the data. —AFP

## Walmart profits hit as consumers shift behavior

**NEW YORK:** Walmart reported a drop in profits Tuesday due to higher costs for labor, food and fuel as it pointed to some consumers shifting away from discretionary items amid high inflation.

Shares tumbled following the report, with profits lagging expectations as Walmart executives described a series of cost hits that converged during the period. The company was overstaffed for part of the quarter due to the unexpectedly speedy return of workers who were afflicted by the Omicron variant of COVID-19, resulting in higher labor costs.

Walmart was also affected by a spike in energy costs when the Russian invasion of Ukraine sent oil prices soaring. Another obstacle was a March fire that destroyed a warehouse in Indianapolis, Indiana that employed more than 1,000 people. Nobody was injured in the episode, but Walmart had to replace goods and route items through neighboring infrastructure, adding cost.

Walmart reported a 25 percent drop in profits to \$2.1 billion for the quarter ending April 30. That translated into \$1.30 per share, below the \$1.48 expected by analysts.

Revenues rose 2.4 percent to \$141.6 billion. Walmart raised its full-year sales forecast slightly but lowered its profit forecast. It now expects earnings per share to fall one percent after previously projecting an increase in the mid-single digits. Chief Executive Doug McMillon acknowledged on a conference call with analysts that the results were "a disappointment to us," but said, "We're looking forward to putting it behind us and having a strong year."

Walmart's revenue at its massive US name-sake stores rose on average just three percent, versus a 5.6 percent jump in the quarter that ended in January, a benchmark known as comparable sales. E-commerce sales growth has also leveled off compared with earlier in the pandemic. Executives said strong demand for pricey items such as game consoles suggest that some consumers are not cutting back due to inflation. But other shoppers have shifted behavior as rising prices for gasoline and other necessities pressure consumers, resulting in some people steering more money to staples such as groceries and away from discretionary items such as apparel.

As a result, Walmart has been adding more promotions in general merchandise, where inventories have risen significantly from a year ago. Another shift is in the move away from brands for lunch meats, dairy and other goods in favor of Walmart's own branded goods, which are lower-priced. Walmart US President John Furner said the company planned to redouble efforts with food suppliers to limit future price increases. —AFP



## Business

# China's zero-COVID policy to hit Asia aviation recovery: IATA

## Walsh urges Beijing to ease its hardline stance



SINGAPORE: Director General of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Willie Walsh delivers his keynote address at the Changi Aviation Summit in Singapore on May 17, 2022. — AFP

SINGAPORE: China's zero-COVID policy will hold back a full air travel recovery in the Asia-Pacific region, a top airline industry group warned Tuesday, adding to calls for Beijing to ease its hardline stance. The world's second-biggest economy is seeking to stamp out the coronavirus entirely, with rapid lockdowns and mass testing, and the measures have hammered both domestic and international air travel.

The aviation sector's recovery in Asia was already relatively slow, and Willie Walsh, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) chief, warned Beijing's approach made the picture bleaker.

Currently, the United States produces about 98 percent of the formula it consumes.

### Import applications

The FDA plans to work to quickly review such applications, especially ones that come from "countries that have health and safety inspection systems similar" to the United States, according to a senior White House official. The process would also prioritize applications showing "clear quality and safety and nutritional adequacy," a different senior administration official added.

According to Califf, foreign-made baby formula could appear on US shelves within "weeks." The Biden administration was also reaching out to US manufacturers to offer help with logistical challenges, such as shipping, the officials said. US families have grown increasingly desperate for formula amid a perfect storm of supply chain issues and the massive recall.

The average out-of-stock rate for baby formula hit 43 percent earlier this month, according to DataSentry, which collected information from more than 11,000 retailers. Abbott's agreement with the FDA to restart production at the plant in Sturgis, Michigan also needs to be reviewed by a federal court after the Justice Department filed a complaint on Monday. The complaint says the facility "failed to comply with regulations designed to ensure the quality and safety of infant formula, including protection against the risk of contamination from bacteria."

"The actions we are announcing today will help to safely increase the supply of baby formula for families," US Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. Robert Ford, chairman and chief executive officer of Abbott said he regretted the situation and that the company already had begun "working to implement improvements and take corrective action."

"We know millions of parents and caregivers depend on us and we're deeply sorry that our voluntary recall worsened the nationwide formula shortage," he said in the statement.

The FDA and White House officials reiterated Monday that parents who are concerned about running out of baby formula should talk to their child's doctor, and that it is not safe to water down existing formula or to make your own at home. The scarcity is the latest crisis to confound President Joe Biden's push to get the US economy on sound footing amid the highest inflation in four decades and the ongoing global supply chain bottlenecks. — AFP

## US warns firms over incognito N Koreans seeking tech jobs

WASHINGTON: The US government warned Monday that North Koreans are hiding their identities to try to get contract jobs in the global technology sector, and said such workers pose major security risks. The FBI, Treasury Department and State Department issued a joint advisory saying that North Korean information technology workers were posing as nationals of China, South Korea, Japan, Eastern Europe, and the United States to seek jobs.

The North Koreans "target freelance contracts from employers located in wealthier nations, including those in North America, Europe, and East Asia," they said in the statement. And at times they do deals with others, not from North Korea, to act as go-betweens who help arrange and complete the contracts for the North Korean workers.

The North Korean managers "use their outsourced employees to make software purchases and interact with customers in situations that might otherwise expose" them, it said. The ruse helps companies get around the hefty sanctions placed on Pyongyang for its nuclear weapons program to acquire goods and services from abroad.

The advisory says that while much of the surreptitious job-seeking is to earn foreign exchange or to access virtual currency exchanges, some of the workers have helped Pyongyang's government-backed hacking operations. The workers also "may steal the customer account information of US or international banks to verify their identities with freelance platforms, payment providers, and companies employing" contract workers, it said.

Hiring the North Koreans "poses many risks, ranging from theft of intellectual property, data, and funds to reputational harm and legal consequences, including sanctions under both US and United Nations authorities," it said. — AFP

## Abbott agrees to restart US baby formula production

WASHINGTON: Amid a US shortage of baby formula, officials announced Monday a previously closed manufacturer would re-open and encouraged foreign companies to apply to import their products-although it will take weeks to see more stock back on store shelves.

A "consent decree" agreement between the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and major formula manufacturer Abbott outlines steps needed to restart production at the company's plant in Michigan, which was shut down due to a recall, Abbott said in a statement. "Once the FDA confirms the initial requirements for start-up have been met, Abbott could restart the site within two weeks," the statement said. However, the company cautioned that "from the time Abbott restarts the site, it will take six to eight weeks before product is available on shelves."



Abbott, which produces the popular Similac brand used by millions of American families, announced a voluntary recall on February 17 after the death of two babies. In a separate move, the FDA also said Monday it plans to accept applications from international baby formula manufacturers "who don't normally distribute their infant formula products in the US," FDA Commissioner Robert Califf said in a statement.



WEST HOLLYWOOD, US: In this file photo taken on November 12, 2021 Jeff Bezos attends the Baby2Baby 10-Year Gala presented by Paul Mitchell at Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood. — AFP

## White House hits back after Bezos knocks Biden on economy

WASHINGTON: The White House on Monday uncharacteristically lashed out at Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, after he openly criticized the Biden administration's fiscal and economic policies on Twitter. "It doesn't require a huge leap to figure out why one of the wealthiest individuals on Earth opposes an economic agenda for the middle class," said Andrew Bates, deputy press secretary. "It's also unsurprising that this tweet comes after the president met with labor organizers, including Amazon employees," he added. Bates was referring to President Joe Biden's recent White House meeting with Christian Smalls, the president of the Amazon Labor Union, which caused a shock in early April when it became the company's first labor union in the United States. The White House released a video of the meeting, during which Biden hugged Smalls, who wore a jacket with the slogan "Eat the rich" emblazoned on it. "You're trouble man," Biden told Smalls, adding: "I like you, you're my kind of trouble." In recent days, Bezos criticized Biden in in several posts on Twitter.

The US president has recently encouraged increasing taxes on wealthy corporations as a means of fighting rampant US inflation, an idea which seemed to irk the Amazon billionaire.

"Raising corp taxes is fine to discuss. Taming inflation is critical to discuss. Mushing them together is just misdirection," Bezos tweeted. Additionally, referencing Biden's social spending Build Back Better bill, which stalled in Congress, Bezos criticized the administration for having "tried hard to inject even more stimulus into an already over-heated, inflationary economy." — AFP

"It has been a brutal two years for airlines. But we are seeing signs of recovery now," he told an aviation conference in Singapore. "Unfortunately, (the) Asia-Pacific region will lag this recovery as China continues to pursue zero-COVID."

In 2021 in Asia, international travel was only seven percent of what it was in 2019, compared with a worldwide figure of 25 percent, he said. While the picture had improved at the start of this year, there was still a "long way to go," he added. China's decision to stick with zero-COVID has put it at odds with many Asian governments, which have started reopening borders and dropping quarantine and

testing requirements in recent months. "The science supports these initiatives," Walsh told the Changi Aviation Summit, attended by top industry officials.

IATA is "convinced that this science supports the removal of testing and quarantine for unvaccinated travelers from areas of high population immunity, including many parts of this region," he said.

China, the last major economy still closed off to the world, is facing mounting calls to drop the zero-COVID policy which has left millions in Shanghai locked down for weeks. Last week, the World Health Organization said the approach was unsustainable. — AFP

## Ukraine 'unhappy' as Hungary stalls EU Russian oil ban

KYIV: Ukraine's foreign minister urged the EU Monday to overcome Hungary's resistance to an embargo on Russian oil and then look to "kill" all of Moscow's exports to starve its war machine of funds. Budapest has been holding up a push by Brussels, backed by other European Union states, to ban Moscow's vital oil exports, the cornerstone of a planned sixth package of sanctions, arguing that it would hammer its own economy.

"We are unhappy with the fact that the oil embargo is not there," Ukraine's top diplomat Dmytro Kuleba said after meeting EU foreign ministers in Brussels. "It's clear who's holding up the issue. But time is running out because every day Russia keeps making money and investing this money into the war."

Kuleba said he was convinced the oil embargo would come and "the only question is when and what will be the price that the European Union will have to pay to make it happen." He then called on the 27-nation bloc to move on to a seventh package of sanctions that would "kill Russian exports" and deliver a crushing blow to President Vladimir Putin's coffers.

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 with Hungary after making the oil proposal on May 4. "The whole union is being held hostage by one member state who cannot help us

find the consensus," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis declared EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said discussions to break the deadlock would go back to ambassadors after Hungary laid out the economic costs of the move. "I cannot tell you if it's going to take one week or two," he said.

### Hungary hikes cost

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. Bulgaria's Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said that Sofia was also seeking a two year exemption on enforcing the ban to allow it to put in place new infrastructure. Hungary, often the odd one 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.

And Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto on Monday appeared to up the price tag for ditching Russian oil by saying it would cost 15 to 18 billion euros (\$16 to \$19 billion) to prepare its economy for the move.

"It is legitimate for Hungarians to expect a proposal" from the European Commission to cushion that blow, Szijarto said in comments broadcast on his Facebook page. "A complete modernization of the Hungarian energy infrastructure is needed to the scale of 15 to 18 billion euros."

Putin's invasion at the end of February has seen the EU slap unprecedented sanctions on Moscow and send weapons to Ukraine in a strong show of unity that now risks cracking. The protracted dispute over the oil embargo has led some EU diplomats to believe achieving a ban on Russian natural gas is beyond their reach. The EU plans to cut its reliance on Russian gas by two thirds this year, but it has been reluctant to halt imports as Germany opposes such a move. — AFP



LONDON, UK: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows, Britain's Attorney General Suella Braverman, Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis, Britain's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Britain's Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office Michael Ellis listen as the opposition Labour Party's Shadow Minister for Europe and the Americas Stephen Doughty responds, during a statement on the Northern Ireland Protocol, in the House of Commons in London on May 17, 2022. — AFP

## Experts warn UK over relaxing post-Brexit City rules

LONDON: A proposed relaxation in post-Brexit rules for Britain's 'City' finance sector could spark a race to the bottom in standards, top economic experts warned on Monday. Almost 60 prominent figures expressed concern in an open letter to British finance minister Rishi Sunak over UK plans to promote "competitiveness" in the financial services industry.

Britain wants reforms which help offer cheaper financial services and slash red tape, after the nation's departure from the European Union at the start of 2021. Monday's letter, signed by Nobel economics prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz and former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, welcomed the overall aim to boost economic growth-but slammed the focus on competition.

"We wholeheartedly support the government's aim to stimulate long-term UK economic growth, including through financial regulation," the letter read. "Yet we believe that competitiveness is an inappropriate objective for regulators." The letter warned this focus was "a recipe for excessive risk-taking" of the kind that sparked the notorious 2007/2008 global financial crisis.

"After the last global financial crisis, which cost the world economy some \$10 trillion, it was accepted that a focus on competitiveness by the then

Financial Services Authority (FSA) had helped cause the disaster," they warned. The FSA was subsequently axed in 2013 and replaced with the Prudential Regulation Authority, which is part of the Bank of England and regulates lenders, and the Financial Conduct Authority watchdog.

Britain had revealed plans last week to introduce laws that will seek to "maintain and enhance the UK's position as a global leader in financial services having left the European Union".

Monday's open letter conceded that this might have beneficial effects of reducing fees and providing higher-quality products and services. However, the signatories also warned that the relaxation could have a "harmful" impact that could water down money-laundering regulations to attract ultra-rich clients and encourage risk-taking. "The 'harmful' kind (of competitiveness) implies a 'beggar-thy-neighbor' race to the bottom competition with other nations, leaving everyone worse off," the letter added. A Treasury spokesman defended the proposals and insisted that high regulatory standards would be maintained.

"Now we have left the EU, it is right that the regulators' objectives reflect financial services' critical role in supporting the economy, making the UK an even more attractive place to invest and do business," he said.

"We want to ensure the financial services sector is delivering for businesses and consumers across the UK, while also cementing our position as a global leader and promoting high international standards," he added. The UK financial sector has yet to strike a post-Brexit deal with Brussels on equivalence, which would allow London-based firms to fully operate in Europe. — AFP



## Business

# UK unemployment dips but wages hit by soaring inflation

## Pound rises on expectations of another interest rate hike

**LONDON:** Britain's unemployment rate has fallen further to a near five-decade low, official data showed Tuesday, but the value of wages continues to erode as inflation soars.

The unemployment rate eased to 3.7 percent in the three months to the end of March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, sending the pound rising against the dollar on expectations of another interest rate hike. That was the lowest level in more than 47 years and compared with a rate of 3.8 percent in the quarter to the end of February.

Bank of England (BoE) governor Andrew Bailey on Monday warned that fallout from surging prices driven by the Ukraine war would cause unemployment to increase. He described as "apocalyptic" the situation surrounding soaring food costs—which he said were fuelled by major wheat and cooking oil producer Ukraine finding itself unable to export its goods. Addressing British MPs, Bailey spoke also of a "very real income shock" coming from surging energy and food prices. While average wages are rising in the UK, the ONS on Tuesday said they continued to sink in real terms as Britain, like other countries, faces runaway inflation.

The pound on Tuesday rallied 1.3 percent to \$1.2480 as traders bet that soaring inflation, lifted in part by UK wage rises, would force the BoE to raise interest rates further, despite growing fears of recession. "There continued to be a mixed picture for the labour market," said Darren Morgan, ONS director of economic statistics.

Total employment remained below its pre-pandemic level, with job vacancies at a record-high of

almost 1.3 million at the end of April. "Indeed, with the latest fall in unemployment to its lowest rate since 1974, there were actually fewer unemployed people than job vacancies for the first time since records began," Morgan said. While companies struggle to fill posts after the pandemic caused people to change careers, Morgan noted that since the outbreak of COVID, about half a million more people in the UK "have completely disengaged from the labor market". For those in work, regular earnings excluding bonuses were "falling sharply in real terms", he added.

### 'Unemployment to rise'

Bailey on Monday said "the main driver of inflation and what brings it down is the very big, real income shock which is coming from outside forces and, particularly, energy prices and global goods prices.

"That will have an impact on domestic demand and it will dampen activity, and I'm afraid it looks like it will increase unemployment." He described inflation fallout from the war in Ukraine as "a major worry" for Britain and the developing world. "Sorry for being apocalyptic but that is a major concern," Bailey said.

He spoke after official data last week showed Britain's economy shrank in March on fallout from soaring inflation, increasing the prospect of the country falling into recession.

Earlier this month, the BoE warned that Britain risks falling into recession with UK inflation expected to top 10 percent, a four-decade high, by the end of the year.



**LONDON, UK:** In this file photo taken on January 27, 2022, pedestrians on their way to work cross the London Bridge backdropped by The Shard in central London. Britain's unemployment rate has fallen further to a near five-decade low, official data showed May 17, 2022, but the value of wages continues to erode as inflation soars. —AFP

It came as the central bank raised its main interest rate by a quarter-point to one percent to tackle rocketing prices. That was the fourth straight increase by the BoE, while its key rate now stands

at the highest level since the global financial crisis in 2009. Raised rates have lifted borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, further impacting spending. —AFP

## UK manufacturers embracing local suppliers: Industry

**WASHINGTON:** UK manufacturers, scarred by the supply crunch sparked by Brexit and COVID, are increasingly turning to local suppliers—and the Ukraine war will accelerate the trend, the sector said Monday. MakeUK, an organization which represents 20,000 firms, quizzed 132 key decision makers in a poll conducted before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February.

Britain's exit from the European Union, alongside pandemic fallout, persuaded many businesses to curb offshore supply, it found. Nearly half of respondents or 42 percent had increased the proportion of Britain-based suppliers, while two fifths planned to do so.

"Over the past two years manufacturers' supply chains have faced unprecedented disruption with the combination of the UK leaving the European Union and the global pandemic, sitting alongside rocketing transport, energy, and raw material costs," the report said. "This disruptive cocktail has forced businesses to dramatically review their supply chain arrangements at speed, with a growing trend bringing the supply base closer to home."

Britain formally left the EU single market and customs union at the start of 2021, sparking a supply crunch that was then exacerbated by the pandemic. "The rules of supply chain are being re-drawn," added MakeUK policy director Verity Davidge. "Resilience trumps efficiency with winners being those who have been able to rapidly adjust their supply chain strategies to accommodate the succession of shocks."

More recently, the sector has also been plagued by decades-high inflation, particularly due to rocketing energy costs in the wake of the Ukraine war. Eight in 10 poll respondents said energy costs had caused a major or mild disruption. The war will increase UK manufacturers' focus on local suppliers, it noted. "At the time of writing, manufacturers are also experiencing significant business costs such as energy, accelerated by the events taking place in Ukraine," MakeUK added. "However, this accumulation of events, while costly to businesses, has no doubt turned their attention to the need to invest in supply chain technologies and future proof their businesses." —AFP

## Biden announces new plan to ease housing shortage

**WASHINGTON:** Faced with a shortage of homes that has driven up prices and rents, President Joe Biden's White House on Monday unveiled a plan to improve housing supply and affordability.

Consumer prices are rising at their fastest pace since the early 1980s—nearly a third of which is due to housing costs—and Biden has said tackling US inflation is his key priority. The new plan aims to provide access to credit for homebuilders and buyers, especially low-income families, and assistance

## Thailand's economy rebounds after COVID battering

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's economy grew 2.2 percent in the first quarter as exports and tourism rebounded after the relaxation of pandemic restrictions, the country's main economic agency said Tuesday. During the pandemic, Southeast Asia's second-largest economy suffered its worst economic performance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, with visitor numbers crashing from roughly 40 million annually.

But this month the tourism-dependent kingdom dropped almost all restrictions for fully vaccinated visitors, including the need for COVID-19 tests to travel. "The export sector is good... the tourism industry is getting better due to the relaxation of entry requirements for tourists," National Economic and Social Development Council secretary general Danucha Pichayanon said.

The agency said the economy grew by 2.2 percent in January to March compared with the same period last year, and by 1.1 percent compared with the previous quarter. The figures are a stark turnaround from the depths of the pandemic, which saw the economy contract by 6.1 percent in 2020.

The agency said global market volatility from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and a slowdown in China's economy thanks to virus lockdowns across various cities, were affecting the pace of



**BANGKOK, Thailand:** Foreign tourists walk along the popular Khaosan Road in Bangkok on May 17, 2022. Thailand's economy grew 2.2 percent in the first quarter following an export and tourism boost after the relaxation of pandemic entry restrictions, the kingdom's main economic agency said. —AFP

the kingdom's economic recovery. Ukraine is a key exporter of fertilizer and the war has reduced supply in Thailand.

The Thai government has sought to ease the shortage by sourcing fertilizer from Saudi Arabia. The agency also raised its inflation forecasts this

year to between 4.2-5.2 percent, up from the earlier range of 1.5-2.5 percent. Danucha attributed the inflation increase to rising energy prices.

The country has a weekly average of more than 6,500 daily new coronavirus infections, although testing is limited. —AFP

## Cash-strapped Sri Lanka out of petrol: PM

**COLOMBO:** Crisis-hit Sri Lanka has run out of petrol and is unable to find dollars to finance essential imports, the new prime minister said Monday in an address to the nation. "We have run out of petrol... At the moment, we only have petrol stocks for a single day," Ranil Wickremesinghe said, warning his bankrupt country could face more hardships in the coming months.

He said the government was also unable to raise dollars to pay for three shipments of oil, with the ships awaiting outside the Colombo harbor for payments before discharging their cargoes. Sri Lanka is in the throes of its worst-ever economic crisis with its 22 million people enduring severe hardships to secure food, fuel and medicines while

facing record inflation and lengthy power blackouts.

Wickremesinghe assumed office Thursday after his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksa was forced out after weeks of protests over the government's handling of the economic crisis turned deadly. "The next couple of months will be the most difficult ones of our lives," Wickremesinghe said. "I have no desire to hide the truth and to lie to the public."

However, he urged people to "patiently bear the next couple of months" and vowed he could overcome the crisis. He said the government had also run out of cash to pay the 1.4 million civil servants their salaries in May, and he will turn to money printing as a last resort.

"Against my own wishes, I am compelled to permit printing money in order to pay state-sector employees and to pay for essential goods and services," he said. He also warned that fuel and electricity tariffs will be raised substantially and his government will also sell



**COLOMBO, Sri Lanka:** Auto rickshaw drivers block a main intersectional road while waiting to buy fuel at a fuel station that ran out of supplies, in Colombo on May 16, 2022. —AFP

off its loss-making national carrier to reduce losses. Sri Lanka has sought an IMF bailout and one of the key demands of the international lender is for

Colombo to divest loss-making state enterprises, including Sri Lankan Airlines whose carried-forward losses exceed a billion dollars. —AFP

## Nigeria's treasury chief arrested over fraud

**LAGOS:** The head of Nigeria's treasury has been arrested for alleged involvement in fraud and money laundering worth 80 billion naira (\$193 million), the national anti-graft agency said.

Ahmed Idris, Nigeria's accountant-general, was arrested on Monday "after failing to honor invitations" to respond to the allegations, it said. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) said Idris "raked off the funds through bogus consultancies and other illegal activities using proxies,

family members and close associates."

The proceeds were invested by Idris in real estate in the capital Abuja and in his home state of Kano in northern Nigeria, it said in a statement issued late Monday. Idris has not commented on the accusations. President Muhammadu Buhari came to power in 2015 on a pledge to end endemic graft.

Under his watch, the EFCC has secured a string of high-profile convictions, including ministers, state governors, senior public servants and prominent political figures. Last year, the agency said it had recovered 750 million dollars (714 million euros) that had been plundered from the nation's coffers.

The government has been accused of targeting the opposition in its anti-corruption drive, an allegation it denies. —AFP



Business

# No Twitter deal without clarity on spam accounts, says Musk

## Statement further complicates acrimonious bid for social media giant

NEW YORK: Billionaire Elon Musk said Tuesday that his purchase of Twitter would not go ahead unless he was given assurances on the bots he says plague the platform, further complicating his acrimonious bid for the social media giant. The chief of SpaceX as well as Tesla, Musk is currently listed by Forbes as the world's wealthiest person, with a fortune of about \$230 billion, much of it in Tesla stock.

Seen by his champions as an iconoclastic genius and by his critics as erratic and power-hungry, Musk surprised many investors in April with news that he wanted to purchase Twitter. But his \$44 billion bid for the company is now "temporarily on hold," pending questions over its estimates of the number of fake accounts, or bots.

"Yesterday, Twitter's CEO publicly refused to show proof of 5%," tweeted Musk, who has almost 94 million followers on the social network. "This deal cannot move forward until he does." Twitter chief executive Parag Agrawal has said the platform suspends more than a half-million seemingly bogus accounts daily, usually before they are even seen, and locks millions more weekly that fail checks to make sure they are controlled by humans and not by software.

Internal measures show that fewer than five percent of accounts active on any given day at Twitter are spam, but that analysis cannot be replicated externally due to the need to keep user data private, Agrawal contended. Musk—who posted that the real number of

bots may be four times what Twitter claims and "could be much higher," and has said he would make getting rid of them a priority if he owned the platform—responded to that tweet by Agrawal with a poo emoji.

"So how do advertisers know what they're getting for their money?" Musk tweeted in a subsequent response about the need to prove Twitter users are real people. "This is fundamental to the financial health of Twitter."

### 'Under pressure'

The process used to estimate how many accounts are bots has been shared with Musk, Agrawal insisted. According to an estimate published Friday by software firm SparkToro, 19.42 percent of Twitter accounts are fake or spam, but the company acknowledges its methodology for determining bots is likely different from that used by Twitter.

SparkToro has a tool on its website that shows more than 70 percent of Musk's followers are fake accounts. "It appears the spam/bot issue is cascading and clearly making the Twitter deal a confusing one," Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said in a note to investors.

"The bot issue at the end of the day was known by the New York City cab driver and feels more to us like the 'dog ate the homework' excuse to bail on the Twitter deal or talk down a lower price."

Twitter shares "will be under pressure this morning again as the chances of a deal ultimately getting done is not looking good now," Ives said, adding it is "likely



LOS ANGELES: This illustration photo displays Elon Musk's Twitter account with a Twitter logo in the background in Los Angeles. — AFP

a 60%+ chance from our view Musk ultimately walks from the deal and pays the breakup fee." Shares of Twitter were down roughly 2.4 percent early Tuesday in pre-market trading.

Meanwhile, in a filing to Wall Street regulator the Securities and Exchange Commission, Twitter urged its shareholders to vote in favor of Musk's buyout for \$54.20 per share in cash, at an upcoming special meeting. Musk has described his motivation as stem-

ming from a desire to ensure freedom of speech on the platform and to boost monetization of a website that is massively influential but has struggled to attain profitable growth.

He has also said he favored lifting the ban on Donald Trump, who was kicked off the platform in January 2021 shortly after the then-US president's efforts to overturn his election defeat led to the January 6 assault on the US Capitol. — AFP

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for six months with a rate of return at 2.000 percent.

## Aji Rahimi wins ABK's Alfouz prize of KD 10,000

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Abdoulmajid Aji Rahimi as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The winner was announced on 16 May 2022. The draw was held under the supervision

of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD 100 only.

ABK encourages everyone to open Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances in winning in the upcoming draw which will happen on 23 May 2022. The higher the deposits are, the higher the chances to win.

## Gulf Bank upgrade on MSCI Index affirms investor confidence in bank: Mandani

KUWAIT: In an interview with CNBC Arabia, Waleed Khaled Mandani, the Deputy CEO at Gulf Bank, said: "Gulf Bank's upgrade to the MSCI World Index came after fulfilling the requirements of the upgrade in terms of market capital, liquidity and availability of shares, in light of the continuous growth of financial indicators during the last period, and the positive outlook the bank enjoys, rapid digital development, and application of the best standards of sustainability and governance."

He noted that the bank's net profits increased by 26 percent to reach KD 15 million in the first quarter compared to the same period in 2021. The return on average shareholders' equity increased to 9.2 percent for the first quarter.

Mandani pointed out that the total loans provided to customers increased by 7 percent to reach 4.8 billion dinars, an increase of 335 million, while the percentage of non-performing loans decreased to 1 percent in the first quarter, compared to 1.5 percent in the same period last year. However, the Bank still maintains abundant allocations to cover non performing loans by an estimated percentage of 548 percent.



Waleed Khaled Mandani

## Virgin Mobile Kuwait, first telco to launch in The Sandbox Metaverse

KUWAIT: Virgin Mobile Kuwait on Tuesday announced its Metaverse program to collaborate with Kuwaiti content creators on platforms including The Sandbox. The initiative is aimed at building digital literacy and capacity in Kuwait as the company cements its position as the market's leading digital telco.

In addition to The Sandbox, Virgin Mobile is collaborating with leading global digital content provider, Nonvoice LLC, which based out of the United States. The two parties have signed a memorandum of understanding to bring the latest innovations to Kuwait and the wider Middle East region. Virgin Mobile Kuwait is preparing to launch in the coming weeks as the latest operation in the Virgin Mobile Middle East and Africa footprint (which already has successful telcos operating out of United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman).

Virgin Mobile Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Benoît Janin said encouraging the people of Kuwait to engage with the brand in the Metaverse was an exciting part of the company's customer engagement strategy, providing the already digitally advanced market refreshing new services and experiences. "The Metaverse offers enormous opportunities to accelerate



Benoît Janin

digital skillsets such as computer programming, content creation, gaming and e-commerce," Janin said.

"Kuwait is hot on global trends which are evident in its 2nd ranking in the world for TikTok penetration and 4th global ranking on Snapchat. "The country has a surging community of content creators and gamers and enjoys an App-convenient lifestyle for everything from entertainment to shopping, dining and banking."

Nonvoice CEO Simon Buckingham said the collaboration was a great move for both Virgin Mobile Kuwait and Nonvoice which is ramping up its Metaverse services for the global telecommunications sector. "We see the Metaverse as a great fit for Virgin Mobile Kuwait which is focused on taking customers further on their digital journeys to explore new platforms and join online communities in Web 3.0," Buckingham said. Janin said Virgin Mobile Kuwait would always deliver on the digital needs and aspirations of the market and cater to the young, entrepreneurial and creative segments that were already embracing the Virgin way of being fresh, bold and fun. "This is fully in line with our ambition to become the leading digital telco in Kuwait and one of the most disruptive innovators within the GCC region." Virgin Mobile Kuwait is the first telco company in the world to position its brand in The Sandbox and is in discussions to expand its services in line with The Sandbox roadmap. The collaboration with Nonvoice will see Virgin Mobile become the first telco in the world to roll-out its cutting-edge services that have been in development for the past six months. Content creators, gamers and coders are encouraged to register with Virgin Mobile Kuwait's "MetaTribeKW" Community to gain access to the services and a host of exclusive experiences, content and challenges.



Dr Hamad Yahya Al-Nuaimi receives the stars of Paris and German Team.

## Ooredoo official spells out company's sponsorship policy

KUWAIT: Dr Hamad Yahya Al-Nuaimi was appointed Group Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Ooredoo in April 2020. In his current role, Dr Hamad provides extensive support to the offices of the Chairman, Group CEO and Deputy Group CEO and coordinates communication between the Board of Directors and Ooredoo's senior management.

Dr Hamad is also responsible for managing Ooredoo's senior stakeholder relations with key national and international figures and institutions, including heads of states, ministers, government agencies and international organizations.

Prior to his current role, Dr Hamad was Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait. He has an extensive and accomplished career of over 25 years in the finance, communications, media and telecoms industries and has held senior roles at QNB, which has seen its brand value jump to \$1.3 billion, and Al-Jazeera, which became among the world's top 5 brands, during his tenure. Dr Hamad holds a PhD in Marketing from the UK in 2005, Marketing Research and Development.



Dr Hamad Yahya Al-Nuaimi

Question: You're pictured here at the recent meet and greet event with star players from Paris Saint-Germain, a team sponsored by Ooredoo for some time now. What does Ooredoo consider when it chooses sponsorships, whether teams, entities, individuals or events?

Dr Hamad: Ooredoo spends a great deal of time selecting sponsorships to ensure each and every sponsorship, whether it be an individual, a team, an entity

or an event, is a seamless fit with the organization, our values and our ethos. We choose individuals, teams and entities who share our sense of responsibility to our communities; those who set a good example to others; those who uphold the highest of standards; and for events, those that will serve to benefit the communities in which we operate.

Question: How does Ooredoo choose brand ambassadors such as Lionel Messi?

Dr Hamad: We adopt the same approach. Does the potential ambassador visibly live our values and our ethos? Will the ambassador be a good role model, especially for the younger generation? Does the ambassador share our commitment to our communities, and our responsibility to be a good (corporate, for us) citizen? It's important to us that we choose ambassadors from all sectors of our societies, reflecting our people and the communities in which we operate, and also that we choose ambassadors to whom our customers and communities will relate.

Question: And how do these sponsorships fit in with Ooredoo's corporate social responsibility strategy?

Dr Hamad: Our corporate social responsibility strategy aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, so all sponsorships within this strategy must also align. We select sponsorships across each of the goals we consider a priority, with a particular focus on those that promote health and wellbeing for all; those that support gender equality and equal opportunities for all; and those that support sustainable development.

Question: Does Ooredoo apply the same approach when selecting entities with which to enter into strategic partnerships, such as Plug and Play, Dell, Microsoft and many more?

Dr Hamad: We do indeed. We have a strategic aim of seeking, establishing, developing and maintaining partnerships with world-leading entities - those that share our values and ethos - that can help us achieve our long-term strategic goals. We particularly seek entities that share our commitment to innovation and to investment in technology, and those that will help propel us toward our goal of complete digitalization.

### Foreign investment

During the interview, Mandani indicated that Gulf Bank's upgrade on the MSCI World Index strengthens the Bank's capital base in terms of foreign investment, and affirms foreign investors' confidence in the Bank, pointing out that foreign ownership rates in the stock rose to 13 percent. He stressed also that the Bank is working continuously to achieve strong and solid performance and maintain positive results, which contributes to strengthening the position of the bank locally, regionally and globally and helps it to progress during the next phase.

When addressing the importance of applying sustainability standards as a main indicator to attract foreign investments, Mandani said, "Gulf Bank is a pioneer in implementing sustainability standards, as we launched our first sustainability report last year, and will continue to prioritize sustainability." Mandani also stressed the Bank's commitment to green finance and green securities issuances.

### Optimistic forecast

Mandani expressed optimism about the performance of the banking sector during the upcoming months and years, saying: "My expectations are very positive for the performance of banks in Kuwait and the region due to the rise in oil prices and the increase in investment spending on major government projects, which increases our expectations of strong results for Gulf Bank and other banks." Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.





# The Millon auction house for 200 iconic brand new limited edition sneakers



A photograph shows sneakers displayed two days before being auctioned at the Millon auction house in Paris. Millon auction house launched on May 15, 2022 the very first European public auction for 200 iconic brand new limited editions, exclusive collaborations or cult pairs of sneakers.— AFP photos

## Amber Heard says trial is 'torture,' wants to 'move on'

Amber Heard testified on Monday that the multi-million dollar defamation suit filed against her by her former husband Johnny Depp is "torture" and she just wants him to leave her alone so she can move on with her life. The 36-year-old actress also told the jury hearing the case that she filed for divorce from the "Pirates of the

Caribbean" star in May 2016 because she feared for her life.

"I had to leave him," Heard said. "I knew I wouldn't survive if I didn't. I was so scared that it was going to end really badly for me." Heard said Depp would become a physically and sexually abusive "monster" when he was drinking and her efforts to curtail his drug and alcohol use had failed. "The monster had been this thing that was now the normal and not the exception," she told the seven-person jury hearing the case in Fairfax, Virginia. "The violence was now normal."

The 58-year-old Depp, during his four days on the witness stand, denied ever striking Heard and claimed that she was the one who was frequently violent. Depp filed 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 rep-

resenting 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. Heard said the trial has forced her to live "over and over again the most intimate, embarrassing, deeply humiliating and personal things that I've survived." "I want to move on and I want Johnny to move on," she said. "I just want him to leave me alone." Filing for divorce was "the hardest thing I've ever had to do," the actress said. "It was hard because I loved Johnny so much," she said. "I loved him so much." Heard said the same week she filed for divorce she sought a temporary restraining order following an argument during which Depp threw a mobile phone at her, hitting her in the face.

### 'Under the makeup'

Under cross-examination, Depp's lawyers asked Heard about multiple incidents of alleged domestic violence she testified about and then showed photos from subsequent days where no injuries were visible. "You should see what it looks like under the makeup," Heard retorted. They also grilled her extensively about a pledge she made to donate the \$7 million from her divorce settlement from Depp to charity.

Heard acknowledged that she has not donated the entire amount yet but said that was because she needed the money to fight the defamation suit filed against her by Depp. "I haven't been able to fulfill those pledges yet because I've been sued," she said. Judge Penney Azcarate has scheduled closing argu-



This combination of pictures created on May 16, 2022 shows US actress Amber Heard as she testifies in the courtroom at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Virginia.

ments 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



US actor Johnny Depp waves to the courtroom gallery at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Virginia.— AFP photos



Lifestyle | Features



A man wearing a hat passes by the official poster of the 75th Cannes Film Festival at the Palais des Festivals main entrance in Cannes, southeastern France. — AFP photos



(From left) Cannes Film Festival director Thierry Fremaux, French director and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Ladji Ly, French actor and President of the Jury of the 75th Cannes Film Festival Vincent Lindon, US film director and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Jeff Nichols, Iranian director and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Asghar Farhadi, Indian actress and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Deepika Padukone, British actress and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Rebecca Hall, Italian actress and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Jasmine Trinca and Norwegian film director and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Joachim Trier pose on the balcony of the Grand Hyatt Cannes Hotel Martinez on the eve of the opening ceremony of the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

# CANNES FILM FEST LAUNCHES WITH VETERANS AND ZOMBIES

The red carpet is ready for the opening of the 75th Cannes Film Festival on Tuesday, with Oscar winner Forest Whitaker as the first guest of honor and a French zombie comedy to kick off proceedings. The masks are off, health passes are no longer needed and the world's leading cinema get-together is ready to party after two years in which the pandemic put a dampener on proceedings. Whitaker, the 60-year-old star of "The Last King of Scotland" and cult films such as "Ghost Dog" and recent TV hit "Godfather of Harlem", will pick up an honorary Palme d'Or at the opening ceremony on the Cote d'Azur.

He won an acting award at the festival back in 1988 for his role as jazz legend Charlie Parker in Clint Eastwood's "Bird". The opening film on Tuesday is "Final Cut", a comedy love letter to filmmaking and Z-list zombie movies from the team behind the award-winning "The Artist". Its director Michel Hazanavicius told AFP it was "a joyous celebration of film people, which I hope will encourage others to get involved."

The 12-day festival will really turn on the jets on Wednesday with the arrival of Tom Cruise-his first trip to the festival in exactly 30 years-for the European launch of "Top Gun: Maverick". The sequel, long delayed by the pandemic, has been getting warm reviews from critics and gives Cannes a chance to honor Cruise, described by festival director Thierry Fremaux as "someone who is devoted to cinema".

### Shadow of war

As well as the lighter fare playing out of competition-which also includes Baz Luhrmann's much-anticipated rock'n'roll biopic "Elvis" next week-there are 21 films vying for the top prize Palme d'Or. The first to be shown will be "Tchaikovsky's Wife" by Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov, who



Italian actress and Jury member of the Official Selection Jasmine Trinca waves as she arrives at the Grand Hyatt Cannes Hotel Martinez on the eve of the opening ceremony.

left his country in March following a controversial embezzlement trial his supporters said was politically motivated. The film is unlikely to win him any new admirers in the Kremlin given that it focuses on the legendary composer's brief and tragic marriage that he entered into to disguise his homosexuality-a story that remains taboo for Russian conservatives. Serebrennikov was unable to attend Cannes for two previous nominations due to the court case that banned him from leaving Russia for three years. That will not be the only reminder of Russia's invasion of Ukraine during the festival.

The final film by Lithuanian director Mantas Kvedaravicius, who was killed in Ukraine last month, will get a special screening. He was filming a follow-up to his celebrated documentary "Mariupolis" about the conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region, when he was reportedly captured and killed by Russian forces, according to Kyiv. Ukraine's beleaguered filmmakers will get a special day at the industry marketplace

and one of its most promising directors, Sergei Loznitsa, will show "The Natural History of Destruction", about the bombing of German cities in World War II.

The jury charged with selecting the winners this year includes Indian superstar Deepika Padukone and Iran's two-time Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi, and is headed by French actor Vincent Lindon. Lindon starred in last year's Palme-winning gore-fest "Titane", the only time a Cannes jury has watched a woman being impregnated by a car.

It was the sort of brash and radical choice that has ensured Cannes has maintained its edge for three-quarters of a century, having held its first edition in the immediate aftermath of World War II. The organizers have sought to refresh their image this year, partnering with TikTok, which is sponsoring an award for short films, and new media outlet Brut. — AFP



A woman talks on the mobile phone as she past in front of the official poster of the 75th Cannes Film Festival on the facade of the Palais des Festivals.

## 75th Cannes film fest ready to party as COVID rules end

The last touches were being laid in Cannes on Monday for the 75th anniversary edition of the world's leading film festival, promising a return to its full glitz. Dangling from ropes above the fabled Palais des Festivals, workers were unfurling the huge poster for the Cannes Film Festival's golden jubilee, which this year features an image from "The Truman Show". Some 35,000 film professionals are expected between May 17 and 28, hoping for a return to form for cinema's most glamorous event after two years in which Covid dampened the mood. "We are ready. The town hall has just redone everything-the whole place-so we hope it will go well," said Jeremie Tripet, manager of "L'Avenue", a bistro just off the main drag known as La Croisette.

After Cannes was entirely cancelled in 2020 and held under strict health protocols in 2021, most of the world is expected to be represented at this year's event, which includes a large industry marketplace alongside the festival. One major exception is the absence of Russians, due to the impact of sanctions over the war in Ukraine and a ruling from the organizers that state-linked delegates are not welcome. China is also expected to have a limited presence due to its continuing Covid restrictions. But otherwise the festival is keen to put the pandemic in the past, with no mandatory masks or health passes this year-and no restrictions to partying.

### Hollywood returns

The easing of pandemic restrictions also means Hollywood will be back in full force at Cannes. The much-delayed blockbuster sequel "Top Gun: Maverick" gets its European premiere on Wednesday, with Tom Cruise appearing on the Croisette for the first time in 30 years.

One of the first stars to walk the red carpet will be Forest Whitaker-the Oscar-winning star of "The Last King of Scotland",

"Godfather of Harlem" and much more-who is picking up the honorary Palme d'Or award at the opening ceremony on Tuesday. Then film fans can get stuck into the usual feast of new releases and competition entries, braving the festival's famously opinionated crowds, who are never shy about cheering and booing during screenings. There's a lot of excitement around the Elvis Presley biopic from Australia's Baz Luhrmann, hoping to recreate the buzz he generated when he brought the can-can to Cannes with "Moulin Rouge!" 20 years ago. "Elvis", playing out of competition, sees newcomer Austin Butler stepping into The King's blue suede shoes. Tom Hanks plays his infamous manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

There are 21 films in the race for the Palme d'Or, including the latest body-horror fable from David Cronenberg, "Crimes of the Future" starring Lea Seydoux and Kristen Stewart. The Canadian director told IndieWire it is likely to cause walkouts "within the first five minutes". There are only five women directors in the competition, hoping to follow the success of last year's winner, "Titane", which made Julia Ducournau only the second female to win the Palme.

### Ukraine spotlight

Alongside all the glitz, festival director Thierry Fremaux said Cannes aimed to keep the war in Ukraine in the spotlight. "Together we will have a great festival-we will think a lot about cinema without ever stopping thinking about Ukraine."

The final film by Lithuanian director Mantas Kvedaravicius, who was killed by Russian forces in Ukraine last month, will get a special screening. He was shooting a follow-up to his celebrated documentary "Mariupolis", about the conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region, when he was reportedly captured and killed.

Ukraine's beleaguered filmmakers will get a special day at the industry marketplace and one of its most promising directors, Sergei Loznitsa, will show "The Natural History of Destruction", about the bombing of German cities in World War II. The main competition also includes exiled Russian Kirill Serebrennikov, who was unable to attend for his two previous nominations due to a politically charged conviction for embezzlement back home. —AFP

## Egypt composer's star rises with 'Moon Knight' fame

For nearly 30 years, his music has made its way to every young Egyptian's ringtone-but it's the country's ancient history that recently propelled composer Hesham Nazih to the realm of superheroes. Following his career-defining score for the Pharaohs' Golden Parade last year-a grandiose spectacle that saw 22 mummies transferred across Cairo to a new museum-Nazih was tapped to write the music for Marvel Studios' latest series, "Moon Knight". The six-episode saga starring Oscar Isaac tells the story of a superhero who draws his powers from an ancient Egyptian god. "Ancient Egyptian civilization is extremely appealing for any composer, whether Egyptian or not," the 50-year-old composer told AFP from his studio in Cairo. But while drawing inspiration from ancient heritage was "not an artistic goal" in and of itself for the musician, it has allowed him to realise his dream of transcending national boundaries.

### Drawing on heritage

In April 2021, all eyes were on the globally streamed procession of mummies through the capital, when Egyptian soprano Amira Selim, clad in a full-length gown adorned with Pharaonic motifs, took the stage with a haunting performance of the Hymn of Isis. The ode, the lyrics to which were taken from texts in the "Book of the Dead", was sung in phonetic ancient Egyptian and featured an arrangement of traditional folk instruments along with a classical orchestra, cementing the composer's genre-shattering prowess.



Egyptian composer Hesham Nazih poses during a studio photoshoot session in the capital Cairo. — AFP

The result was a media fervour that took Nazih himself by surprise, with the piece being shared widely both in Egypt and abroad. "The audience's reaction was very moving," he told AFP, adding that the parade "holds a special place in my heart" as it showcased the talents of Egyptian artists.

Riding the ancient Egypt high, the virtuoso was selected to compose the score for Marvel's Moon Knight, marking his first foray into Hollywood. Helmed by Egyptian director Mohamed Diab, the series has proven massively popular among his compatriots-despite there being no way to legally stream the show there yet-due in no small part to Diab's insistence on the production being an Egyptian affair.

In addition to a cast and crew that brings together the likes of Egyptian-Palestinian actress May Calamawy and Egyptian editor Ahmed Hafez, the series soundtrack has been peppered with popular Arabic songs, ranging from golden-era classics to modern electro street music known as mahraganat. "I'm still processing all of it. Moon Knight is a whole other level for me," the composer said. "I was seeing reactions from so many different audiences and cultures." But Nazih's latest experimentations with ancient Egypt weren't the first time he has drawn from Egyptian heritage.

For the 2014 thriller series "The Seven Commandments", Nazih wove in spiritual Sufi chants, to massive success. The soundtrack was a hit on social media, achieving a long-held dream for the musician. When he was nine, he explained, he stopped halfway down a street in Alexandria to watch a Sufi ritual in a small mosque, and was haunted by the "majesty" of the scene. Decades later, he was finally able to channel it into a composition.

### No formal training

"Music doesn't communicate information, it's pure emotion," according to Nazih, and it was emotion that took him from a career as an engineer to creating more than 40 soundtracks for film and TV over the past three decades. Having first felt the impact of a great score as a child, he has been chasing that high ever since. "I knew then that I wanted to go into this field, to make people feel what I felt," he said.

His music has defined famous films including 2003's "Sahar El Layali" ("Sleepless Nights" in Arabic), which was almost tipped as Egypt's submission for an Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film that year. In 2019, Nazih scored "Al-Fil al-Azraq 2" ("The Blue Elephant 2"), Egyptian cinema's highest ever grossing film, earning 100 million pounds (\$5.4 million).

Over his career, he says he has seen the once-stringent boundaries between music and film begin to dissolve. "Film composers aren't recognized as true filmmakers by directors because they're musicians, but they're not recognized as musicians by their peers because they belong to the world of cinema," he said. But things might be changing. In 2018, Nazih was the first musician to receive the Faten Hamama prize at the Cairo International Film Festival, which is awarded to renowned figures in cinema, but had previously only ever gone to directors and actors. —AFP



A woman walks past an installation for the film "Top Gun: Maverick" in front of the Grand Hotel at the Croisette in Cannes, southeastern France. — AFP



## Sports

# Tamim ton gives Bangladesh upper hand against Sri Lanka

## Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das hit fifties

CHITTAGONG: Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das struck fifties after Tamim Iqbal made a hundred to put Bangladesh in pole position in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Chittagong on Tuesday. Liton hit 54 not out and Mushfiqur made 53 not out as the pair added 98 runs in an unbroken stand to guide Bangladesh to 318-3 at stumps on the third day, in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings 397. Tamim retired on 133 after reaching his 10th Test hundred with a four and single off Asitha Fernando off successive balls before tea.

But he is expected to resume his 217-ball innings—including 15 fours—on the fourth day when Bangladesh will aim to accelerate their scoring rate in pursuit of a first-innings lead. Liton joined Mushfiqur when Tamim did not return after the break and helped Bangladesh continue their dominance without facing serious trouble. Liton pulled Lasith Embuldeniya for four to bring up his 12th Test fifty off 96 balls before Mushfiqur reached his own fifty, his 26th in Tests, in the next over with a single off Kasun Rajitha.

Liton led the charge with eight fours while Mushfiqur played the anchor role as he took 124 balls to bring up his fifty, with just two fours so far. Sri Lanka's bowlers briefly halted Bangladesh's run flow after Fernando broke Tamim's 162-run opening stand with Mahmudul Hasan, who made 58 off

142 balls before edging a leg-side delivery behind the stumps.

Concussion substitute Rajitha then removed Najmul Hossain for one and Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque for two to restore some parity in the game. Replacing Vishwa Fernando, who took a blow on the helmet on Monday and could bowl only eight overs in the innings, Rajitha struck with his fourth ball as Najmul gave a regulation catch to wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella.

Five overs later Rajitha swung a ball in to break Mominul's off-stump. Tamim was earlier given out caught behind on 102 off Ramesh Mendis but the decision was reversed on review. Resuming on 76-0, Bangladesh started the day's play confidently as Tamim dispatched left-arm quick Fernando for two fours in the second over of the day, before bringing up his 32nd Test fifty off 73 balls with a boundary.

Sri Lanka dropped the only chance that came their way in the morning as Embuldeniya dropped Mahmudul at fine-leg off Asitha on 51. The 21-year-old, playing only his fifth Test, soon completed his second Test half-century in 110 balls when he flicked Asitha towards mid-wicket for a double. Angelo Mathews had held the Sri Lankan innings together before agonisingly falling on 199. Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan claimed 6-105 for Bangladesh. — AFP



CHITTAGONG: Sri Lanka's Dhananjaya de Silva (right) fields a ball shot by Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal (left) during the third day of the first Test cricket match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the Zahir Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium on May 17, 2022. — AFP



OKLAHOMA: Tiger Woods chips balls during a practice round prior to the start of the 2022 PGA Championship at Southern Hills Country Club on May 17, 2022 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. — AFP

## Tiger buzz builds as rivals see threat at PGA Championship

TULSA: Tiger Woods excited spectators and rivals alike with a back-nine practice round on Monday at Southern Hills, continuing his comeback from severe leg injuries before this week's PGA Championship. Woods, whose incredible return at last month's Masters came only 14 months after a rollover car crash, brought a similar buzz to the roars he created at Augusta National. "Just watching him at the Masters, that was unreal, just the crowds and what it does to a tournament when he tees it up," said Norway's Viktor Hovland. "Just getting used to big crowds, loud crowds."

Woods played the front nine on Sunday and said his surgically repaired right leg—held together with pins, rods and screws—feels stronger than it did a month ago. "I'm excited," Woods told reporters Sunday. "I'm not going to play that much going forward, so anytime I do play, it's going to be fun." Woods made the cut at the Masters but battled through pain simply to walk 72 holes and faded to his worst-ever Augusta rounds of 78, the 15-time major winner calling the effort to finish four rounds among his greatest feats.

The former world number one, now ranked 818th, won the 2007 PGA at Southern Hills, although the course underwent an \$11 million revamp in 2018. If his body has the strength and stamina to walk 72 holes, his skill could make him a major threat. "If there's ever a question if Tiger can contend, we can all just kind of chuckle at that. Never is he going to be in a field where he can't contend," home-state hero Tador Gooch said.

"He might not have as good of odds in some places but I think as long as he's in the field, if he ever gets it slotted, no matter how old he is, no matter what's going on, he's always going to have a chance. "I mean, it's Tiger Woods," Woods, 46, seeks his 16th career Grand Slam title, two shy of the record set by Jack Nicklaus, and a 73rd US PGA Tour triumph, which would break the all-time record he now shares with Sam Snead. "When Tiger is in the field... there's just a different energy," Gooch said. "Every time he's in the same field, you just cherish it. We all know what he's been through."

Bryson DeChambeau, the 2020 US Open winner who underwent left hand surgery last month after missing the cut at the Masters, tweeted Monday he will practice the next two days and see about playing the event. "On my way to Southern Hills CC," tweeted DeChambeau. "Going to test how I am feeling over these next couple days and decide on whether to compete. Looking forward to being in Tulsa." — AFP

## Fowler undecided on LIV Golf, wants answers to issues

TULSA: Rickie Fowler, a three-time major runner-up and former world number four, says he hasn't made a decision about the Saudi-backed LIV Golf series and wants more information on key questions. The 33-year-old American, whose most recent of five career US PGA Tour titles came at the 2019 Phoenix Open, said Monday at the PGA Championship he needs answers on player status as independent contractors and what punishments await PGA talent that plays in an LIV Golf London event next month. "To be straightforward with you guys, I haven't necessarily made a decision one way or the other," Fowler said at Southern Hills.

"I've mentioned in the past, do I currently think that the PGA Tour is the best place to play? I do. Do I think it can be better? Yes. So I think it's an interesting position." Fowler, ranked 146th in the world, was a college star at nearby Oklahoma State who is still chasing his first major victory despite 12 major top-10 finishes and eight top-fives in majors, four in 2014 alone. Fowler sees start up bids by two rivals as a message to the PGA, exposing opportunities for top talent.

"I've always thought competition is a good thing and these leagues or tours wouldn't be coming up or popping up if they didn't see those opportunities out there," Fowler said. "Competition ultimately makes people better, whether it's business, sport, so it's interesting, that's for sure." The US PGA Tour last week rejected requests for releases by members who wanted to play the LIV London event, which will be contested opposite the US PGA's Canadian Open in Toronto.

Fowler wonders what might happen to any players who play at London and if LIV Golf leader Greg

## Vietnam close on 100 gold as couple win minutes apart

HANOI: A married couple from Vietnam each won individual gold in chess at almost the same time on Tuesday as the SEA Games hosts closed on 100 gold medals overall. Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son, 32, and his wife Pham Le Thao Nguyen, 34, won the men's and women's rapid chess titles in Hanoi. Each saw off opponents from Singapore with just minutes between their victories. Thao Nguyen finished a bit earlier and then quietly waited for her husband to seal his win. "During the game we were worried for each other," Thao Nguyen said, according to Vietnam News Agency. "This was our first experience like this."

Truong Son, the world number 128 in the International Chess Federation rankings, is the youngest Vietnamese to have earned the title of grandmaster and had already won gold earlier in the regional Games. "We were always together in training. We supported and shared difficulties together," he said. "Now is the time for us to celebrate together." Their wins boosted Vietnam's overall gold medal tally to 98, far outstripping their rivals at the Games, with Thailand at 43 and Philippines 34.

### Men dancesport athletes

Meanwhile, Men dancesport athletes at the SEA Games say they had to overcome dated stereotypes to reach the top of competitive ballroom dancing. Issarapong Duangkaew and his woman dance partner Thanawan Yananun, both 24, won two titles for Thailand at the regional Games in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi. But afterwards Thanawan spoke for Issarapong about the challenges that he and other men dancers in socially conservative Southeast Asia must overcome as they pursue their sport.

"Somebody always asks, 'If you do dancesport, are you a ladyboy?'" she told AFP, as Issarapong looked on. "No, it's not. It's like a man dancing ballet or a man dancing K-Pop, it's like that," she added, saying that views of men doing ballroom dancing are slowly



TULSA: Rickie Fowler of the United States prepares to play a shot on the 13th hole during a practice round prior to the start of the 2022 PGA Championship at Southern Hills Country Club on May 17, 2022 in Tulsa. — AFP

Norman has a point when he describes players as independent contractors who should be able to play wherever and whenever they want. Courts might end up settling the question, but the lack of definite answers puts Fowler, and others, in a sticky situation as the conflicting events approach, as well as four US-based LIV Golf events that would be certain not to have releases from the US PGA.

"If someone goes and plays, I don't know, I'm like trying to learn as much as I can," Fowler said. "I have no commitment one way or another. I'm sure there will be some sort of consequences but I really don't know at this time. It's almost kind of have to wait and see what happens. "The tour is currently best place to play in the world, hands-

down. "If there were other leagues or tours or whatever may be, the tour continuing to be the best place to play, guys will come and play and be at the tour but there's options to go play another event if you want to."

"I feel like there needs to be some clarity between if you're an independent contractor or are you basically an employee," Fowler says some players want to know the punishment potential but others might just jump to the new rival league anyway. "Guys would probably like to know," Fowler said. "Because if you're trying to make a decision one way or the other, I know there's some guys that are probably in a position where the consequence may not matter." — AFP

## England cricket chief executive to quit as part of shake-up

LONDON: Tom Harrison is to step down as chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board in June—part of a major overhaul following a slump in Test results. Since the turn of the year, managing director of men's cricket Ashley Giles, head coach Chris Silverwood and Test captain Joe Root have all been replaced, with the ECB chairmanship currently vacant as well. Clare Connor, currently managing director of England women's cricket, will take over on an interim basis, the ECB announced on Tuesday. Root resigned last month following England's 1-0 defeat in the West Indies, which left them with a miserable record of just one win in 17 Tests, and has been replaced by all-rounder Ben Stokes.

Former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum was last week appointed as coach while former England batsman Rob Key is the new managing director. Harrison, who took up his role in 2015, oversaw the introduction of the controversial city-based Hundred competition, which started last year, and during his tenure England won both the men's and women's 50-over World Cups. The 50-year-old faced calls to quit over the ECB's handling of a racism scandal that came to light last year. Harrison said it had been a "huge honor" to serve as chief executive. "Cricket is an extraordinary force for good in the world and my goal has been to make the game bigger and ensure more people and more communities in England and Wales feel they have a place in this sport," he said.

"The long-term health of cricket depends on its ability to grow and remain relevant and be more inclusive in an ever-changing world." Martin Darlow, interim chairman of the ECB, said: "When the (coronavirus) pandemic struck, it was Tom's leadership that brought the game together and saved us from the worst financial crisis the sport has ever faced. "He has always put the interests of the game first and worked to lead important change to make our game more accessible and inclusive, though we all know there is still much more work to do" — AFP



HANOI: Vietnam's Truong Doan Minh Nguyen (left) and Huong Thu Dang compete in the dancesport event during the 31st Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) in Hanoi. — AFP

changing. Dancesport is a physically demanding pursuit where flamboyantly dressed men and women pairs must quickly wow judges with elaborate, sensual, head-turning moves.

At a packed gymnasium just outside of central Hanoi, hundreds of spectators cheered loudly and waved flags as the duos strutted their stuff in a large hall. Vietnamese dancer Truong Doan Minh Nguyen said that similar views—that only gay men would do ballroom dancing—were once widespread in his country. "In the early years (of dancesport in Vietnam), people had the same perception," he told AFP.

"But after I have developed my performance into a more sporty and stronger style, limiting soft moves, then people have changed their perception in men like me doing dancesport." During the Latin categories of the event's Sunday schedule, Nguyen and his partner Huong Thu Dang won three golds for Vietnam at the Games. Nguyen said interest in dancesport has grown over the years in Vietnam, adding that there may be nearly 500 clubs dedicated to it across the country.

Sean Mischa Aranar Fajardo, a dancer at the Games from the Philippines, said that men's ballroom dancing had improved markedly over the years. Before, they may have been viewed negatively simply because of poor technique. "The movement was not correct before, it doesn't look competitive," he said. — AFP



Sports

# Brazil football clubs open doors to foreign investors

## New law allows Brazilian football clubs to operate as companies

SAO PAULO: A new law allowing Brazilian football clubs to operate as companies has opened the door for foreign investors to buy teams in the spiritual home of the "beautiful game," following in Europe's footsteps. Passed last year, the law could help ailing Brazilian clubs turn their finances around. After a century operating as non-profit associations, Brazilian clubs have started transforming their business models since Congress passed the "Football, Inc." bill last August, encouraging the creation of SAFs, or "football corporations."

Already, US investors have negotiated deals to buy historic Rio de Janeiro clubs Botafogo and Vasco da Gama. Brazilian football great Ronaldo, retired from his Ballon d'Or-winning glory days in Europe, has bought Cruzeiro, the club where he made his professional debut, adding it to his investment portfolio alongside Spanish second division side Real Valladolid.

Before the law was passed, just two top-tier Brazilian clubs operated as companies: Cuiaba, owned by local tyre manufacturer Drebora, and Red Bull Bragantino, part of the Austrian beverage company's international stable of teams. "Brazilian football

was always very closed to external investment because of the domestic-controlled business model," said Cesar Grafiatti, who advises football investors as a partner at consulting firm Convocados. "With these investments, the trend will be for Brazilian clubs' management to improve, which brings yet more money and in turn better performance," he told AFP.

### 'Win to be profitable'

Experts say Brazilian clubs are an alluring option for foreign investors. Brazil is the world's leading exporter of footballers, and its currency has been weakened by the coronavirus pandemic. The business potential "is huge" in the football-mad country of 213 million people, said Grafiatti.

Before they became club-companies, Botafogo, Vasco and Cruzeiro were all stuck in financial crises, an all-too-common fate for Brazilian teams. Now, fans and investors alike will be watching the results. Botafogo returned to the first division this year, and are currently a respectable fourth in the league. Vasco and Cruzeiro are both in the second division, battling for promotion. The three clubs together had

racked up debts totaling some \$442 million in 2020, according to consulting firm Sports Value.

Botafogo were bought by US businessman and virtual reality pioneer John Textor, who acquired a 90-percent stake in the club in March. Under the deal, Textor, who also co-owns English side Crystal Palace and Belgium's Molenbeek, will invest \$77 million in the team in the next three years. "Football is no different than any other business. You have to win to be profitable," the 56-year-old magnate told CNN in March, before recruiting Portuguese coach Luis Castro and signing a dozen new players.

Ronaldo bought a 90-percent stake in Cruzeiro for an undisclosed amount in April. "We won't rest until we've broadly implemented a management model that's efficient, ethical and brings results," he said. But the club has so far remained relatively low-key when it comes to signing new talent. As for Vasco, US group 777 Partners, which owns Italian side Genoa and a share in Spain's Sevilla, is seeking to buy a 70-percent stake in the club for \$135 million. The deal still needs a green light from Vasco's advisers and partners.

### More deals on horizon

This trailblazing trio of clubs had to move fast because of "urgent financial reasons," said sports marketing specialist Rafael Zanette. But others are taking note, and could be close behind, he said. "In the future, some clubs interested in becoming SAFs will probably be more demanding in negotiations," he said. According to local media reports, second-division side Bahia are currently in negotiations with City Football Group, owners of Manchester City and nine other clubs.

Reigning league champions Atletico Mineiro have said they will not rule out going corporate. Other powerhouses such as Flamengo, Corinthians and Palmeiras are holding out for now. But that may change. Zanette predicts Brazil, whose clubs have won four of the past five Copa Libertadores, will dominate South American football even more under the new system. "Latin America should be looking to the Brazilian market as a reference," he said. "This is the path to grow, and even start catching up to Europe." —AFP



## Kuwait grabs gold in 3rd Gulf Games

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Third Gulf Games continued yesterday as Kuwait is expected to excel and win medals in shooting and of sporting activities. Kuwait grabbed one gold medal on Monday. Bahrain and Oman had outstanding performance in the opening of the Games.

Kuwait Basketball and Futsal men's teams had the best start. Kuwait secured one gold, 5 silver and 4 bronze medals (5th). Bahrain remained on top position with 6 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze medals; followed by Oman - 4 gold and 2 bronze and Saudi Arabia 2 gold, 2 silver and three bronze medals. Qatar so far, secured 2 gold and 2 silver while UAE grabbed 1 silver and 2 bronze medals.

### Al-Youha shines

All medals came from athletics which will be concluded on Wednesday. Kuwait men won one gold, two silver and two bronze while the women won three silver and two bronze. Runner Yaqoub Al-Youha won the gold medal (110 m hurdles) in 13.65 seconds followed by Qatar's Saeed Al-Absi (14.08 seconds) and Oman's Khalfan Al-Jaberi (15.04 seconds) respectively.

In the Javelin throw, Abdelrahman Fawaz won the silver medal with a 66.97 meters throw. Saudi Arabia's Ali Essa won gold with a 71.15 meters throw and his compatriot Ahamad Al-Yaseen took the

bronze medal with a 58.16 meters. In the long jump, Abdallah Al-Mirshed won the silver medal with 7.45 meters while Oman's Salem Al-Yaaroubi won gold with 7.58 meters. Saudi Arabia's Humoud Al-Alwani took bronze with 7.16 meters.

In the Shot-put, Mushari Suroor won bronze with 17.95 meters, while Bahrain's Abdelrahman Mahmoud won gold with 20.74 meters while Saudi Arabia's Mohammad Dawood won silver with 20.49 meters. In the 10,000 meters, Abbas Abdelrahman won bronze (30 minutes 39 seconds and 25 tenths of a second), as Bahrain's Albert won gold (29 minutes 15 seconds and 97 tenths of a second) and his compatriot Abraham won silver with (29 minutes and 30 seconds).

In the 100 meters dash, Qatar's Tosin Ogunode won gold in 10.05 seconds followed by Saudi Arabia's Abdallah Baker (10.21 seconds). Qatar's Ammar Ibrahim won the 400 meters gold (45.76 seconds), followed by Saudi's Mazen Alyaseen (45.83 seconds) and Bahrain's Abbas Ali (45.96 seconds) respectively.

### Women's competition

Mudahawi Al-Shammari won the silver in 100 meters dash (in 11.52 seconds) while Oman's Mazzon Alaloub won gold (11.47 seconds) and Bahrain's Hajar Al-Khaldi won bronze (11.56 seconds). Salsabeel Al-Sayyar won silver in the Javelin throw (30.70 meters) and Aisha Al Khadher took bronze (23.70 meters) while the



gold went to Oman's Hiba Al Asmi (36.40 meters). In the long jump, Maryam Hasan won the bronze medal

while Bahrain's Fatima Mubarak won the gold while UAE's Latifa Al-Kaabi took silver.

## Legacy on the line for Rangers in Europa final

GLASGOW: Rangers captain James Tavernier wants to leave his legacy on the Glasgow giants by delivering just the club's second European trophy on their 150th anniversary in Wednesday's Europa League final. The Scottish side face Eintracht Frankfurt in Seville aiming to add to their 1971/72 Cup Winners' Cup success. "It would put me in the category amongst the greats in the club. That's where we all want to be," Tavernier told Sky Sports on the prospect of lifting the trophy.

"We want to put a legacy down for the day we retire. You can look back on your career and be proud of it." No Scottish side has won a European trophy since Alex Ferguson led Aberdeen to the Cup Winners' Cup in 1983. "It means a lot, it's not often that you play a final in Europe. As a Scottish team, it's very rare that it happens," said Rangers boss Giovanni van Bronckhorst. "So I'm really honoured and proud that we are in the final in Seville."

The scale of the achievement is all the greater given the journey Rangers have been on for the past decade. The Gers all-time top goalscorer Ally McCoist was the manager when mounting debts forced the club into liquidation in 2012. "Nine years ago we were playing East Stirling in the Third Division," said McCoist. Rangers ascent through the leagues was not as smooth as expected. McCoist lost his job in 2014 during a season in which they failed to gain promotion from the Championship. Even when back in the top flight, Rangers comparative lack of resources and poor management at all levels struggled to halt Celtic matching a record nine consecutive league titles. However, Rangers renaissance began by winning the title without even losing a game last season. "It's all about stages and steps on the journey back. Last season was phenomenal to go through that campaign undefeated and win the title back. That was immense, but this is just another level."

### Fortress Ibrox

The jubilation for the blue half of Glasgow at stopping Celtic's bid for 10-in-a-row was tempered by the full season being played behind closed doors. With 50,000 back in the stands, Ibrox has been a fortress on the road to Seville with tens of thousands set to follow their team to Spain.

Braga and RB Leipzig found to their cost that a 1-0 lead was not enough as Rangers were inspired to 3-1 wins with home advantage in the second legs of quarter-finals and last four. However, hope they can cope far from home in the final comes from a stunning 4-2 win away to Borussia Dortmund in the last 32. Having come so far, Rangers are not a crossroads with the outcome at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan set to dictate their path.

Celtic have already snatched back the crown as Scottish champions and with it direct entry to next season's Champions League. Lift the Europa League and Rangers will join them in the group stages for the first time since 2010 with the extra bounty of their European prize money from this season and next season's Super Cup to come. Van Bronckhorst replaced Steven Gerrard mid-season and an overhaul of the squad is expected in the Dutchman's first summer window. —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, Zaineb, currently holder of Indian Passport no. Z5185901 issued in Kuwait on 02/05/2019 have changed my name to Zaineb Juzer Tahery (C 0866) 18-5-22

### EMERGENCY

112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988





TULSA: A detailed view of a 7-wood golf club belonging to Matt Fitzpatrick of England as he chips to a green during a practice round prior to the start of the 2022 PGA Championship at Southern Hills Country Club on May 16, 2022 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. —AFP

## Golf in turmoil, battle lines drawn

### Questions swirl over Saudi-backed breakaway golf tour

ST ALBANS: Golf is in turmoil as it braces for the launch of a new Saudi-backed breakaway tour but figurehead Greg Norman is confident it will be a success despite a host of unresolved issues. The LIV Golf Invitational Series plans eight events this year but no player names have yet been announced. There is also uncertainty over broadcast deals and whether ranking points will be on offer.

Questions over the source of the funding persist with Norman grilled over concerns about Saudi backing for the new tour when he faced the press in Britain last week. The battle lines have been drawn, with the US PGA Tour refusing to release members for next month's opening event in England, which clashes with the PGA's Canadian Open. The DP World Tour, formerly known as the European Tour, has been more opaque, saying it is "evaluating each request on a case-by-case basis".

Former world number one Norman, chief executive of LIV Golf Investments, accused the US PGA Tour of "perpetuating its illegal monopoly on what should be a free and open market". Six-time major winner Phil Mickelson and former world number one Lee Westwood have asked for permission to play in the inaugural LIV event at the Centurion Club in St Albans, outside London, and Sergio Garcia's name is also understood to be in the frame.

But others have rejected the new golf circuit,

including world number two Jon Rahm and four-time major champion Rory McIlroy, as players gather in Tulsa, Oklahoma for the PGA Championship. Two-time British Open champion Norman, 67, appears unperturbed by the lack of guaranteed star names just a few weeks away from the start of the 54-hole tournament, which takes place from June 9 to 11.

#### Superstars

The Australian believes, in the long term, the top players will be attracted to the new tour, but he does not think it needs the biggest stars to be a success from the start. "If none of the top 20 wanted to come in, we're still going to go ahead," he said. "There's still value in there. Imagine if that 15-year-old kid TK (Thai golfer Ratchanon "TK" Chantananuwat)... came in and won if he's playing here, if he won the first event."

"He's the next superstar. We're giving that opportunity to that kid or an amateur to come in here to have that opportunity," Norman said he had spoken to "50 to 60 players" and they were starting to realise their rights as independent contractors to play where they wanted. He is adamant that he is not spoiling a fight but is braced for a legal battle and has pledged to pay players' fines if necessary.

Money is certainly not an issue for the LIV Series, with an eye-watering \$25 million of prize money on offer at each regular-season event, where players will

compete as individuals and in teams. Norman last week announced the tour had been given an extra \$2 billion in funding to expand the schedule. But the source of that money—the Saudi sovereign wealth fund—is proving controversial, with Amnesty International adamant that the tour is another example of the "sportswashing" of Saudi Arabia's human rights record.

There are a series of other unknowns even as the spectator stands go up at Centurion Club, including how will golf fans be able to watch the tournament? Chief commercial officer Sean Bratches, former managing director of commercial operations at F1, said LIV was aiming for "broad distribution" online and was in discussions with more traditional broadcasting partners. "We don't have any deals signed because we're right out of the gate," he said. "When we sign a deal we'll announce it."

There is also the thorny question of ranking points—will top-level golfers be happy to play in events with no points on offer? Again there is no clear-cut answer, even though chief operating officer Atul Khosla said tour chiefs had held talks with world ranking officials. "I don't know that we will get it for the first event because of the nature of how long it takes for the application to go through and the process one needs to undertake," he said. "But we are hopeful that we can get them for this year onwards." —AFP



TURIN: Juventus' defender Giorgio Chiellini from Italy greets to supporters during the Serie A football match Juventus vs Lazio at the Allianz Stadium in Turin, on May 16, 2022. —AFP

### Chiellini says goodbye as Lazio make Europa

TURIN: Giorgio Chiellini bid farewell to Juventus fans on Monday in his last home match for the Turin giants, a disappointing 2-2 draw which earned Lazio a place in the Europa League after Sergej Milinkovic-Savic levelled with the last kick of the game. Fans chanted "there's only one captain" as a giant choreography depicting his shirt number '3' was displayed in the stands ahead of the match and they then gave Chiellini a huge round of applause after he was substituted in the 18th minute. The 37-year-old had played the full 120 minutes of Juve's Italian Cup final defeat to arch rivals Inter Milan on Wednesday, after which he announced that he would be leaving Juve after 18 years at a club where he has won nine league titles and a clutch of other trophies.

"It's been an emotional day," said Chiellini to DAZN, adding that he believes he can "still play at a high level of football". Following the announcement of his departure from Juve he said he would think about whether to hang up his boots after having already decided to retire from international football. "I don't know right now," he said. "I need to think about things. It's a decision that can't be made in a day."

#### Tearful Dybala

When he left the field he handed his captain's armband to another player on the way out—Paulo Dybala. Argentina international Dybala, who has been at Juve since 2015, will leave at the end of the season after the club decided not to renew his contract after a verbal agreement with the 28-year-old struck in the autumn was publicly rejected by the club earlier this year.

Dusan Vlahovic did the Argentine's "mask" celebration when he headed in the opener in the 10th minute, and when Dybala was substituted with 12 minutes remaining, with the hosts leading 2-1, he did a tour of the stands and was embraced by fans while he tried to hold back the tears. Juve looked to be cruising to a routine home win to honor their two departing heroes when Alvaro Morata doubled the hosts lead in the 36th minute. However Alex Sandro poked into his own net five minutes after the break and Maurizio Sarri's Lazio pushed for a leveler which came in the 95th minute, Milinkovic-Savic rifling past Mattia Perin from a tight angle to give Lazio a spot in Europe's second-tier competition.

"For next year we will need a few players in order to aim towards the Champions league," said Milinkovic-Savic, who has been linked with a move away from the Roman club in the summer. They sit fifth in one of two Europa League places, four points away from seventh-placed Fiorentina, who were hammered 4-1 at a Sampdoria side in party mood. —AFP

### Newcastle blow up Arsenal's Champions League dream

NEWCASTLE: Mikel Arteta castigated his Arsenal side for throwing away a season's work in a limp 2-0 defeat at Newcastle that looks set to see the Gunners miss out on Champions League football for a sixth successive season. Tottenham remain two points above their north London rivals in fourth place in the Premier League.

Spurs now realistically only need a draw away to already-relegated Norwich on Sunday to secure a top-four finish thanks to their superior goal difference. Arsenal's defeat also guaranteed third-place Chelsea's place in the Champions League next season. Ben White's own goal and Bruno Guimaraes' late strike was the difference between the sides.

But the manner of the Newcastle performance was even more impressive as Eddie Howe's men sent a message they could be challenging for a top-four finish themselves next season. "A really difficult night to swallow," said Arteta. "Newcastle deserved to win comfortably. They were much better from the first minute, we had nothing in the game. "They were much better than us in everything that a football match requires. We could not cope tonight with the game we had to play here." Arteta's men were in the driving seat with three games to go as they lead Spurs by four points. But Tottenham's 3-0 derby win on Thursday cranked up the pressure on the young Gunners who failed to respond. "Newcastle were 10 times better than us and the performance was nowhere near what we need to play in the Champions League," added Arteta. "We weren't at the races."

#### Massive club'

Only Manchester City and Liverpool have won more Premier League points than the Magpies in 2022 since they began to splash to wealth of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund in the transfer market. More big money signings are expected to arrive at St. James' Park in the coming months, but Arsenal's budget in the transfer market could be severely dent-



NEWCASTLE: Arsenal's Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka (2nd right) fouls Newcastle United's Paraguayan midfielder Miguel Almiron during the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Arsenal at St James' Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, north east England on May 16, 2022. —AFP

ed by again missing out on the riches of the Champions League.

"It was a brilliant all-round performance. It was front foot, we never let up and that's the most pleasing thing," said Howe. "We have to improve and work incredibly hard to improve everything about the team over the summer. It's a massive club, we have big ambitions, but I have to focus on how we do it rather than talk."

Newcastle's upturn under Howe had been lacking a scalp against one of the Premier League's traditional top six. But they got that and more as Arsenal were lucky to escape without a more comprehensive defeat. Aaron Ramsdale was nearly embarrassed when Miguel Almiron blocked his clearance early on.

But the England international kept his side in the

game with a brilliant save to deny Allan Saint-Maximin at his near post. The hosts' pressure was finally rewarded when Joelinton's dangerous low cross just evaded Callum Wilson and flew into his own goal off the unfortunate White. Newcastle are firmly rooted in mid-table, but looked like the side with more on the line as they continued to storm forward.

Wilson fired over from Guimaraes' cross and then sent an audacious effort from 40 yards floating inches past the post. In between times Ramsdale produced another big stop from a one-on-one with Jacob Murphy. A second Newcastle goal seemed only a matter of time and it duly arrived five minutes from time when again Wilson was denied by Ramsdale, but Guimaraes swept home the rebound for his fifth goal since a January move from Lyon. —AFP