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Curbs on meats, oils leaving Kuwait; wheat supply stable

World Bank to provide additional \$12bn to address global food crisis



KUWAIT: Workers pack pita bread from a conveyer belt at a factory in this June 24, 2019 file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The General Administration of Customs sent orders to all border posts to ban sedans carrying frozen chicken, vegetable oils and meats from leaving Kuwait, as food prices soar around the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and international economic sanctions on Moscow have disrupted supplies of wheat and other food supplies from both countries and pushed up fuel and diesel prices, especially in developing nations. And India over the weekend banned wheat exports, which sent prices of the grain soaring.

The Center of Government Communications said Kuwait's strategic supply of wheat is stable as the country's imports are sourced from other countries. The imported wheat is of high quality, clean and suitable for storage in Kuwait's hot weather conditions, it added in a statement Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the World Bank on Wednesday announced an additional \$12 billion in funding for projects to address the global food security crisis, bringing the total to \$30 billion. Amid the growing shortages exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a key grain producer, the new funding will finance projects over the next 15 months to boost food and fertilizer production, facilitate greater trade and support vulnerable

households and producers, the World Bank said.

"Food price increases are having devastating effects on the poorest and most vulnerable," World Bank President David Malpass said in a statement. "It is critical that countries make clear statements now of future output increases in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine." The bank previously announced \$18.7 billion in funding for projects to be implemented over the next 15 months in Africa and the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and South Asia.

"Countries should make concerted efforts to increase the supply of energy and fertilizer, help farmers increase plantings and crop yields, and remove policies that block exports and imports, divert food to biofuel, or encourage unnecessary storage," Malpass said. Washington welcomed the decision, which is part of a joint action plan by multilateral lenders and regional development banks to address the food crisis.

"The Russian war against Ukraine is the latest global shock that is exacerbating the sharp increase in both acute and chronic food insecurity in recent years driven by conflict, climate change and economic downturns, such as those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic," the Treasury Department said, applauding the institutions for working swiftly to address the issues. — Agencies

Lebanon faces tense times after elections

BEIRUT: Hezbollah's opponents might rejoice at their loss of majority in parliament but Lebanon's packed political calendar now sets the stage for protracted deadlocks at best or violence at worst. Sunday's polls passed without any major incident, in itself an achievement in a country which has a history of political violence and is suffering its worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Iran-backed Hezbollah is a major political and military force, described by its supporters a bulwark against enemy the Zionist entity and by its detractors as a state within a state whose continued existence prevents any kind of democratic change in Lebanon. Hezbollah and its allies lost the clear majority they had in the outgoing parliament, despite a flurry of televised addresses by the Shiite group's leader Hassan Nasrallah in the week running up to the vote.

The biggest winners were the Christian Lebanese Forces party and new faces born of a 2019 secular protest movement, all of whom have a clear stance against Hezbollah. "Old guard parties will seek to assert their political dominance in the face of the reformists who have entered parliament for the first time," said analyst Lina Khatib, head of the Middle East and North Africa Program at Chatham House.

As of May 22, after the current assembly's mandate expires, the new lawmakers will have 15 days to pick a speaker, a position Nabih Berri has held since 1992 and is not intent on leaving despite reaching the age of 84. By convention, Lebanon's prime minister position is reserved for a Sunni Muslim, the presidency goes to a Maronite Christian and the post of speaker to a Shiite Muslim.

Berri is a deeply polarizing figure but all Shiite seats in parliament were won by Hezbollah and the veteran speaker's own Amal party, which rules out the emergence of a consensual candidacy.

Continued on Page 6

Finland and Sweden apply to join NATO

BRUSSELS: Finland and Sweden on Wednesday handed in their bids to join NATO, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine up-ended decades of military non-alignment. The applications were warmly received by most allies. But Turkey raised objections, and ambassadors meeting in Brussels failed to reach consensus on starting formal membership negotiations.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had promised the process

would be "swift and smooth", but Turkey will have to be mollified before the ratification can take place. "The applications you have made today are an historic step. Allies will now consider the next steps on your path to NATO," Stoltenberg said, after receiving the bids from the Finnish and Swedish ambassadors.

But resistance raised by NATO member Turkey threatens to block them, with Ankara accusing the Nordic countries of acting as safe havens for opposition Kurdish groups. In Ankara, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said: "We asked them to extradite 30 terrorists but they refused to do so. You will not send back the terrorists to us, and then ask our support for your NATO membership?" — AFP (See Page 5)



BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg poses with application documents presented by the Finnish and Swedish ambassadors to NATO during a ceremony to mark Sweden's and Finland's application for membership on May 18, 2022. — AFP

Burj Khalifa engulfed by sandstorm

DUBAI: The world's tallest building disappeared behind a grey layer of dust on Wednesday as sandstorms that have swept the Middle East hit the United Arab Emirates, prompting weather and traffic warnings. The 828-metre Burj Khalifa, which towers over Dubai and is usually visible across the busy financial hub, retreated behind a curtain of airborne dirt that shrouded much of the country.

The UAE is just the latest country in the path of sandstorms that have smothered Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran and others in recent days, closing airports and schools and sending thousands to hospital with breathing problems. Capital city Abu Dhabi's air quality index (AQI) soared into the



DUBAI: This picture taken on May 18, 2022 shows a view of the haze obscuring the skyline with a mosque in the foreground during a heavy sandstorm. — AFP

"hazardous" zone overnight, according to waqi.info and the Plume pollution app.

The Middle East's sandstorms are becoming more frequent and intense, a trend associated with overgrazing and deforestation, overuse of river water and more

dams. Experts say the phenomenon could worsen as climate change warps regional weather patterns and drives desertification. Emirati authorities issued a nationwide warning urging residents to remain vigilant.

Continued on Page 6

School closures inflict toll: IMF

WASHINGTON: School closures during the pandemic have set back children's learning in many G20 countries and could have a long-lasting negative impact on GDP in advanced economies, the IMF said Tuesday. Recent assessments of schoolchildren show that widespread virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in lower academic levels in India, Germany, the United Kingdom, Brazil and the United States, where many institutions were closed for more than a year.

"If these learning losses aren't addressed, affected students could experience a lifetime of depressed earnings," the Washington-based crisis lender said in a report. IMF economists observed that current students will make up nearly 40 percent of the working-age population in G20 economies for decades to come.

"While much is still unknown, our simulations show that, once all such students are in the labor market, gross domestic product for advanced G20 economies could be as much as three percent lower in the long run," the report warned. Poorest households suffered the worst learning losses, and their prospects stood to be "particularly diminished, further widening income inequality," the IMF said. If learning loss from the pandemic goes unaddressed, it could result in lifetime income losses of 1.5 to 10 percent for residents of G20 nations, the IMF estimates. — AFP

Kuwait's Deputy Amir receives new ambassadors' credentials

Amir congratulates Lebanon on successful elections



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Tanzania Said Shaib Mussa. —Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Hungary Eszter Torda.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Malawi Younos Abdul Karim.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of Ambassador of Tanzania Said Shaib Mussa.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of Ambassador of Hungary Eszter Torda.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of Ambassador of Malawi Younos Abdul Karim.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Wednesday at Bayan Palace the credentials of newly appointed ambassadors of

Tanzania Said Shaib Mussa, Hungary Eszter Torda and Malawi Younos Abdul Karim. Several senior state officials attended the reception.

In other news, His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Wednesday two congratulatory cables to Lebanese President Michel Oun and Prime Minister Najeeb Mikati on the success of the recent par-

liamentary elections, wishing them good health and the Lebanese republic all progress and prosperity.

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 congratulatory cables to the president and prime minister of Lebanon. —KUNA

UK Minister hails Kuwait as strategic partner

KUWAIT: The visiting UK Minister for Asia and the Middle East Amanda Milling on Wednesday commended the State of Kuwait as an important strategic partner in the region. The UK Minister said in a press statement that her country is seeking to strengthen its relations with Kuwait, speaking highly of its key role in resolving both Gulf and Lebanese crises, in addition to its humanitarian and development part in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and several other countries. She added that her first visit to Kuwait and the Gulf region since she became minister for Asia and the Middle East in February 2022 aims at developing bilateral relations between both countries through their joint steering group that was launched in 2012.

Milling elaborated that the joint group seeks to upgrade relations in the fields of security, defense, cybersecurity, education, culture, trade and investment, adding that she and Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhafiri signed a joint action plan and a memo of understanding during her visit to Kuwait. She noted that Britain and Kuwait have been partners for decades, reminding that in 2019 they had marked the 120th anniversary of forging bilateral relations. The British minister pointed out that she attended a workshop on women's leadership hosted by the British embassy in Kuwait on Monday, marking the Kuwaiti Women's Day. Milling and her accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait on Monday on her first visit to Kuwait



KUWAIT: The UK Minister for Asia and the Middle East Amanda Milling. —KUNA

since she was appointed Minister for Asia and the Middle East, where she has already met several Kuwaiti ministers and senior officials. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The Digital Transformation Showcase organized by the US Embassy in Kuwait in action. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Digital Transformation Showcase organized by US embassy in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The US Embassy in Kuwait launched its pilot Digital Transformation Showcase on Tuesday at the Radisson Blu Hotel, where four American technology companies pitched their latest innovations and services virtually to different Kuwait-based firms. The in-person audience included representatives from telecoms, banking, government, and education, among other key players in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector.

"This pilot showcase exemplifies the embassy's ongoing efforts to sustain robust commercial ties between our two countries, especially in light of a pandemic that has only accelerated the need for digital transformation across the board," US Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider said.

Holtsnider kicked off the showcase following a networking reception. Attendees - ranging from chief technology officers to government officials and university presidents - then tuned into a series of virtual presentations by American tech companies Explorance Inc, Forward Slope, MLTwist, and Truststamp: all major service providers in artificial intelligence, big data, cybersecurity, and other advanced technologies.

"Investing in cutting-edge technology is fundamental to competing in an increasingly digital world. These four companies represent some of the best examples of US innovation and technolo-



US Charge d'Affaires James Holtsnider speaks during the event.

gy services that cut across all sectors of the Kuwaiti economy including cybersecurity, financial services, education, and oil and gas," the US diplomat added. Advanced technologies will likely be the main drivers of ICT spending in Kuwait over the next few years, with technologies that facilitate digital transformation projected to exhibit the fastest growth.

"Kuwait's recent removal from the United States Trade Representative's Special 301 watchlist also shows that Kuwaitis are serious about intellectual property and want to choose high-quality, secure solutions from trusted companies," Holtsnider pointed out. "This will encourage more tech companies to come to Kuwait. The US Embassy is here to help."



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force General Director Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mikrad signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Kuwait Engineers Society's Chairman Faisal Al-Atel to boost cooperation between the two entities.

Local

Fluctuating oil prices requires measures to enhance Kuwaiti economy: Commerce Minister

Privatization a need for Kuwait to face economic challenges: Shuraian



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Al-Shuraian speaks during the forum. —KUNA photos



Former commerce minister Amani Bouresly addresses the forum.

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahad Al-Shuraian said on Wednesday that the political and economic changes that the world was going through amidst the sharp fluctuating oil prices required some serious measures to enhance the economy through economic restoration programs and initiatives to privatize a number of public sector institutions. This came in an economic forum organized by the Arab Planning Institute entitled 'towards more privatization in the GCC' with the participation of several economic experts and officials.

Shuraian added that economic restoration programs aim to improve the level of competition, which reflects positively on the country and lifts the load on the government, and creates new job opportunities. "It requires new measures in order to achieve Kuwait's vision, measures that correspond to the international requirements, the application of transparency and equality standards, these are the main characteristics for the transformation into a financial center," he pointed out.

Amani Bouresly, former Minister of Commerce and Industry, and head of the organizing committee of the forum, said meanwhile that privatization is one of the solutions to reduce the continuous inflation in the public sector's institutions and the rise

costs and expenses. "Privatization has great benefits on the economic level, the most important of which is raising productivity and improving the level and efficiency of public services, but this file is still facing many organizational, legislative and social obstacles," she added. She pointed out that the process of reconstructing the economy and down-



Telecom sector privatization created thousands of jobs

sizing the public sector that has more than 400,000 employees is considered one of the main pillars of Kuwait vision 2035, as for the private sector can create more job opportunities for upcoming workers to the market.

Meanwhile, Arab Planning Institute consultant Dr Fahad Al-Fadhala said that the forum's main goal is

to shed the light on the efforts of the privatization programs in the GCC and its role in repairing the economy. Furthermore, Head of the Kuwait technical agency for privatization program Sheikh Fahad Salim Al-Sabah said that the biggest challenge that faces privatization in Kuwait is the large increase of national labors in the governmental sectors, which leads to a larger cost on the country. The legislators offer employees the chance to choose between staying in the institute to be privatized, to move to another governmental job or retirement.

"The number of Kuwaiti employees in the telecommunications sector before privatization did not exceed 500 employees and there was only one company, while privatization allowed competition in the market, bringing the number of companies to three, creating more than 2,500 job opportunities for Kuwaitis, and this is evidence that proper privatization brings positive results on the Kuwaiti economy," he added. This second economic forum, organized by the Arab Planning Institute, which is held over two days, represents an opportunity to gather all the concerned parties related to the privatization program, to display the different viewpoints and successful regional and international experiences and the possibility of benefiting from them at the Gulf level. —KUNA

News in brief

Team to promote greening in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ali Al-Mousa gave orders on Wednesday to form a team responsible for greening and tree planting works in residential areas and roads, as well as promoting vegetation and improving public parks around Kuwait.

Coordination to address residency violators

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry and Public Authority for Manpower reached an agreement to create a platform in order to deal with the status of residency law violators, Al-Rai reported yesterday quoting informed sources who estimated illegals' numbers at "tens of thousands". The agreement was reached during a recent meeting between Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah, Justice Minister Jamal Al-Jalawi and PAM officials to discuss the issue of violating labor in the private sector, said the sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "The green light was given to start preparing for a temporary project to deal with residency violators who work in the private sector only," the sources added.

Kuwait oil up to \$120.22 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil surged \$5.02 to reach \$120.22 per barrel (pb) during Tuesday trading sessions, compared with \$115.20 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. Benchmark Brent however dropped 2.31 to reach \$111.93 pb and West Texas Intermediate lost \$1.80 to settle at \$112.40 pb.

Kuwait, Ethiopia discuss domestic labor recruitment

KUWAIT: Minister of Justice and Minister for Integrity Promotion Affairs Jamal Al-Jalawi and a delegation from the Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Skills discussed ways to bring Ethiopian domestic workers to Kuwait. A statement by Kuwait's Public Authority for Manpower indicated that Minister Jalawi and Nigussu Tilahun Gebreamanuel — Commissioner for the Jobs Creation Commission in Ethiopia — had laid the final touches on a cooperation memorandum to bring in Ethiopian domestic workers to Kuwait. The Ethiopian delegation began its visit to Kuwait earlier this week to discuss ways to bolster cooperation especially within the domestic workers domain. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Justice and Minister for Integrity Promotion Affairs Jamal Al-Jalawi presents a memento to Nigussu Tilahun Gebreamanuel — Commissioner for the Jobs Creation Commission in Ethiopia. —KUNA

Nazaha refers former official to Public Prosecution

KUWAIT: Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha) stated that following its investigations and evidence gathering, it has referred a former senior official and others to the Public Prosecution for the embezzlement and facilitating the embezzlement of public funds as criminalized in Article 10 of Law No. 1 of 1993 on the Protection of Public Funds, as well as for the falsification of official documents as crim-

inalized in Article 257 of Law No. 16 of 1960 regarding the Penal Code.

Further, the referral comes as part of Nazaha's efforts to combat corruption, avert its dangers, and pursue its preparators by implementing its mandate of detecting violations and suspicions of corruption crimes as per Article 24 of Law No. 2 of 2016 on the establishment of Kuwait Anticorruption Authority and the Special Provisions of Financial Disclosure.

Nazaha confirms that it is determined to continue its efforts in investigating the information and data submitted to it regarding corruption crimes. Nazaha also appreciates the role of traditional and social media in providing it with information about incidents of corruption.

Man arrested for firing from AK-47 in wedding



KUWAIT: Police arrested one person who fired gunshots during a wedding in Kuwait recently, and two people who officers say have cooperated with the accused. Officers also confiscated an AK-47



rifle the suspects used in the firing, the Interior Ministry said in a statement Wednesday. The arrest came following investigations after a video clip showing the shooting went viral on social media.

On the occasion of the



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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

News in brief

Arab Parliament hopes for stability

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament Tuesday hoped that the Lebanese legislative polls concluded Sunday would achieve political stability in the country that is aspired by all Lebanese people. In a statement, the parliament stressed support to the Lebanese State in order to complete all steps and form a national government to contribute to improving economic conditions facing the country. The statement lauded wisdom and ability of Lebanese people to maintain stability in their country, despite difficulties.

28th Arab mineral committee held

RABAT: The 28th meeting of Arab mineral resources advisory committee was held in Rabat, in the presence of representatives of some Arab countries. The meeting stressed the need to develop the mineral wealth sector for development in Arab countries. Director General of Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO) Adel Saqar affirmed the importance of cooperation amongst Arab countries to develop this sector, pointing to several achievements made by the organization in this field. He highlighted the establishment of a database of mineral services production in the Arab countries.



ABK participates in AUM career fair

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) successfully concluded its participation in the American University of the Middle East's (AUM) hybrid career fair, which was launched last week. As the event's gold sponsor, ABK is reinforcing its commitment to investing in local talent and providing opportunities to students who aspire a career in the banking sector.

Students and alumni visited the ABK booth, where they were provided with networking opportunities and career advice from the Bank. Visitors were also introduced to the processes within the banking sector and were provided with access to an array of in-person and online courses to enrich their learning experience.

Commenting on the Bank's participation at the AUM career fair, Afrah Al-Arbash, Acting General Manager for Human Resources said, "We are pleased to be participating in the AUM career fair, consistent with our ongoing commitment to empower the ambitious youth in Kuwait. In line with our 'Transformation and Growth' strategy, the Bank will continue to invest heavily in inspiring, guiding and preparing the future generation, for an appropriate career in the banking sector. We look forward to participating in the upcoming annual fairs, remaining steadfast in our commitment to attracting national workforce, and enhancing our capabilities at the Bank."

ABK Human Resources employees at the AUM career fair provided a view into the financial services sector, while also highlighting the most coveted skills in the banking sector. Students were also presented the opportunities for growth and development within ABK. Namely, ABK's Retail Banking Division (RBD) Academy, designed to give trainees the opportunity to be fully immersed in the working environment of various departments within the Bank and get familiar with the day-to-day operations, providing them with a more hands-on experience.

Afrah Al-Arbash concluded by saying, "ABK has been and will continue to be very active in local career fairs. We are always energized by the enthusiasm of student and fresh graduates who are interesting in working in banking and finance. We will continue to reach out young talents and participate in career fairs, as we are always looking for quality candidates to join the ABK team."



Afrah Al-Arbash

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive on a main road as Kuwait City skyscrapers are seen in the background. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

stc takes part in AUM career fair



KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, participated in the American University of the Middle East's (AUM) annual career fair. stc's participation falls in line with the various initiatives the Company has organized and pursued to empower the younger generation, while attracting aspiring candidates that fit into stc's dynamic culture.

During the AUM career fair, members from stc's recruitment team welcomed students and graduates at the Company's dedicated booth. Those visiting stc's booth got a chance to learn more about how the pioneering telecom company operates, as well as the different fields and professions currently available. Members of the recruitment team also held on the spot interviews and provided graduates with the necessary steps required to submit their resumes for a chance to start their career journeys at stc.

stc indicated in a statement that its participation in the career fair strongly supports its ongoing commitment to attract and recruit Kuwaiti talent. This initiative aligns with the Kuwaitization initiative and stc's strive to empower the younger generation through various

aspects of their lives within the community. stc has implemented various strategies to achieve these objectives, including participating in career fairs, organizing internships, and sponsoring initiatives that aim to educate and prepare the younger generation for their future careers.

As part of stc's commitment to support the Kuwaiti employment program 'Kuwaitization' aimed at increasing the indigenous participation rate in the private sector, we have placed the Kuwaiti employment replacement program as one of the main pillars of our human resources strategy. Whereby, the Kuwaiti employees at stc reached 63 percent of company's total employees by the end of 2021.

Following its participation in the AUM career fair, stc was recognized by the university for its active role in the private sector, especially when it comes to supporting students and graduates. The steps taken by stc to assist individuals in starting or developing their careers in the telecom industry have well positioned the Company to become one of the employers of choice within the community.

stc expressed that it is proud to participate in AUM's career fair once again, especially following the pandemic where such initiatives were placed on hold.



NBK gold sponsor of AUM career fair

KUWAIT: In line with its continuous support of fresh graduates as they make the first step in their professional career, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) participated as the Gold Sponsor of the American University of the Middle East (AUM) Career Fair 2022 held during May with a view to encourage students to navigate the labor market and get directly in touch with employers.

NBK's participation in AUM Career Fair reflects its belief in the importance of supporting the young students and fresh graduates and providing them with suitable job opportunities in an important sector like the banking and financial sector, as NBK is an active participant in the events aiming to support promising national talent in Kuwait.

On this occasion, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK continues to cement its leading role among private sector institutions in soliciting, training, upskilling national talent and qualifying them for working in the banking sector."

Ablani pointed out that NBK has the highest employee retention rates and is the employer of choice for national talents in the private sector, adding that the bank is the largest employer of national labor in the private sector.

"Group Human Resources strategy is based on soliciting high-caliber national talent, serving the goals of New Kuwait Vision 2035 by increasing national labor ratio in the banking sector, and supporting the national economy by recruiting local talent," he elaborated.

He explained that graduates are an important source for the bank to solicit talent, which contribute to its change agenda and the remarkable transformation, thanks to their high potential that require the proper guidance. On the other hand, the Bank provides a unique training and development environment to



enhance the skills of its employees and build their professional career.

Gadeer Al-Kooheji, Recruitment Manager, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Career fairs offer NBK a great opportunity to spread its work culture among students and fresh graduates, and encourage them to join the private sector."

"NBK's booth witnessed a noticeable turnout from the fair visitors, as Group Human Resources staff provided answers to all inquiries raised by the students who filled out the job applications for available vacancies," she added.

NBK is committed to provide training programs for young Kuwaiti fresh graduates and students, to equip them with the expertise, professional knowledge, and on-job training, as professional preparation for them to

The Company also thanked AUM for recognizing stc's role within the private sector, and for organizing the career fair which serves as a platform to connect employers with aspiring candidates and recent graduates. Through its role as an active member within the community, and a pioneer within the private sector, stc will continue to participate and organize initiatives that support the community across various aspects including empowering and supporting the younger generation.

As part of its ongoing initiatives to recruit aspiring talents, stc has an open internship program to all students and recent graduates who wish to learn more about the telecom sector. The internship programs are carried out in collaboration with local universities such as AUM, where students can effectively apply what they have studied, as well as their personal knowledge throughout the experience. The internship programs have been designed to measure each candidate on their ability to grasp new concepts and apply their knowledge to achieve positive results that can possibly lead to a job opportunity at stc. This scenario has played out several times in the past, in which stc recruited graduates from AUM based on their merits and ability to work well within stc's dynamic culture.

navigate their way into the labor market, reflecting its role as one of the key supporters of the youth among local private sector institutions.

NBK's efforts in soliciting national talents go in line with its development and training plans aimed to invest in national cadres and prepare a promising banking generation. The bank also offers a number of training courses and professional academic programs, being one of the leading banking institutions in Kuwait in organizing training programs for the youth.

During the fair, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American University of the Middle East (AUM), Dr Fahad Ibrahim Al-Othman, presented an honorary shield to Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources, in appreciation of NBK's role in supporting and nurturing fresh graduates.



India turning Kashmir into surveillance state

Germany to strip Schroeder of official perks

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Finland, Sweden apply to join NATO

First Ukraine war crimes trial begins

BRUSSELS: Finland and Sweden on Wednesday submitted a joint application to join NATO as Russia's invasion of Ukraine forces a dramatic reappraisal of security in Europe. The reversal of the Nordic countries' longstanding policy of non-alignment came as Ukraine opened the first war crimes trial of a Russian soldier since the invasion began.

Vadim Shishimarin, 21, from Irkutsk in Siberia, pleaded guilty to killing an unarmed 62-year-old man in Ukraine's Sumy region on February 28 — four days into the invasion. "By this first trial, we are sending a clear signal that every perpetrator, every person who ordered or assisted in the commission of crimes in Ukraine shall not avoid responsibility," prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said.

Russia's government has no information on Shishimarin, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding that many such cases reported by Ukraine are "simply fake or staged". Peskov further accused Kyiv of a "complete lack of will" towards peace talks, after Ukrainian negotiator Mykhaylo Podolyak said start dialogue was "on hold", having failed to yield any breakthroughs.

The Kremlin also intensified a tit-for-tat round of diplomatic expulsions against European countries, ordering out dozens of personnel from France, Italy and Spain. At NATO headquarters in Brussels, alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg formally received the applications from the Finnish and Swedish ambassadors, calling them "an historic step".

"All allies agree on the importance of NATO enlargement. We all agree that we must stand together and we all agree that this is an historic moment which we must seize," he said. The membership push could represent the most significant expansion of NATO in decades, doubling its border with Russia, and President Vladimir Putin has warned it may trigger a response from Moscow.

But the applications face resistance from NATO member Turkey, which accuses the Nordic neighbours of harbouring anti-Turkish extremists. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan demanded "respect" from NATO over his government's concerns.

Western allies remain optimistic they can overcome Turkey's objections and for now, several including Britain have offered security guarantees to

Finland and Sweden to guard against any Russian aggression. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the Nordic applications would not have been expected a short time ago, "but Putin's appalling ambitions have transformed the geopolitical contours of our continent".

Mediators for Azovstal

On the ground, in Ukraine's ruined port city of Mariupol, a unit of soldiers had been holding out in the Azovstal steelworks, but Moscow said Wednesday that 959 of the troops had surrendered this week. Kyiv's defence ministry said it would do "everything necessary" to rescue the undisclosed number of personnel still in the plant's tunnels, but admitted there was no military option available.

"The evacuation mission continues, it is overseen by our military and intelligence," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address. "The



'We will still fight'

most influential international mediators are involved."

Those who have left Azovstal were taken into Russian captivity, including 80 who were heavily wounded, the Russian defence ministry said. The ministry, which published images showing soldiers on stretchers, said the injured were transported to a hospital in the eastern Donetsk region controlled by pro-Kremlin rebels.

The defence ministry in Kyiv said it was hoping for an "exchange procedure... to repatriate these Ukrainian heroes as quickly as possible". But their fate was unclear, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refusing to say whether they would be treated as criminals or prisoners of war. Putin had "guar-

anteed that they would be treated according to the relevant international laws", Peskov said.



BRUSSELS: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivers a statement on the Commission's proposals on the topic of "REPowerEU, defence investment gaps and the relief reconstruction of Ukraine" at the EU headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

anteed that they would be treated according to the relevant international laws", Peskov said.

'My war is not over'

Despite their last-ditch resistance in places such as Mariupol, and their successful defence of Kyiv, Ukrainian forces are retreating across swathes of the eastern front. White smoke from burning fields marks the pace of Russia's advance around the village of Sidorove, on the approaches to the militarily important city of Slovyansk and Ukraine's eastern administrative centre in Kramatorsk.

Army volunteer Yaroslava, 51, sat on a slab of concrete jutting out from the remains of a school in Sidorove where her husband's unit had set up camp before it was hit by a Russian strike. She stared at a spot where rescuers and de-miners had spotted a motionless hand reaching out from the rubble.

"We had settled in London before the war but felt like we had no choice but to come back," Yaroslava

said. "My two sons have just signed three-year contracts with the army. We will fight. We will still fight," she said without moving her eyes.

The war crimes trial in Kyiv, expected to be followed by several others, posed a test of the Ukrainian justice system at a time when international bodies are also conducting their own investigations. Shishimarin faces a possible life sentence. Prosecutors said the sergeant was commanding a unit in a tank division when his convoy came under attack. He and four other soldiers stole a car and encountered the man on a bicycle, shooting him in cold blood, according to the prosecutors.

The International Criminal Court said Tuesday it was deploying its largest-ever field team to Ukraine, with 42 investigators, forensic experts and support staff being sent into the field to gather evidence of alleged atrocities. The US State Department also announced it was creating a special unit to research, document and publicise Russian war crimes. — AFP

Belarus introduces death penalty for attempted terrorism

MOSCOW, Russia: Belarus has introduced the death penalty for attempts to carry out acts of terrorism, Russian news agencies reported Wednesday, charges that several opposition activists face in the ex-Soviet country. Belarus — a close ally of Russia that has supported its military offensive in Ukraine — is the only country in Europe that continues to carry out executions despite calls for a moratorium.

"Lukashenko signed a law on the possibility of the death penalty for an attempted terrorist act," the RIA Novosti news agency reported, citing an online government portal for legal information. It said the law would come into force 10 days after its publication.

Two years ago, Belarus faced historic protests against the re-election of strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled the country with an iron fist for over two decades. Thousands of activists were arrested in the crackdown and the key leaders of the opposition movement are now either jailed or in exile.

Among them was Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, a political novice who ran against Lukashenko in the August 2020 polls in place of her jailed husband.

She now leads the Belarusian opposition from exile in Lithuania, while her husband Sergei Tikhonovskiy is serving 18 years in jail on what supporters believe are politically motivated charges.

Last March, Belarusian prosecutors charged Tikhonovskaya in absentia with "preparing acts of terrorism as part of an organised group", according to Belarusian state news agency Belta. Tikhonovskaya denounced Wednesday the decision of the "lawless regime" to expand the use of the death penalty, saying it targeted anti-government activists.

"This is a direct threat to activists opposing the dictator and the war," Tikhonovskaya tweeted. "I urge the international community to react: sanction lawmakers and consider any tools to prevent the political killings," she added.

Belarus and its leadership are already under a litany of Western sanctions over its handling of the opposition protest and over its support for Moscow's campaign in Ukraine. But many opposition activists remain behind bars in Belarus awaiting trial.

On Wednesday, a Belarusian court in the city of Grodno started a closed-door hearing in the case against 12 activists accused of "preparing acts of terrorism", according to Belarusian rights group Vyasna.

Among them is veteran activist Nikolai Avtukhovich, who has already served more than seven years in jail. The 59-year-old faces a litany of other charges, including treason. The activists

Barnette had been so far behind that the early frontrunners spent little time digging into her background until recent days, when a series of anti-Islam and homophobic statements were uncovered.

Oz, who would be the first Muslim Republican senator if elected, zeroed in on a 2015 social media post in which Barnette said that "pedophilia is a cornerstone of Islam."

She has denied posting the slur and told Fox News on Sunday that some of her inflammatory posts were aimed at starting a conversation, rather than "full thoughts."

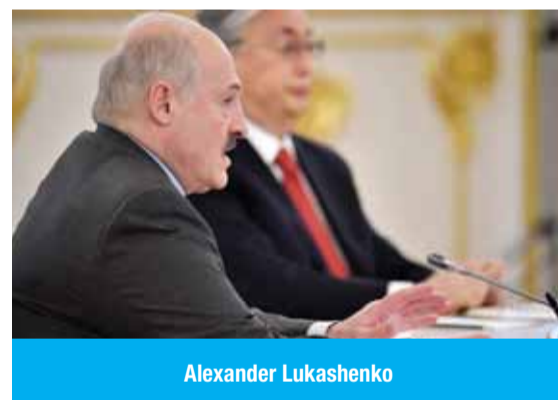
She is also facing questions over her appearance at the "Stop the Steal" rally that turned into the 2021 US Capitol riot, and spreading Trump's false claims of election fraud.

'Full recovery'

A Fox News poll released this week showed Barnette with support from 19 percent of respondents, McCormick with 20 percent and Oz with 22 percent.

The anti-abortion Barnette has seen her popularity swell among conservatives after speaking powerfully about her mother being raped at age 11 and giving birth to her at just 12.

"In the world the Left desires, I would never have been born," she tweeted earlier this month. "Frankly, things have shifted so quickly in the past 10 days that it is difficult to predict a winner." Donna Patterson, head of political science at Delaware State University, told AFP.



Alexander Lukashenko

are accused of setting a policeman's home and car on fire, and burning another policeman's car in the autumn of 2020.

Capital punishment in Belarus — carried out by shooting — is highly secret and there are no official statistics. The last known death sentence in Belarus was carried out against Victor Pavlov, who was arrested in January 2019 on suspicion of murder and larceny, according to the UN Human Rights Committee.

The committee had called for his execution to be halted while it examined his allegations of torture in detention but said in a statement in March that his family had been informed it had taken place, without any information about when he was executed. Pavlov was the 15th person executed in Belarus since 2010 while their case was still pending before the committee, it said. — AFP

Whichever Republican triumphs on Tuesday will go head-to-head against the candidate for the Democrats—who hope to wrest control of the Pennsylvania seat, and thereby cement their razor-thin control of the Senate.

Republican leaders worry Barnette will prove unable to expand her appeal beyond the party's base, costing it an eminently winnable race. Trump echoed that message last week, warning Barnette would "never be able to win the general election against the radical left Democrats."

The ex-president's support for Oz will serve as a new test of his sway over Republicans, after a clean sweep of successful endorsements in the first three state primaries but failure of a high-profile candidate in Nebraska a week ago.

The Pennsylvania primary took another turn, this time on the Democratic side, as Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman, the overwhelming favorite for the party's Senate primary, suffered a stroke on Friday. The tattooed, six-foot-nine-inch (2.05-meter) liberal said he had suffered no cognitive damage and was expected to make a "full recovery" but he remains hospitalized.

His campaign said Tuesday that he would have a pacemaker with a defibrillator implanted in what should be a "short procedure that will help protect his heart and address the underlying cause of his stroke." According to the most recent Franklin and Marshall University poll, Fetterman leads Marine veteran and moderate US congressman Conor Lamb by nearly 40 percentage points. —AFP

S Lanka honours Tamil war-dead after 13 years

COLOMBO: Thousands of Tamils killed in Sri Lanka's decades-long separatist war were commemorated on Wednesday for the first time outside the minority's heartland in the north and east of the country. Clergy from Buddhist, Hindu and Christian communities offered prayers in Colombo and lit a clay lamp for those who perished between 1972 and May 2009 when the fighting ended.

The ceremony coincided with the 13th anniversary of the ending of hostilities. "This is highly symbolic and very important for Tamils," Tamil legislator Dharmalingam Sithadthan, an MP from the northern Tamil heartland of Jaffna told AFP.

"In previous years, there were private memorials held in secret, but this public event is highly welcome." Any remembrance of Tamil war victims had been banned under Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa family which is currently under siege over the country's dire economic crisis.

The head of the separatist Tamil Tiger movement, Velupillai Prabhakaran, was shot dead by security forces on May 18, 2009, bringing a formal end to the bloody ethnic war. Current President Gotabaya Rajapaksa led the government's military campaign against the Tigers as the head of the defence ministry under his president brother Mahinda.

Mahinda stepped down as prime minister last week after weeks of protests over severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines. The government defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt last month as it ran out of dollars to finance even the most essential imports.

On Wednesday, volunteers offered porridge to passers-by as a symbol of the humble food that tens of thousands of Tamils were left with during the final stages of the war. "The kanji (porridge) was the life-saving food for Tamil people in the last stages of the war," a Hindu priest said at the ceremony. "They struggled in the midst of shelling and bombing and underwent untold suffering."

Government forces imposed an economic embargo, ordered civilians into what they called "no-fire zones" and allegedly bombarded them killing an estimated 40,000 Tamils. Successive Sri Lankan governments have denied allegations that troops committed war crimes but have refused to allow any independent investigation.

Rights activist Mari de Silva said she hoped Wednesday's commemoration would lead to ethnic reconciliation in the Sinhalese-majority nation. "I sincerely hope this is also a first step towards real reconciliation in Lanka and that we can join the call for justice and accountability," she said on Twitter. — AFP

Last-minute drama roils US primaries in new Trump test

WASHINGTON: A tattooed, hoodie-wearing frontrunner suffering an 11th-hour stroke and a far-right firebrand surging into contention: the US state of Pennsylvania votes Tuesday in a midterm primary marked by more than its share of last-minute drama.

With key races across multiple states it is the most consequential day yet of a scorched-earth primary season-and will provide the latest test of Donald Trump's continuing sway over his Republican Party.

Hopefuls in North Carolina, Oregon, Kentucky and Idaho are vying to be their party's representative in November's congressional and state ballots, but all eyes are on the Senate contest in the swing state of Pennsylvania.

For months the Republican race looked like a toss-up between hedge fund tycoon David McCormick and TV surgeon Mehmet Oz, who has former president Trump's endorsement-like a string of successful candidates in the contests to date.

But the Pennsylvania race has been rocked in the final days by a come-from-behind surge from an insurgent contender, Kathy Barnette, who has drawn practically level with her big-spending rivals.

International

Italy marks 30-year anniversary of murder of anti-mafia judge Falcone

Falcone posed a real threat to the Cosa Nostra, an organised crime group

ROME: Thirty years ago, the Sicilian mafia killed judge Giovanni Falcone with a bomb so powerful it was registered by experts monitoring volcanic tremors from Etna on the other side of the island. The explosion, which ripped through a stretch of motorway near Palermo at 5:56 pm on May 23, 1992 sent shockwaves across Italy, but also signalled the start of the mafia's decline.

Anti-mafia prosecuting magistrate Falcone, his wife, and three members of his police escort were killed. The mob used a skateboard to place a 500-kilogramme (1,100-pound) charge of TNT and ammonium nitrate in a tunnel under the motorway which linked the airport to the centre of Palermo.

Falcone, driving a white Fiat Croma, was returning from Rome for the weekend. At a look-out point on the hill above, a mobster nicknamed "The Pig" pressed the remote control button as the judge's three-car convoy passed.

The blast ripped through the asphalt, shredding bodies and metal, and flinging the lead car several hundred metres. The three policemen on board were killed instantly. Falcone, whose wife was sitting beside him, had slowed seconds before the explosion and the car slammed into a concrete guard rail.

His chauffeur, who was sitting in the

back, survived, as did the three agents in the convoy's rear. A "garden of memory" now stands on the site of the attack. Oil from olive trees that grow there is used by Sicilian churches for anointing children during baptisms and confirmations.

'Mafia massacre'

Falcone posed a real threat to the Cosa Nostra, an organised crime group



'Garden of memory'

made famous by "The Godfather" trilogy and which boasted access to the highest levels of Italian power. It was he who gathered evidence from the first mafia informants for a groundbreaking trial in which hundreds of mobsters were convicted in 1987.

And at the time of the attack, he headed the justice ministry's criminal affairs department in Rome and was working on a package of anti-mafia laws. His murder woke the nation up. The Repubblica daily attacked the

"mafia massacre" in its headline the next day, with a photo of the famous mustachioed magistrate, while thousands of people in Palermo protested in the streets.

All eyes turned to fellow anti-mafia magistrate Paolo Borsellino, Falcone's close friend and colleague, who gave an interview at the start of July saying the "extreme danger" he was in would not stop him doing his job. On July 19, just 57 days after his friend, Borsellino was also killed in a car bomb attack, along with five members of his escort. Only his driver survived.

Amid national outrage, the state threw everything it had at hunting down Cosa Nostra boss Salvatore (Totò) Riina, who was involved in dozens of murders during a reign of terror lasting over 20 years. Riina was arrested on January 15, 1993, in a car in Palermo.

The truth?

The murders of Falcone and Borsellino "in the long term turned out to be a very bad business for Cosa Nostra, whose management team was decapitated by arrests and informants' confessions", Vincenzo Ceruso, author of several books on the mafia, told AFP.

Dozens of people have been convicted for their roles in the assassinations. But Roberto di Bella, now an anti-mafia judge at the Catania juvenile



REGGIO CALABRIA, Italy: File photo shows Italian judge Roberto Di Bella poses during an interview at his office in the Juvenile Court in Reggio Calabria, Calabria, southern Italy. The anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone, his wife and his bodyguards were killed in a bombing of his vehicle on May 23, 1992. —AFP

court in Sicily, said that while "the majority of the perpetrators have been tried and convicted", there remained "a part that is still not clear".

Survivors insist there are still bits of the puzzle missing and point to Falcone's belief there could be "possible points of convergence between the leaders of Cosa Nostra and the shadowy centres of power".

"We still don't have the truth about who really ordered the murder of Giovanni Falcone, because I don't believe that ignorant people like Toto

Riina could have organised an attack as sophisticated as that in Capaci," Angelo Corbo, one of the surviving bodyguards, said in a documentary.

He said he was not alone in believing there were "men in suits and ties" among the mobsters. However, an investigation into possible "hidden orchestrators" of the Capaci attack was thrown out in 2013. "There is no evidence of the existence of external backers. There is no doubt that these are mafia acts," author Ceruso said. —AFP

Germany to strip Schroeder of official perks over Russia links

BERLIN: Germany's ruling coalition will seek Thursday to strip former chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of official privileges like chauffeurs over his obstinate refusal to break off ties with Russian energy giants. Under an application by the three parties forming the government, Schroeder will lose offices and employees paid for by taxpayers at an annual cost of around 400,000 euros (\$421,000).

"The budget committee notes that the former chancellor Schroeder no longer upholds the continuing obligations of his office," said an application due to be put before the committee Thursday.

His office "will therefore be suspended", said the document seen by AFP. Schroeder will however continue to benefit from police protection. Despite a huge national outcry, Schroeder has stubbornly refused to quit his posts with Russian energy giants Rosneft and Gazprom following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who like Schroeder is from the Social Democratic Party, has also publicly urged the former leader to give up his Russian jobs, but to no avail. Schroeder, who was Germany's chancellor from 1998 to 2005, is chairman of the board of directors of Russian oil giant Rosneft.

The 78-year-old is also due to join the supervisory board gas giant Gazprom in June. The gas group is



Gerhard Schroeder

behind the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia, which has been halted by Scholz in one of the West's first responses to the war in Ukraine.

Schroeder himself signed off on the first Nord Stream in his final weeks in office, and currently heads the pipeline's shareholders' committee. With the extraordinary application to remove Schroeder's perks, Scholz's coalition is also seeking to amend the rules on official privileges accorded automatically to former chancellors.

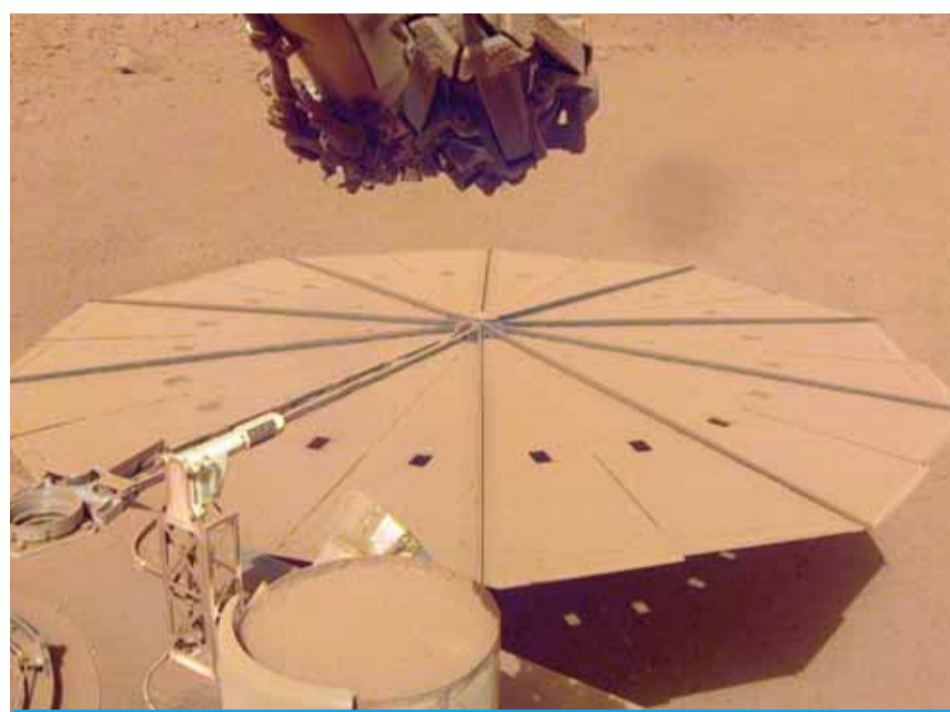
The document calls for privileges in future to be extended only to those who exercise "continuing responsibility towards their office", and no longer be granted based purely on their "status". —AFP

End of the line nears for NASA InSight Mars lander

WASHINGTON: After some four years probing Mars' interior, NASA's InSight lander will likely retire this summer as accumulated dust on its solar panels saps its power. The lander will, however, leave behind a legacy of data that will be tapped by scientists around the world for years to come, helping to improve our understanding of planet formation, NASA said, while announcing on Tuesday the imminent end to InSight's science operations.

Equipped with an ultra-sensitive seismometer, InSight recorded more than 1,300 "marsquakes," including a magnitude 5 quake on May 4, the largest so far. But around July, the seismometer will be turned off. The lander's energy level will then be checked about once a day, and some pictures may still be taken. Then by the end of 2022, the mission will be completely stopped. The cause: the accumulation over months of Martian dust on the lander's two solar panels, each measuring about seven feet (2.2 meters) wide.

InSight, which is already running on only a tenth of the energy it had at the beginning, will soon find its batteries drained. The speed at which dust accumulated corresponded more or less to what had been estimated by NASA. The lander got a new lease on life around a year ago, when its robotic arm was put to new and unplanned use to remove some dust from the solar panels, extending the mission. The maneuver-employed six times successfully—saw the arm use dust itself to clear the panels, as it scooped up some martian soil and gently



This handout photo shows an image captured by NASA's InSight Mars lander of one of its dust-covered solar panels on April 24, 2022. —AFP

dropped onto the robot so the dirt was blown across the solar panels, clearing parts of their surface.

Adding something to the lander specifically to clean the panels was forgone due to costs, explained Bruce Banerdt of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, during a press conference Tuesday. Such a mechanism would leave "less to put into the science instruments," he said.

InSight, one of four missions currently on the Red Planet—along with the US rovers Perseverance and Curiosity, and China's Zhurong—arrived on Mars in November 2018. Its seismometer, made in France, has

since paved the way for great advances.

"The interior was kind of just a giant question mark," said Banerdt, who has worked on the InSight mission for more than a decade. But thanks to InSight, "we've been able to map out the inside of Mars for the very first time in history."

Seismic waves, varying based on the materials they pass through, offer a picture of the interior of the planet. For example, scientists were able to confirm that the core of Mars is liquid and to determine the thickness of the Martian crust—less dense than previously thought and likely consisting of three layers. —AFP

Lebanon faces tense times...

Continued from Page 1

The election will be a first test of how willing Hezbollah's opponents are to challenge the Shiite tandem. The leader of the Tehran-backed movement's parliamentary group set the tone as early as Monday when he warned rivals against becoming "shields for the (Zionists)".

His words were a reply to Samir Geagea, whose Lebanese Forces have championed the case for disarming Hezbollah, and had laid down the gauntlet by vowing never to support Berri's re-election or join a unity government. The new polarization of Lebanese politics raises fears of a repeat of deadly violence that broke out in Beirut last year between Hezbollah-aligned fighters and FL supporters. The L'Orient-Le Jour daily stressed in an analysis that Hezbollah's parliament majority in recent years had enabled it "not to resort to terror to impose its decisions and preserve its red lines".

"The risk of a total stalemate is real, deadlocks are a Lebanese specialty," said Daniel Meier, a France-based researcher. In Lebanon's unique and chaotic brand of sectarian consensus politics, forming a government can take months, even when the country faces multiple emergencies. Between the two latest elections, two out of four years were spent under a caretaker government with limited powers as the country's political barons haggled

over cabinet lineups.

The latest government, led by billionaire Najib Mikati, has only been in place since Sept 2021 after a 13-month vacuum. It was billed a mostly technocratic government tasked with guiding Lebanon to recovery, but each minister was endorsed by one of Lebanon's perennial heavyweights. Whether any of the 13 MPs labelled as representing the interests of the 2019 anti-establishment uprising would consider joining a coalition government with that same establishment is doubtful.

"There is change in the balance of power but this will not translate in a program for change because despite everything Hezbollah keeps its veto power," analyst Sami Nader said. A quick fix would be to keep the Mikati government in a caretaker capacity until the presidential election.

That is the last but not the least of the major hurdles in the institutional calendar. Due by the end of the year, the new parliament's pick for a president to succeed Michel Aoun, who will be 89 by then, was further complicated by the latest election. He groomed his son-in-law Gebran Bassil for years but the electoral surge of the Lebanese Forces, the Christian rivals of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, is a spanner in the family works.

Army chief Joseph Aoun has already been tipped as an alternative but talks could drag on. "Probably we will have a long period of stalemate in the parliament," said Joseph Bahout, a professor at the American University of Beirut. He predicted a tunnel of institutional deadlocks could delay reforms requested by the International Monetary Fund for a critically needed rescue package until the spring of 2023. —AFP

Burj Khalifa engulfed by...

Continued from Page 1

"Abu Dhabi Police urges drivers to be cautious due to low visibility during high winds and dust," the police force tweeted, as residents took to social media to publish photos and videos. "Please do not be distracted by taking any videos or using your phone," it added.

A National Center for Meteorology graphic showed nearly all the country covered by the storm, with the warning: "Be on the alert: hazardous weather events are expected." Winds with speeds up to 40 km per hour are blowing the dust, it said, reducing visibility in some areas to less than 2,000m. However, a Dubai airports spokesman said there was no impact on air traffic. Weather conditions were expected to remain the same for the next few days.

In neighbouring Saudi Arabia, badly hit on Tuesday, conditions eased in the capital Riyadh on Wednesday but continued to restrict visibility in the city center. Emergency rooms in Riyadh hospitals received some 1,285 people suffering from respiratory problems over 24 hours from the sandstorm, the state-run Al-Ekhbariya channel reported late on Tuesday.

The Saudi national weather centre reported that dust was also affecting visibility in the west and south, specifically in Assir, Najran, Hael and Madinah provinces. Madinah is home to Madinah city, the second-holiest city in Islam. The center predicted another sandstorm would arrive in the kingdom by Sunday. —AFP



DUBAI: This picture taken on May 18, 2022 shows a view of the haze obscuring the skyline with a mosque in the foreground during a heavy sandstorm. —AFP

International

Sri Lankan police arrest ruling party MPs over mob violence

Wickremesinghe still in talks with potential coalition partners to finalise his cabinet

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan police arrested two ruling party lawmakers for allegedly instigating mob violence that plunged the country into days of unrest and left nine people dead last week, officials said Wednesday. The members of parliament, both from President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's party, were questioned by criminal investigators on Tuesday evening and detained overnight, a police official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.



Direct evidence against two MPs

"There is direct evidence against the two MPs and that is why they were arrested," the official said. Sanath Nishantha and Milan Jayathilake were among 22 politicians—including former prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and his son Namal—whose passports were impounded last week following allegations that they instigated violence.

On May 9, thousands of ruling party supporters who were bussed into the capital attacked a peaceful demonstration by anti-government protesters demanding President Rajapaksa resign over an economic crisis that has paralysed the country. Then-Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa—the president's elder brother—resigned shortly after the mob attack sparked retaliatory violence and arson, with more than 70 ruling party leaders' homes destroyed. More than 225 people were hospitalised from the violence, according to health officials. Police say they have arrested about 500 people in connection with the violence and retaliation.

Cabinet formation

Thousands continue to demonstrate outside the



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

president's seafont office in Colombo, demanding he resign over an economic crisis that has resulted in acute shortages of food, fuel and essential medicines.

The shortages have been accompanied by record inflation and lengthy blackouts, bringing severe hardships to Sri Lankans, who are experiencing the country's worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948. Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed as prime minister last week.

Wickremesinghe has the crucial support of two main opposition parties to form a "unity government" aimed at pulling the country out of the crisis, but had yet to form a full cabinet. Four ministers were appointed on Saturday. Official sources said Wickremesinghe was still in talks with potential coalition partners to finalise his cabinet.

The prime minister was expected to also take on the crucial finance portfolio for ongoing bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund. Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera said the energy crisis was worse than initially feared.

"We will not be able to supply petrol in the next two days and I appeal to motorists not to queue up," Wijesekera said in parliament. He said the government managed to raise 53 million dollars for a petrol tanker that was already at the Colombo port and was awaiting full payment before unloading.

"It will be Saturday or Sunday before we can distribute petrol, but we have a reserve for essential services like ambulances," Wijesekera said. The foreign exchange crisis has also led to shortages of 14 essential drugs, including anti-rabies vaccines. — AFP

Kabul brokers peace talks between Pakistani Taliban and Islamabad

KABUL: The Afghan Taliban said on Wednesday that it was hosting peace talks between Pakistan officials and a Taliban-inspired militant group that has battled Islamabad for over a decade.

Since the Afghan Taliban returned to power last year, Islamabad has increasingly complained of attacks by the Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP), especially along the mountainous border with Afghanistan. The TTP is a home-grown movement but shares common roots with the new rulers of Kabul, who Pakistan has claimed permit its fighters to stage assaults from Afghan soil.

"Talks were held in Kabul between the government of Pakistan and the Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan in the mediation of the Islamic Emirate," government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said, using the self-styled name of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, in good faith, strives for a successful negotiation process and expects both sides to be tolerant and flexible," he said on Twitter. In a statement, the group also confirmed that "negotiations are underway" under the guidance of the Afghan Taliban.

A truce previously agreed for the Islamic festival of Eid will also be extended until May 30, the statement said. A militant source told AFP that "negotiations are held in Kabul in a positive atmosphere" but that it would be "premature to draw any conclusion".

Pakistan government officials have not yet commented on the talks. The official discussions may be an indication the Taliban are trying to smooth over rocky relations with neighbouring Pakistan. The mountainous region between Afghanistan and Pakistan has long been a hive of militant activity, with the border becoming a source of friction since the Taliban reclaimed power in August.

Islamabad has made repeated claims its forces have been targeted by fighters across the international boundary. Last month, Afghan officials said a Pakistani airstrike in eastern Afghanistan killed 47 people. Pakistan did not comment on the strike but urged Kabul to secure its border to prevent militant operations.

The Afghan Taliban called the assault a "cruelty" that "is paving the way for enmity between Afghanistan and Pakistan". Last year Pakistan conducted peace negotiations with the TTP during a month-long ceasefire, but that truce eventually collapsed. — AFP



A.G. Perarivalan

Indian Supreme Court frees convict in Rajiv assassination case

NEW DELHI: India's top court on Wednesday ordered the release of a man jailed over the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, more than 30 years after he was first arrested. A bench headed by Justice L. Nageswara Rao invoked extraordinary powers to grant relief to A.G. Perarivalan, 50, who was already granted parole in March. Perarivalan was convicted for supplying batteries used in a bomb that killed Gandhi in the southern state of Tamil Nadu on May 21, 1991. The bombing was carried out by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Sri Lankan armed separatist group.

Gandhi's killing by a suicide bomber was seen as retaliation for a 1987 Indian government pact with Sri Lanka to disarm the Tamil guerrillas. India later withdrew troops deployed to the island country after losing 1,200 of them at the hands of the rebels.

Perarivalan, who was arrested in 1991 and was 19 at the time of the assassination, was first sentenced to death, but later had his punishment commuted to a life sentence. His case was mired in legal wranglings since he filed a mercy petition in 2015 between the state and the central government. Tamil Nadu's governor passed the decision on the plea to India's president, but the Supreme Court ruled that this did not have "constitutional value" and invoked special powers to order Perarivalan's release. Six others are still in jail serving life sentences in the case. Rajiv Gandhi became India's youngest-ever leader after his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was assassinated in October 1984. He ruled until losing an election five years later. — AFP

Pollution behind one in six global deaths in 2019

PARIS: Pollution caused some 9 million people to die prematurely in 2019, according to a new global report published Wednesday, with experts raising alarm over increasing deaths from breathing outside air and the "horrifying" toll of lead poisoning. Human-created waste in the air, water and soil rarely kills people immediately, but causes instead heart disease, cancer, respiratory problems, diarrhoea and other serious illnesses. The Lancet Commission on pollution and health said the impact from pollution on global health remains "much greater than that of war, terrorism, malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, drugs and alcohol".

Pollution is an "existential threat to human health and planetary health, and jeopardises the sustainability of modern societies," it added. In general, the review found, air pollution—accounting for a total of 6.7 million deaths globally in 2019 — was "entwined" with climate change because the main source of both problems is burning fossil fuels and biofuels. "If we can't manage to grow in a clean and green way, we're doing something terribly wrong," said the report's lead author Richard Fuller, of the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution, adding that chemical pollution also harms biodiversity—another major global threat.

"These things are terribly connected and strategies to deal with one have ripple effects all the way through," he said. Overall, one in six premature deaths globally—or nine million—were caused by pollution, a figure unchanged since the last assessment in 2015.

Researchers noted a reduction in mortality linked to indoor air pollution, unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation, with major improvements seen in Africa. But early deaths associated with industrialisation—outdoor air and chemical pollution—are on the rise, particularly in southern and eastern Asia.

Ambient air pollution caused some 4.5 million deaths in 2019, according to the study, published in Lancet Planetary Health, compared with 4.2 million in 2015 and just 2.9 million in 2000. Chemical pollution is also increasing, with lead poisoning alone causing 900,000 deaths. Even that, the report warned, is likely a "substantial undercount" in light of new research suggesting there is no safe level of exposure.

Harmful to children

Algeria banned lead in petrol in 2021, the last country to do so. But people continue to be exposed to the toxic substance, largely due to unregulated recycling of lead-acid batteries and e-waste. Contaminated culinary spices are also a culprit.

"The fact that lead is getting worse, mostly in poorer countries, and ramping up in terms of the number of deaths, is horrifying," said Fuller. Heart disease is the cause of almost all early deaths from exposure to lead, which hardens arteries, said Fuller. But elevated lead levels in blood—estimated to affect hundreds of millions of children—also harm brain development and are linked to serious losses of cognitive function.

The report said lead is also linked to a spike in behavioural disorders and diminished economic productivity, with global economic losses estimated at almost \$1 trillion annually. In Africa, economic losses from lead-related IQ loss are equivalent to about four percent of gross domestic product, while in Asia it amounts to two percent. Overall, excess deaths due to pollution have led to economic losses totalling \$4.6 trillion in 2019, or around six percent of global economic output, researchers said. Low- and middle-income countries are by far the most affected, with more than 90 percent of deaths in these regions.—AFP

Snooping techniques

Rebel groups in Kashmir have waged battle against Indian forces for over three decades, seeking independence or a merger with neighbouring Pakistan, which has fought two wars with India over control of the region.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, and also thousands of Indian soldiers. Only last week a member of the Hindu minority was gunned down. India has long relied on an array of surveillance techniques to avert militant activity and combat dissent against its rule.

After 1947, when Kashmir was divided between newly independent India and Pakistan, police officers went door to door to confiscate radios of households that listened to Pakistani broadcasts. Modi's government nullified the region's limited autonomy in 2019, with authorities arresting thousands and imposing the world's longest internet shutdown to forestall a local backlash.

It has also imposed a rigid security framework that has rendered public protest virtually impossible. Aakar Patel, former head of Amnesty International in India, said the CCTV order "is a worrying development". It will legitimise "a complete surveillance of their civic life, threatening their human rights to privacy, freedom of assembly, autonomy and dignity", Patel told AFP.

Not cricket

Since the 2019 changes, widely invoked administrative detention laws have effectively circumvented judicial remedies. Hundreds, including suspected protesters, dissidents and journalists, have been arrested and are languishing in Indian jails—sometimes for years and often without charge or the option to get bail.

They include three students detained for five months after cheering Pakistan in a 2021 cricket match against India. Already soldiers regularly confiscate Kashmiris' cellphones to scrutinise their activities. Arrests over social media posts criticising the government are common and police have a robust network of paid civilian informers. Residents, including journalists, are regularly summoned for "background verifications".

If someone does not show up, their relatives can be held until the person reports to the police. But snooping techniques have become more sophisticated, with security forces installing an expansive network of cameras to monitor insurgent activity.

An official document seen by AFP says this will include 1,100 cameras with facial recognition capabilities and centralised command centres for live police monitoring. Repeated requests to authorities for comment on the legality of the CCTV order to shopkeepers went unanswered.

"But the government describing it as related to Kashmir's security trumps every other consideration," one lawyer said on condition of anonymity. — AFP



SRINAGAR, India: This picture taken on May 5, 2022, shows a CCTV camera installed outside a shop at a market in Srinagar. India has ordered all private businesses in Indian-administered Kashmir to install security cameras, a move activists say is aimed at turning one of the world's most militarised places into a surveillance state. — AFP

India turning Kashmir into surveillance state

SRINAGAR, India: In Indian-administered Kashmir, shopkeepers are spending hundreds of dollars each to install security cameras mandated by authorities in a move activists say is aimed at creating a surveillance state—and outsourcing the cost. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government has struggled to quell a decades-old insurgency and strengthen its hold over the Muslim-majority region, where a large number of people do not want to be part of India.

Half a million soldiers are stationed in the portion ruled by India—the rest is controlled by Pakistan—and a 2019 security crackdown has seen unprecedented restrictions on protest and press freedoms. Already there are security cameras on almost every street in Srinagar, Kashmir's largest city, and in other towns.

But last month, local administrators instructed shopkeepers to install CCTV systems inside their premises at their own expense to enhance the police's ability to watch people's every move. The orders say the scheme will "deter criminals, (and) anti-social and anti-national elements", while outlining minimum standards for camera resolution, infrared capability and range.

Always on, the systems should record and store footage for 30 days to be produced on demand from "police and any other law enforcement agencies" without a court order. Failure to abide by the orders, which took effect in April, is punishable by a fine or a month's imprisonment.

Surveillance system dealers in Srinagar told AFP that meeting the CCTV standards would cost each of Kashmir's thousands of stores upwards of 40,000 rupees (\$524). Because of the territory's frequent power outages, shopkeepers also need to pay for battery backups to ensure uninterrupted recording.

"The specifications given in the order make it unaffordable for me at a time when business is down," Bilal Ahmed, who runs an ice cream parlour in Srinagar's main business district, told AFP. Ahmed said he was waiting to see whether others would abide before deciding what to do, but many are already installing the systems to avoid potential punishment.

"This order is wrong. But if this is what they want, then the government should pay for it," another Srinagar shopkeeper said while begrudgingly installing a camera system, speaking anonymously for fear of government reprisals.

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2022

Business

Morocco's Marrakesh 'breathing again'

Tourists back after COVID-19 shutdown



MARRAKESH: Tourists ride in a horse-drawn carriage in Jemaa el-Fnaa square in Morocco's Marrakesh. —AFP

MARRAKESH: Moroccan snake-charmer Youssef watched as long-absent tourists again thronged Marrakesh's famous Jamaa El-Fna square, ending a long pause forced by the COVID pandemic. "We're breathing again," he said. The ancient southern city, famous for its views of graceful red buildings set against palm trees and snow-capped mountains, has long drawn visitors including celebrities from Madonna to Yves Saint Laurent.

But it was particularly hard hit by a two-year collapse in tourism that saw arrivals to the North African kingdom plummet to just a third last year from 2019. For Youssef, taking a break from playing his oboe-like "ghaita" pipe before the seemingly mesmerised serpent, "it's such a pleasure to be back here after these slow, painful months". Tourism—which accounts for some seven percent of

Morocco's economy and creates hundreds of thousands of formal and informal jobs—was battered by Morocco's tight restrictions during the pandemic.

Today, Marrakesh residents see signs of hope again as tourists have returned to the UNESCO-listed old city's narrow alleys. Cafe terraces are full and foreigners browse shops and market stalls for traditional clothing, furniture and souvenirs. "We're not back to pre-pandemic levels but the situation has been improving over the past month," said salesman Abdellah Bouazri, after serving an Argentinean customer in a Boca Juniors football top.

Bouazri, 35, said the coronavirus had forced him to temporarily abandon his shop and find alternative work as a security guard. The father of two was one of many in the beleaguered industry forced to find an alternative income—including many informal workers

without contracts or social security. But he said he was optimistic about the future: "It has been hard, but today I'm delighted to be going back to my real job."

'Recovery incomplete'

Morocco this week reopened land borders with the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, two years after they were shut due to COVID and a major diplomatic row. That was the latest step in a slow recovery for the tourism sector, backed by the government which has launched a two billion dirham (190 million euro) support fund, on top of 95 million euros it released to prop up hotels.

"The recovery might be underway, but it's incomplete," said the FNII national hotels federation's chief Lahcen Zelmat. According to the tourism ministry, Morocco last year earned some 3.2 billion

euros in tourism revenue—less than half the figure for the year before the pandemic. But revenue in the first quarter was up by 80 percent on last year, according to official figures, and the finance ministry predicts a "more favorable outlook for 2022".

That was reflected in the steady flow of tourists outside the Medersa Ben Youssef, a 16th-century Quranic school in Marrakesh. "This place is magical—I'm impressed by all the detail," said Nick, a 29-year-old Londoner visiting for the first time. "Since COVID I've been missing exploring new cultures." Nearby, other visitors queued up to the Yves Saint Laurent museum, one of the city's top tourist spots. "The museum was a must," said Coco, a Chinese student living in Germany. "We consider ourselves very lucky to be able to travel again, and we're really charmed." — AFP

The 'bots' at heart of Twitter buyout row

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk's pausing of his bid to buy Twitter due to questions over "bots" has put the artificially-operated accounts at the heart of the proposed deal's latest controversy. The software is so commonplace and can be such a problem that tech giants such as Meta, Google and Twitter have teams devoted to banishing bots and cybersecurity firms sell defenses against them. Here's a closer look at bots:

Human or software?

At a basic level, "bots" are software programs that interact with online platforms, or their users, pretending to be real people, said Tamer Hassan, co-founder and chief of cybersecurity firm HUMAN. Malicious bots have become sophisticated and are among this decade's top cyber threats, said Hassan, whose firm specializes in distinguishing people from software online. The term bots at Twitter is often used to describe fake accounts, powered by some version of artificial intelligence, that can fire off posts and even react to what is posted by others, said independent analyst Rob Enderle.

Tickets and turmoil

Bots are used in more than three quarters of security and fraud incidents that happen online, from spreading socially divisive posts to snapping up hot concert tickets and hacking, Hassan told AFP. "The question is, what would you do if you could look like a million humans?" Hassan asked rhetorically. "Across all social media platforms, bots can be used to spread content to influence people's opinions, garner reactions and can even result in cybercrime."

Bots can be used on social media to widely spread false news, direct users to misinformation, steer people to specious websites and make bogus posts seem popular using shares or "likes." Bots on social media can also sucker people into financial scams, Hassan added. "Social media platforms have had bots for a long time," analyst Enderle said. "Bots have been connected to attempts to influence the US election and shape opinions about Russia's war on Ukraine."



SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter logo is seen at their headquarters in downtown San Francisco, California. Billionaire Elon Musk said his bid to buy Twitter won't proceed unless he gets proof of the number of spam accounts plaguing the platform, adding more uncertainty to his roller-coaster pursuit of the social media giant. — AFP

The deal with Twitter

Twitter makes its money from ads, and marketers pay for reaching people, not software. "Advertising to bots isn't going to have a good close rate because bots don't buy products," Enderle noted. If advertisers are paying Twitter fees based on how many people see ads, and those numbers are inflated due to bots in the online audience, they are being overcharged, Enderle added. If Twitter has way more bots than it is letting on, its revenue could plunge when those accounts are exposed and closed. Twitter chief executive Parag Agrawal has said that fewer than five percent of accounts active on any given day at Twitter are bots, but that analysis cannot be replicated externally due to the need to keep user data private.

Musk posted that the real number of bots may be four times higher and has said he would make getting rid of them a priority if he owned the platform. Twitter has rules about automated actions by accounts, including barring software from posting about hot topics, firing off spam, attempting to influence online conversations, and operating across multiple accounts. Bots are a known social media problem, and having Musk make it a sticking point this late in the acquisition process appears to likely be "a vehicle to escape the purchase or get a lower price," Enderle said. — AFP

Qatar to invest extra \$5 billion in Spain

MADRID: Qatar on Wednesday said it plans to invest an additional \$5 billion in Spain on the second day of a state visit by its Amir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad AlThani. "The volume of investments agreed upon with the Spanish side amounts to \$5 billion in various sectors," said Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman AlThani in a statement tweeted by his ministry.

Neither side gave a timetable for the investment, which amounts to some 4.75 billion euros, nor did they say which sectors would benefit. "Qatar will invest close to five billion euros in our country in the coming years," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said during a business meeting with the Qatari delegation.

"It is a gesture of confidence in the Spanish economy and Spanish businesses which will strengthen bilateral ties," he said ahead of afternoon talks with the Amir. Before the pandemic,

Qatari investment in Spain stood at 2.67 billion euros (\$2.8 billion), the Spanish government said, making it the country's 24th biggest investor. To date, Qatari funding has been notably invested in several sectors: civil aviation, construction, energy and communications.

According to a Spanish government source, the two sides will on Wednesday sign around a dozen commercial contracts, notably concerning energy as Madrid seeks to diversify its gas supplies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Qatar, one of the world's three biggest exporters of liquefied natural gas (LNG), is currently Spain's fifth-largest supplier after the United States, Algeria, Nigeria and Egypt. The country accounted for 4.4 percent of Spain's total gas imports in April and the Spanish government hopes to increase this share.

European states are increasingly looking to other sources of natural gas as they try to wean themselves off dependence on Russia, with LNG easily shipped by boat from countries such as Qatar and the United States. After Madrid, the Qatari leader will continue his tour of Europe, visiting Germany, Britain, Slovenia and Switzerland, where he will attend the World Economic Forum in the mountain resort of Davos which runs from May 22-26. Qatar will host the World Cup later this year. — AFP



MADRID: (From left) Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares and Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez pose for pictures after signing commercial contracts at La Moncloa Palace in Madrid, on May 18, 2022. — AFP

Business

Pakistan, IMF discuss release of funds as economy falters

Economy hit by crippling debt, galloping inflation, plummeting rupee

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund began talks with Pakistani officials on Wednesday over the release of crucial funds, a process slowed by concerns about the pace of economic reforms in the South Asian country. Pakistan has repeatedly sought international support for its economy, which has been hit by crippling national debt, galloping inflation and a plummeting rupee. The talks will be held in the Qatari capital Doha, Pakistan's finance ministry said, and are expected to continue into next week. A major sticking point is likely to be over costly subsidies—notably for fuel and electricity—and Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said he wants the two sides to “find a middle ground”. “The government will try to convince the IMF that for political stability purposes it is important to keep at least some of the subsidies,” said economist Shahrukh Wani. “The IMF will possibly, rightly, say that these are unsustainable and they should be rolled back to make the trade and budget deficit manageable,” he added.

A six billion dollar IMF bailout package signed by former prime minister Imran Khan in 2019 has never been fully implemented because his government reneged on agreements to cut or end some subsidies and to improve revenue and tax collection. Islamabad has so far received \$3 billion, with the program due to end later this year. Officials are seeking an extension to the program through to June 2023, as well as the release of the next tranche of \$1 billion.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who took power with a coalition that removed Khan in a no-confidence vote last month, has vowed to jumpstart the moribund economy, but analysts say his fragile government has failed to take tough decisions. “It's an administration that has refused to take hard political steps to bring eventual economic relief—but that's exactly the sacrifice it must make by going to the IMF,” said Michael Kugelmann, deputy South Asia director at the Wilson Center in Washington.—AFP



RAWALPINDI: A worker pulls a handcart loaded with air coolers at a market during a hot summer day in Rawalpindi.— AFP



Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt honoring Al-Majed in the presence of an elite group of Kuwaiti and Arab bankers.

Union of Arab Banks names Boubyan Bank's Al-Majed 'Arab Banker of the Year'

KUWAIT: The Union of Arab Banks has named Adel Al-Majed, Vice-Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer of Boubyan Bank Group, “Arab Banker of the Year 2021”, making him the first Kuwaiti banker ever to receive the highest recognition given by the Union for excellent achievers in the Arab financial and banking business. Al-Majed was honored during the official opening ceremony of the Arab Banking Conference held in Cairo under the auspices of HE Tarek Amer, Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, and in his presence along with many Arab leaders and bankers.

The Board of Directors of the Union of Arab Banks has unanimously approved to honor Al-Majed in recognition of his career that contributed to the growth of the banking industry in Kuwait and the region over the past 4 decades that he dedicated to the banking industry while working for the National Bank of Kuwait, after which he moved to Boubyan Bank in 2009 to start a new journey full of achievements.

In his speech, Al-Majed thanked the Union of Arab Banks for honoring him, while stressing that all his achievements over his banking career extending over 40 years were attributed to the Grace of Almighty Allah, and then to all those who worked with who were like family to him across all the departments and divisions where he served leading to where he is now.

“Over a few years, we managed to achieve double digit growth every year across many important financial metrics. By 2020, Boubyan had the second-highest number of Kuwaiti customers and had gone from the smallest Bank in Kuwait to a solid number three. Boubyan became a formidable force to contend with in Kuwait's banking sector,” Al-Majed highlighted.

Al-Majed went on describing such achievements: “After 12 years of transformation, Boubyan Bank's Group now has 3 banks: Boubyan, BLME and NOMO digital bank, in addition to a Takaful insurance company, an investment company, and a services company.”

“Reaching to where we were in 2021 specifically was not easy; however, we can summarize the reasons behind our success in some points, the most important of which are setting up a clear strategy, assembling an experienced executive team, returning to the basics of banking business, focusing on customer service, investing in digital banking services, investing in our human resources, and focusing on national cadres.”

A 40-year banking career

Al-Majed is a role model for Kuwaiti banking leaders who joined this industry in the 70s of the previous century, with their ambitions to establish themselves by joining a then-new industry for the Kuwaiti youths, which was not attractive for many reasons related to the difficult nature of the banking business.

It all started with the return of Al-Majed from the Faculty of Commerce, Alexandria University, with a bachelor's degree to join NBK, where he spent most of his banking journey. He then came up through the ranks until he assumed the position of the Deputy CEO of the bank before joining Boubyan Bank in August 2009.

Throughout his tenure with NBK, Al-Majed gained diverse expertise in consumer banking, business banking, regional banking services, private banking, core banking operations, IT, branch services, digital banking services, and the introduction of online banking services for the first time in the Middle East in addition to being involved in administrative and corporate governance affairs.

A cup of coffee with CEO

We could possibly say that over 10 years, specifically before the COVID, Adel Al-Majed, the CEO, met every employee personally through a bank tradition called “A Cup of Coffee with the CEO”, where Al-Majed meets every other week with ten employees from various departments and grades, who are selected by HR as per an agreed mechanism.

During these meetings, which extend for more than an hour, Al-Majed gets to know the bank employees, listens to their transparent opinions and gives them the chance to express themselves freely while listening to their ideas. Such meetings succeeded in creating friendly airs inside the bank and the bank benefitted from some opinions discussed in these meetings.

Adel Al-Majed maintains excellent relationships with various media platforms ever since his days with NBK. It is very much to his credit that he has excellent relationships with all journalists and he has been communicating with them all the time without any traditional barriers such as media offices, secretaries, etc.

Moreover, Al-Majed is credited for being the first CEO in Kuwait, and one of the very few CEOs in the region, to have various social media accounts. This is not an easy thing, especially in Kuwait, which enjoys the highest levels of freedom of expression allowing people to express their opinions freely over these platforms.



Arab Banker of the Year award

Al-Majed receives many daily inquiries through these accounts, especially Twitter, in addition to messages bearing constructive criticism of the bank's services, which he accepts with an open mind without any objection out of his keenness on knowing the opinions of the bank's customers and non-customers regarding the services and products offered to them.

Key financial indicators

All the bank's key financial indicators demonstrate the results of the efforts exerted by Al-Majed and his team, which started showing early by the end of 2010. Less than two in years into the turnaround, the bank's financing portfolio had shifted, and it grew by over 73 percent, from \$1.6 billion in 2008 to \$2.7 billion in 2010.

From 2010 to 2021, the retail financing portfolio - that accounted for a modest percentage in 2008's financing portfolio - represented 42 percent of the financing portfolio at \$7.9 billion in 2021 (a 3-fold increase over seven years at a compounded annual growth rate of 17%). Corporate financing more than doubled between 2008 and 2021 to \$10.8 billion.

The composition of the financing portfolio shifted, too. Financial institutions (excluding banks) represented less than 4 percent of the total portfolio in 2015, down from 46 percent in 2008. The bank turned profitable in 2010, with a net profit of \$20 million, from a net loss of \$171 million the previous year. Between 2010 and 2021, net profit grew at a compounded annual rate of 21 percent, reaching \$106 million in 2021.

The bank's assets reached \$24 billion in 2021, up from \$4.4 billion in 2010, a compounded annual growth rate of 17 percent. Non-performing loans remained low at 1 percent of total loans impaired in 2021. From a market share perspective, Boubyan struck gold with young Kuwaitis. By 2021, the bank counted nearly 50 percent of young Kuwaitis among its customers. The results of the focus on service paid off as the bank consistently received the highest level of customer satisfaction across banks in the country, and was named the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for 12 years.

International expansion

Over the past years, Boubyan succeeded in completing the acquisition of the Bank of London and the Middle East, where Boubyan's current holding stands at 71% approximately, and then Boubyan Bank announced the full launch of Nomo Bank in Kuwait and UK as the first Islamic digital bank from London which can offer its services to Boubyan Bank's customers and non-customers. Through this acquisition, the bank aspires to become the Islamic bank of choice for GCC customers in the United Kingdom as we have incorporated a set of main principles for the bank as a part of its transformation strategy following the acquisition, including having a sustainable customer-focused brand aligned with Boubyan Bank's Group.

French experts shed light on impact of Ukraine war

KUWAIT: Reconnaissance Research on Tuesday hosted a closed symposium attended by French experts about the impacts of the Ukraine war on Kuwait and the region, in presence of HE French Ambassador in Kuwait Claire Le Flecher and a number of representatives of the French diplomatic mission. The symposium focused on visions and ideas presented by two key speakers: Dr. Pierre Razoux, Dr. Jean Baptiste. Both of them have long experience in the fields of security, defense and international relations.

The conferees discussed the effects of global changes, triggered by the Russian war on Ukraine, on the Iranian nuclear deal. The speakers pointed out that Iran would become a nuclear country by 2025, and that any future deal wouldn't work out, considering that it is necessary to get ready to deal with a “nuclear Iran” even if this fact doesn't appeal to the region's countries. The symposium stressed that there is European willingness to support Ukraine as much as possible, as Russian President Vladimir Putin bets on Europe's impatience with the war effects due to its growing energy needs, especially during the coming winter.

The speakers said that if the war doesn't come to an end before winter, some European countries may change their mind, given pressing energy needs. Still, their stance wouldn't matter so much nor would it reverse the equation in favor of the Russian side, regarded by the speakers as the loser so far due to failure to achieve its ends as scheduled. The symposium considered that China, Turkey and India are key beneficiaries of the war since they have had unprecedented export opportunities, especially following Russia's decision to suspend its exports of military supplies, spare parts and other strategic goods.

The speakers noted that the need to have food, water and energy security has now become the core issue for all countries, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and then the Russian war on Ukraine. Addressing the symposium, French Ambassador Claire Le Flecher said: “It is important for us to collaborate with independent think-tanks such as Reconnaissance Research to talk about many pressing issues, and

Ukraine in this context is an important topic.”

She also drew a comparison between the relevance of such discussions regarding Kuwait's past with the Iraqi invasion. Support was given to Kuwait at that time, it needs to be given to Ukraine today. On his part, Dr. Pierre Razoux, the Academic and Research Director of the FMES Institute, said: “This war has far more impacts than many people realize.” He also talked about the impact of the EU's management of the Ukrainian crisis, creating challenges or burdens for China regarding its links with many states, especially GCC.



Dr. Jean Baptiste Jeangene-Vilmer, director of the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) at the French Ministry for the Armed Forces, said: “I strongly believe that the EU has both the will and ability to sustain its support for Ukraine even during the coming winter, when there will be more demand for energy.” He also spoke about how the EU gathered together in unity to face this war and show its power of cohesion.

Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri said: “To have two prestigious French institutions (FMES) and (IRSEM) select Reconnaissance Research as a starting point for their inaugural activities in Kuwait, is a true honor.” He added: “the significance of this symposium stems from its main issue: the Russian war on Ukraine. And despite Europe being the hardest hit by this war, it is a global crisis, and no country seems to be far from being affected by its impacts.”

Participants pointed out that Russia is a superpower that has strong presence in the region and enjoys strategic relations with many countries here. The discussion listed the main impacts of this war as the surge in oil prices and disruption of international supply chains, underlining that it's necessary to weigh all these dimensions with key research, academic and scientific experts only to get familiar with future scenarios and possible reflections on Kuwait and the region in general.



HE French Ambassador Kuwait Claire Le Flecher



Dr. Jean Baptiste and Dr. Pierre Razoux

IndiGo taps KLM boss as first foreign CEO

MUMBAI: Indian airline IndiGo said on Wednesday it has appointed Dutch flag carrier KLM's Pieter Elbers as its first foreign chief executive. Elbers, 52, has served as President and CEO at KLM since 2014, guiding it through the Covid-19 pandemic and overseeing multiple restructuring efforts at the Dutch arm of Air France-KLM. Low-cost carrier IndiGo is India's biggest airline for internal flights. Air India, which this month also appointed its first foreign chief executive in Campbell Wilson, carries more passengers overall with more foreign flights. The country of 1.4 billion people was the world's fastest-growing air passenger market before the pandemic and is set to be the world's third-largest aviation market by 2024.

“What IndiGo's employees and leadership have jointly built, since its start 16 years ago, is, by any standard, truly impressive,” Elbers said in a statement. The Dutch national was due to step down from his post at KLM in May 2023, but IndiGo said Elbers will take over on October 1, pending shareholder and regulatory approvals. Elbers will succeed Ronojoy Dutta as chief executive officer of IndiGo when the 71-year-old retires later this year. “India promises to be the last bastion of ginormous growth globally and given Mr. Elbers' deep understanding of the business... IndiGo will play a pivotal role in this growth opportunity,” billionaire owner Rahul Bhatia said.—AFP

Microsoft moves to avert EU antitrust clash over cloud

BRUSSELS: Microsoft on Wednesday said it was loosening its licensing requirements with cloud companies as it seeks to fight off regulators after growing complaints of monopolistic practices. The tech titan is trying to avoid a replay of its epic battles against EU and US antitrust enforcers in the late 1990s that ended in major court cases and big fines.

At the heart of the controversy is a 2019 decision that made it more expensive for cloud companies to access Microsoft's Office 365 when they were running through data centres operated by rivals, such as Amazon or Alibaba. European cloud companies complained to the European commission, the EU's antitrust regulator, accusing Microsoft of limiting customer choice. They also said the user experience was made worse and that there are incompatibilities with certain other Microsoft products when not running on Azure, the company's own data operating system. “We're just changing the licensing terms so that at their heart, cloud providers that are based in Europe can run Microsoft software pretty much the same way Microsoft can,” company president Brad Smith told reporters in Brussels.—AFP

Business

Japan's economy shrinks slightly as COVID wave hit

Japan battling a series of economic headwinds

TOKYO: Japan's economy shrank slightly in the first quarter of 2022, official data showed Wednesday, hit by COVID-19 restrictions and higher prices. The world's third-largest economy shrank 0.2 percent quarter-on-quarter in the January-March period, slightly less than the market expectations of a 0.4 percent contraction.

It followed a modest rebound in the final three months of 2021 that proved short-lived after Japan put COVID restrictions in place as an outbreak fuelled by the Omicron coronavirus variant took hold in January. Growth was also hit by the rising cost of imports with energy prices surging and the yen falling to its lowest level against the dollar in 20 years.

Economists expect the economy to recover again in the April-June quarter now that virus restrictions have been lifted, but caution there are some caveats. "We see three headwinds to this expected recovery," said UBS economists Masamichi Adachi and Go Kurihara in a note ahead of the GDP data release. "First is a rise in food and energy prices. Second is a drag from the lockdown in China," and third is the risk of a potential resurgence in virus infections, they said.

Others point to ongoing uncertainties linked to "tensions in international relations and military conflicts", according to a survey among economists conducted by the Japan Center for Economic Research. During the current earnings season, major Japanese firms such as Sony and Nissan have offered cautious forecasts because of the uncertainty, particularly over supply chain disruption and the effect of COVID lockdowns in

China. Wednesday's data showed the economy's rebound in the last quarter of 2021 was 0.9 percent, slightly weaker than an initial estimate of 1.1 percent growth.

Rising prices

Japan is battling a series of economic headwinds linked to the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has sent energy costs soaring. The yen has also slumped against the dollar, with a widening gap between Japan's ultra-loose monetary policy and tightening in the United States as the Federal Reserve attempts to combat inflation. Rising energy prices and other hikes are squeezing Japanese consumers and businesses, with household spending dipping 2.3 percent in March from a year earlier.

Analysts have warned that the pace of nominal wage increases in Japan is unlikely to track rising prices, dampening spending appetites. Last month, the government unveiled a 6.2 trillion yen (around \$48 billion) economic package that included handouts for low-income families to help cushion the impact of rising prices and energy costs. Looking ahead, "net trade will boost growth over the coming months as supply shortages ease and the weak yen boosts exports and softens demand for imports," Tom Learmouth, Capital Economics economist, said in a note.

"With coronavirus cases continuing to fall and nearly 60 percent of the population triple-jabbed, another round of restrictions looks unlikely for now." "However, we expect GDP growth to disap-



TOKYO: Employees cheer for their colleagues as they compete in a tug of war event among companies in the Marunouchi, Otemachi and Yurakucho area in Tokyo. —AFP

point across 2022 due to the hit to household income from higher inflation and signs that elderly consumers remain wary of catching the virus," he added. Japan has seen a smaller COVID outbreak

than many countries, although cases surged because of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. The country has recorded around 30,050 deaths despite avoiding harsh lockdowns. —AFP

Sony brings zero-carbon goal forward

TOKYO: Japanese giant Sony brought forward its deadline for reaching carbon neutrality by a decade on Wednesday, saying it is now targeting net-zero emissions across its business by 2040. The electronics and entertainment firm said the decision was taken "as climate change risks become more apparent and serious worldwide, and the transition to a decarbonised society has become an urgent issue". Climate campaigners praised the move, but raised doubts over an element of how Sony aims to reach the goal-investing in new technology that removes carbon from the atmosphere or converts it into a less harmful compound.

Sony said it wants its own factories to be carbon neutral by 2030, also a decade earlier than its previous goal, and plans to reach that by increasing use of renewable power and energy-saving. Eliminating emissions from areas "such as products, supply chains, and logistics", however, is to be achieved in part by investing in start-ups focused on carbon removal and projects that encourage carbon absorption with so-called augmented ecosystems.

But that technology remains unproven, said Eri Watanabe, senior finance campaigner at Japanese climate group 350.org. Sony's announcement "is a positive signal that the company is serious about tackling climate change", but these removal methods are "unproven, and (it is) uncertain if it can contribute to the decarbonisation pathway", she said. She said Sony could influence other Japanese firms to upgrade their climate targets but urged the company not to rely "on unproven technologies to reduce its emissions."

UN climate experts say humanity has fewer than three years to halt the rise of planet-warming carbon emissions, and less than a decade to slash them by nearly half to have a shot at capping global warming at a target 1.5 degrees Celsius. Japan, which is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels, aims to become carbon neutral by 2050. The country is the world's sixth-biggest carbon emitter if the EU is counted as one bloc, according to European Commission data. —AFP

China urges urgent boost to economy

BEIJING: China's premier called for greater "urgency" in rolling out measures to support the virus-battered economy, state media reported Wednesday, days after data highlighted the stark impact of COVID-19 restrictions. China - the last major global economy sticking to a rigid zero-COVID policy - is battling an economic slump due to prolonged virus lockdowns that have constricted supply chains, quelled demand and stalled manufacturing.

Gulf Bank set for MSCI World Index inclusion: Bloomberg

KUWAIT: Amid Gulf Bank's upcoming addition to the MSCI World Index, the Bank's CEO, Tony Daher, recently discussed the Bank's latest achievement with Bloomberg. Daher noted that Gulf Bank's upcoming inclusion to the MSCI World Index is both a testament to, and continuation of, the country's national success. "As it turns out, Gulf Bank is no stranger to the MSCI World Index, having been a part of the index when Kuwait was added in November 2020," noted Daher. "We are very pleased to be back on the index."

Foreign investor engagement

When asked about its standing with foreign investors, Daher noted that the Bank currently has a market cap of about 4 billion U.S. dollars, and a foreign ownership of about 13% and (or the equivalent of roughly 500 million U.S. dollars). Amid a backdrop of excellent relationships with foreign investors and coverage from ARQAAM Capital and EFG Hermes, Gulf Bank is maintaining a positive outlook for the stock, with expected foreign investment inflow reaching USD 100m to 150m. "We are already engaged with foreign investors and we expect more inflow into the stock with the index upgrade," said Daher.

A positive outlook

When asked about how the recent MSCI World Index upgrade is set to influence Gulf Bank's outlook for profitability amid an uncertain global monetary policy backdrop, Daher noted that Gulf Bank is maintaining a positive outlook.

"In Kuwait, we have two forces coming together at the same time: on the one hand, we have a rising interest



Gulf Bank CEO Tony Daher

rate and we are fairly early into the cycle which the local banking sector will benefit from. At the same time, we do have high oil prices which are good for the Kuwaiti economy and the local banking sector in general," said Daher. "While we understand the difficulty in the global markets, we do hold a somewhat positive outlook here in Kuwait for the rest of the year." Daher also noted that current oil prices have given way to surpluses in the government budget, resulting in a fairly positive outlook for future project spending in Kuwait.

He continued: "Over time we expect that surplus to go into project spending. We are the second largest conventional bank in Kuwait, and we expect to participate in that project spending as it comes to fruition, so the balance is fairly positive for project spending here in Kuwait going forward." Daher indicated that the rise in oil prices above the level of \$100 per barrel, in light of the budget price of about \$75 per barrel, is likely to get the country out of the deficit phase and return to achieving surpluses again, which reinforces the optimistic view regarding the increase in investment spending on infrastructure projects.

Siemens Energy to delist troubled Spanish subsidiary

FRANKFURT: Siemens Energy is considering making a takeover bid for its troubled wind power subsidiary Siemens Gamesa with a view to delisting the Spanish-German company, it said on Wednesday. The management of Munich-based Siemens Energy is "considering a cash tender offer for all outstanding shares in

"All localities and departments should step up their sense of urgency, and new measures that can be used should be used," Li Keqiang said at a symposium on Wednesday, according to state broadcaster CCTV. He added that efforts to support the economy should bring it "back to normal quickly" after admitting that indicators have "weakened significantly" since March, with a particular dip in April.

On Monday, data showed retail sales and factory output last month had slumped the most since the start of the pandemic, while unemployment edged back toward its February 2020 peak. Beijing's unrelenting approach to Covid-19 outbreaks has snarled supply chains and locked down tens of millions of people, hitting major financial, industrial and tourist hubs. The

country's borders also remain closed to most foreign travelers and a slew of international sports events have been scrapped over pandemic concerns.

China has targeted full-year growth of around 5.5 percent, but data published in April showed that first-quarter growth slowed to 4.8 percent after the world's second-biggest economy lost steam in the latter half of last year. And the economic targets have a political dimension for Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who is eyeing another term in power. Xi has pinned his legacy to China's strong economic growth and winning the "battle" against COVID. But the current outbreak is the country's worst since the virus emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, and the economy is beginning to weaken. —AFP



GULF BANK SET FOR MSCI INCLUSION

Investment government spending

As for how Gulf Bank is planning to invest growth to international investors, Daher emphasized Gulf Bank's local touch, as well as its minimal exposure to the variable regional economy. "Gulf Bank is a local bank, so we are quite exposed to the local economy and we have very little exposure to the regional economy. When you look at our balance sheet, less than 10% is exposed to the GCC," said Daher. "We are mainly a Kuwaiti bank, so when foreign investors invest in our stock, they are investing in pure local play."

Product diversification

Although Gulf Bank is primarily a local bank, Daher emphasized that diversification remains a major unique proposition of the Bank. "Although diversification (in terms of geography) is very limited, diversification (in terms of product) is fairly well-renowned here in Kuwait. We participate in all aspects of the economy - across both retail and corporate - and currently, the output is fairly positive across the board."

Local market fairly well-balanced

Amid a global trend of banking consolidations, Daher also noted that

the local market is fairly well-balanced, with no plans of local bank consolidations in the near future. Daher said, "Kuwait currently has 10 banks: five Islamic banks and five conventional banks. However, the market is fairly well balanced, and it is not really 'overbalanced'."

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.

Siemens Energy rose nearly four percent in Frankfurt Wednesday, whose products include gas turbines, steam turbines and generators as well as wind turbines, has been dragged down lately by the poor financial performance of Siemens Gamesa.

The group revised down its overall forecasts for 2022 in April after its Spanish subsidiary reported a heavy first-quarter loss due to rising costs and a lack of competitiveness. Integrating Siemens Gamesa could help Siemens Energy compete better with rivals such as Denmark's Vestas, simplify its financial reporting and improve internal synergies. Siemens Energy will hold an investor day in Berlin next Tuesday which may provide more details on the project. —AFP



SHANGHAI: A worker wearing personal gear walks on a street during a COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown in Shanghai on May 18, 2022. —AFP

Business

Debt-laden Air France-KLM inks deal with cargo giant CMA CGM

CMA CGM profits soar during pandemic

PARIS: Air France-KLM said Wednesday that it had signed a freight alliance with shipping giant CMA CGM, which will take a minority stake in the cash-strapped airline as it emerges from COVID losses. CMA CGM, based in the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, has seen its profits soar during the pandemic as lockdowns wreaked havoc on global supply chains, prompting it to launch its own air freight service last year.

It recorded earnings of \$17.9 billion last year

thanks to high freight rates while Air France-KLM has racked up losses of 11 billion euros (\$11.6 billion) over the past two years. The airline has some 7.7 billion euros of debt despite massive bailouts by the French and Dutch governments, which own minority stakes in the former flag carriers that merged in 2004.

Financial details were not disclosed but CMA CGM said it would take up to nine percent of Air France-KLM's stock, possibly at an upcoming capital

increase round aiming to raise up to four billion euros. "This partnership is fully in line with CMA CGM's strategy and its ambition to become a leader in integrated logistics," its chief executive Rodolphe Saade said in a statement. Together the companies will operate 10 freight aircraft and a further 12 are on order, and Air France-KLM also provides cargo shipping as part of its regular passenger flights.

Freight revenues jumped 40 percent at the airline last year to reach 3.6 billion euros, outstripping the

recovery for its passenger business, which generated sales of 8.7 billion euros-though it still posted a net loss of 3.3 billion euros. Air France-KLM chief Benjamin Smith called it a "landmark" deal for stepping up its cargo operations. "I am also extremely pleased that this commercial partnership with CMA CGM has resulted in their decision to invest directly in the Air France-KLM group, demonstrating a strong testimony of their belief in the future success of our group," he said.— AFP

ABK Kuwait-Egypt records solid profit of EGP 551 million

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait-Egypt (ABK-Egypt), one of Egypt's fastest growing banks, announced very positive results for the first quarter of 2022, with a Net Profit of EGP 551 million, which reflects the immense growth in the volume of business carried out by the Bank since entering the Egyptian market. According to the Bank's announced results for the first three-month period ended 31 March 2022, ABK-Egypt's Net Interest Income increased by 23%, reaching EGP 603 million compared to EGP 490 million over the same period in 2021.

Net Operating Profit increased by 33%, amounting to EGP 478 million, compared to EGP 360 million over the same period in 2021. Profit before tax stood strong at EGP 698 million. The Bank's Total Gross Loans Portfolio increased by 10%, reaching EGP 30 billion, compared to EGP 27.4 billion at the end of 2021. Total Customer Deposits witnessed an increase of 7% to reach EGP 51 billion, compared to EGP 48 billion, and Total Assets also increased by 7% to reach EGP 61 billion compared to EGP 57 billion in December 2021.

ABK-Egypt has succeeded in doubling its market share since the completion of the acquisition in 2016, which is clearly evident in the positive financial results that the Bank continuously achieves. These results reflect the Bank's exceptional performance over the past period to achieve sustainable growth. This represents clear evidence of ABK-Egypt's strong growth strategy in the Egyptian market that is based on prudent management methods and ambitious aspirations on both local and regional levels.

Commenting on the results, Ali Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt, said, "ABK-Egypt's strategy is based on sustainable and balanced growth in the Egyptian market, where we are relentlessly working to maintain by strengthening and developing our banking services and the efficiency of our staff to ensure we provide our customers with a distinctive banking experience."

Marafi also expressed his appreciation for all endeavors taken by the Egyptian Government and the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) as well as their constant keenness to provide guidance with all means of sup-



Ali Marafi

Khaled El Salawy

port, adding, "Our Board of Directors, Shareholders, Executive Management, and clients' trust and loyalty, together with our employees' diligence and devotion, were the reason behind our success."

Khaled El Salawy, CEO and Managing Director of ABK-Egypt, stated: "The Egyptian banking sector is witnessing continuous developments that require us to exert more effort, which every member of ABK-Egypt's family succeeds in delivering in line with an integrated strategy that we developed in 2020. Certainly, the world is going through a difficult period in which the economic burdens are growing dramatically, and without our full readiness at all levels, we would not have been able to maintain our growth rates in profits and expand our market share during these challenging circumstances."

"Our positive results during the first quarter of this year confirm the effective role played by the Bank in supporting the Egyptian economy through a strategy based on achieving strong growth rates on all financial indicators, which contributes to strengthening our position as one of the leading banks in Egypt", added El Salawy.

El Salawy concluded, "In 2022, we look forward to expanding our presence in the market through intensifying our focus on service excellence, exploring new customer segments, offering innovative products that cater to our clients' needs, in addition to investing in ABK-Egypt's technology infrastructure, in the hope of conforming to the national goal of digital transformation."

This continuous success achieved by Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait-Egypt is based on offering a wide variety of products and services that are specifically designed to meet the growing needs of its customers. In 2022, the Bank will continue its commitment to promoting financial inclusion, availing financial products and services to all segments of society, whilst continuing to focus on supporting the SME sector, given the importance of this vital sector in the growth of the local economy.

stride and remain resilient," said Jack Kleinhenz, chief economist of the National Retail Federation.

But prices continue to rise, and the cost of gas at the pump hit a record in May as the war in Ukraine pushes oil prices higher. "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 at Oxford Economics. The Fed has gone to battle to try to cool price pressures, announcing earlier this month the biggest interest rate increase since 2000.

Powell said reducing inflation is critical, which means bringing down red-hot demand more in line with supply, and additional sharp rate hikes are "on the table" in June and July. "What we need is to see... growth moving down from the very high levels that we saw last year, moving down to a level that's still positive," Powell said at an event with The Wall Street Journal. And if that doesn't happen, "then we'll have to consider moving more aggressively," he said.

Labor, fuel costs rise

Walmart executives pointed to a series of cost hits that converged in the quarter ending April 30, as the retail giant reported a 25 percent drop in profits to \$2.1 billion - \$1.30 a share, below the \$1.48 expected by analysts-as 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. The company cited higher labor costs and 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.

Walmart US President John Furner said the company is seeing a "wide range" of responses from shoppers to the rise in prices. While there is continued strong demand for pricey items such as game consoles and outdoor grills, he said some consumers are moving away from brand names in favor of Walmart's own branded goods, which are lower-priced. "We need to do more to control costs, to make sure we can provide good value for our customers," Furner said on an earnings conference call.

Investing in homes

In contrast, Home Depot raised its outlook after reporting that first-quarter profits rose two percent to \$4.2 billion on a four percent increase in revenues, as executives with the home-improvement chain said consumers appeared to take higher prices in stride. The spending has been propelled by a strong trend toward increased investment as homes increase in value, according to Chief Financial Officer Richard McPhail. Walmart shares plunged 11.4 percent, while fellow Dow member Home Depot rose 1.7 percent. — AFP

HUAWEI P50 and HUAWEI P50 Pro: Exquisite design, superfast charging

KUWAIT: Huawei is regarded as one of the most prominent and prolific players in the smartphone industry for its expertise in research and development that usually results in the latest technology and products. Consumers choose Huawei devices because of their continued innovations that solve user pain points and the commitment to bring the most revolutionary products to the market.

In 2022, the R&D expenditure of the company was 22.4% of the total revenue with and had 107,000 R&D employees comprising 54.8% of the total workforce. The company has one of the largest patent portfolios in the world. Huawei's flagship smartphones demonstrate the company's mastery at bringing the most advanced features to smartphones in terms of cameras, design, and performance. Among Huawei's smartphones, the HUAWEI P-Series, which in 2021 achieved a total shipment of 100-million-unit mark, is known for having outstanding camera features and exquisite designs.

To create a classic means going beyond the past to reach new heights. Each generation of the HUAWEI P Series has been the perfect blend of smart photography, aesthetics and technology. The HUAWEI P Series has always maintained a commitment to quality, style and photography, with each product representing the peak of mobile imagery innovation at the time and earning a place as a true classic in smartphone photography.

HUAWEI P50

The HUAWEI P50 Series embodies Huawei's own brand of imaging technology, featuring an innovative Dual-Matrix Camera Design that includes a powerful main camera matrix and zoom camera matrix. The line-up is also the first in the industry to support HUAWEI XD Optics, which allow it to go beyond the limits of physics. Computational photography is also improved, empowering the camera system to deliver true-to-life colors and supporting super high definition and dynamic range capture, as well as a more powerful Ultra Snapshot functionality.

The Dual Matrix camera system of P50 Series balances both form and function. The HUAWEI P50 Pro employs computational photography technologies, such as the HUAWEI XD Optics and HUAWEI XD Fusion Pro image engines that transcend physical limitations. The XD Fusion Pro Engine includes a True-Chroma Image Engine, new Super Color Filter System and super HDR, enabling the phone to deliver more realistic colors, ultra-clear image quality and high dynamic range.

The image processing capabilities added to the optical imaging system can correct the optical differentials and restore the details in images by up to 25 per cent. Hardware is integrated with HUAWEI XD Optics in the HUAWEI P50 resulting in high-resolution images that are brighter and clearer with more details.

The HUAWEI P Series has always held true to a premium, simple and elegant design. With the HUAWEI P50, Huawei has even taken one-step further with the



HUAWEI P50
Legend Reborn

Dual-Matrix camera design. This design perfectly balances the smartphone's functionality with a uniquely stunning visual aesthetic demonstrating the power of a multi-camera system and giving the phone a distinctive visual identity.

The HUAWEI P50 Pro features an expansive 6.6-inch True-Chroma Display with a 3D curved screen and a small single punch hole camera on the top that supports the full P3 colour gamut and HDR. The display has a refresh rate of 120Hz to provide a smooth user experience for the consumers. Meanwhile, the HUAWEI P50 features a large 6.5-inch True-Chroma Display that supports 1.07 billion colors allowing it to produce colors with accuracy comparable to professional reference displays.

Both handsets are IP68 certified for dust and water resistance, and they both sport dual stereo speakers for an immersive audio experience. As everyday reliance on smartphones increases, customers search for phones with high battery capacity and fast charging speeds. The HUAWEI P50 Pro meets both these demands. The phone boasts a 4,360mAh battery and supports 66W HUAWEI SuperCharge and 50W Wireless HUAWEI SuperCharge.

On the other hand, the HUAWEI P50 packs a 4100 mAh battery into a compact design and it supports 66W HUAWEI SuperCharge for swift recharging. Controlling multiple devices at once is as easy as controlling just one single device, thanks to the Super Device features. The Device+ tab in Control Panel enables users to easily control or set up multi-device collaboration with other devices, such as the HUAWEI FreeBuds, HUAWEI MatePad and HUAWEI MateBook.

For example, users can tap on the HUAWEI MatePad icon to activate Smartphone-Tablet Multi-screen Collaboration; tap the HUAWEI MateBook icon for Smartphone-PC Multi-screen Collaboration or tap the HUAWEI FreeBuds icon to seamlessly switch their audio output to their Huawei earbuds. Moreover, the trusted, innovative and secure AppGallery is available on the HUAWEI P50 where users can download a wide range of high-quality apps.

With the Distributed File System, HUAWEI P50 can also function as a wirelessly connected external storage unit for the PC, meaning you can access the files you want more easily than ever before. Huawei has always been an innovator, inventor and mentor in the world of smartphones, and the HUAWEI P50 Series is a testimony to its commitment to visionary productions.

US consumers remain resilient even as prices rise

NEW YORK: US consumers continued to increase spending in April, remaining resilient in the face of accelerating inflation, but retail giant Walmart still saw a big hit to its bottom line due to rising costs, according to reports released Tuesday. Home Depot, however, benefitted from the ongoing spending spree, reporting higher profits and a better outlook for the year. The reports come amid rising fears of recession in the wake of a 40-year peak in inflation that has prompted the Federal Reserve to raise borrowing costs aggressively to cool the economy and tamp down price pressures.



SAN FRANCISCO: Customers line up to buy hot dogs at Nathan's Hot Dogs in San Francisco, California. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Consumer Price Index fell slightly.— AFP

The healthy US consumer has underpinned the strong recovery in the world's largest economy following the slowdown in the early months of 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. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said Tuesday the central bank wants to see slowing growth and "clear" evidence inflation is coming down before it pulls back on efforts to cool the economy, and acknowledged that it may be a "bumpy" ride that would inflict some pain.

Consumers haven't pulled back yet, and US retail sales rose 0.9 percent in April, boosted by a rebound in auto sales and increases in other categories, including electronics, home furnishings and restaurants, according to Commerce Department data. The report "is encouraging because it shows consumers are taking higher prices in



IKEA announces the winner of Raffle Draw

KUWAIT: IKEA Al Homaizi is excited to announce the lucky winner of IKEA's second Raffle Draw, Dalal Al Ajmi. The draw has been conducted under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Al Ajmi was granted the KD 10,000 home makeover prize by Mersad El Aji, the Store Manager of IKEA

The Avenues during a special ceremony in IKEA The Avenues. The prize consisting of IKEA products and services, including planning service and delivery & Assembly.

Everyone still has a chance to win the next Grand Prize of KD 10,000. You only need to spend KD 10 at any of IKEA Store in Kuwait. Every KD 10 you spend will give you one entry to the Raffle Draw to win KD 10,000. The more you shop the more chances to WIN! What are you waiting for to be the next winner!! Shop at any IKEA at The Avenues, 360, The Assima Mall, IKEA.com.kw or the IKEA App in Kuwait. Good luck! For more information, please contact: Ali Husain, Ali@ikea.com.kw - Tel.: +965 1840408 - Mob.: +965 97223513.



Auctioneer Victoire Gineste chairs the auction of a recently rediscovered drawing by Michelangelo, the artist's first known nude, that was adjudicated for 23 million euros (\$24.2 million) at the Christie's auction house in Paris on Wednesday. — AFP

Michelangelo sketch sold at auction for 23 mn euros

A recently rediscovered Michelangelo sketch, the artist's first nude, sold at auction Wednesday for 23 million euros (\$24.2 million) at Christie's Paris, a record for the Italian master.

The late 15th-century sketch in pen and brown ink representing a naked man

with two other background figures recently resurfaced in a private French collection and outstripped the previous record for the Renaissance artist of 9.5 million euros for "The Risen Christ" at Christie's London in 2000. — AFP

Second endangered cheetah cub dies in Iran

The second of three Asiatic cheetah cubs born in captivity in Iran has died in a blow to conservation efforts for the critically endangered subspecies, state media reported Wednesday. "The cause of death of the cub is being investigated and the result will be announced after the post mortem," environment department official Hassan Akbari told state news agency IRNA. The announcement came just two weeks after a first cub from the litter died.

The cause of death was established as congenital malformation of the left lung, an environment department statement said. The cubs were born in the Touran Wildlife Refuge by caesarean section on May 1, in what the department said was the first birth of an Asiatic cheetah in captivity. The world's fastest land animal, capable of speeds of up to 120 kilometers (75 miles) per hour, cheetahs once stalked habitats from the eastern borders of India to the Atlantic coast of



Senegal. They are still found in parts of southern Africa, but have practically disappeared from North Africa and Asia.

The Asiatic subspecies-Acinonyx jubatus venaticus-is critically endangered, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Iran is the last country in the world where the Asiatic cheetah can be found in the wild. Authorities launched a United Nations-supported protection program in 2001. In January, deputy environment minister Hassan Akbari said only a dozen individuals were left in the wild-down from an estimated 100 in 2010. Their situation "is extremely critical", Akbari said, adding that animals had been lost to drought, hunters and car accidents. — AFP

Ukraine street artist Gamlet 'under orders' to paint Kharkiv

A black bulletproof vest bearing a Ukrainian military crest, a tourniquet and two felt-tip pens make up street artist Gamlet Zinkivskiy's unpretentious work equipment. The 35-year-old Ukrainian has remained in his hometown of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-biggest city, to paint its walls even amid the destruction of Russia's invasion.

Recognized internationally with exhibitions and paintings from Lima to London, Gamlet has put aside his globetrotting success and now uses his talent to support the home front during the war. "If I move I can have my career somewhere abroad. But it will only be comfort. In Ukraine, I have the feeling that I'm building the country," he said.

"All the city is my house, all the city (is) my gallery," the bald artist added, with four silver rings glinting on his left hand. He writes the words "hellish hospitality" on the latest addition to his Kharkiv portfolio, a combination of Molotov cocktails and a petrol can drawn in a city centre scarred by Russian artillery fire.

'You have to paint'

At the start of the war, Gamlet spent a night in a Kharkiv metro station and 10 days at his parents' house before moving with relatives to Ivano-Frankivsk in relatively untouched western Ukraine. He spent two months there raising funds for humanitarian aid and Ukraine's army, saying he sold a painting for two night vision devices. Then came a telephone call from the commander of the Khartia Battalion, whose insignia he proudly sports on his vest. Every painting is signed with its name.

"You're staying in Ivano-Frankivsk for too long. We need you here (in Kharkiv) — you have to paint," the commander told him. Gamlet believes working in the street, where he can paint when and where he wants, is more important for public morale than getting exposure in galleries. "I see people smiling and happy because they see a destroyed building which they loved but smile when they see painting," he explained. Gamlet also sees his work as increasing access to art, which he prioritizes above simply earning money from selling pictures.

"Street art, it's the story for people

who have never been to (an) exhibition or who don't visit museums, but they know my work in the street." Gamlet hopes that his works, painted on wood covering the windows and exteriors of damaged buildings, will be given to a future war museum or sold for a good cause.

erful spirit. I understood I was Ukrainian," he said. Gamlet started painting Kharkiv's walls when he was 17 — and his artistic activities earned him many brushes with the law.

He said he would spend as much money on "corruption" to leave police custody as he did on paint. After yet



Ukrainian street artist Gamlet Zinkivskiy smokes a cigarette while painting on a wooden board on a street in Kharkiv amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

Only one of the eight paintings he completed in the eastern city of Izyum survived battles with Russian forces in recent weeks, he added, while other works were lost in Berdyansk and Mariupol. But he says he does not see his art as a weapon against Russia. "What I'm doing helps real fighters with weapons to uphold this country. This country, apart from people and cities, has artists, musicians, and culture they love. This inspires them (soldiers) to fight and defend."

Brushes with the law

This is the second time that Gamlet has stayed in Kharkiv for political reasons. He was ready to move to Paris in 2013 before the pro-Western Maidan revolution toppled Ukraine's pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich in 2014. That proved to be a watershed moment. "In 2014 I started painting with a new pow-

another arrest, Gamlet decided to challenge the officers. "I told them, 'What are you doing? Don't you have other things to do? Crimea was annexed and you found (a) terrorist like me.' Then they stopped bothering," he recalled. Since then, he says he rejected an offer from the city to become its official painter in order to remain independent.

Gamlet studied art at university and art school for eight years. But he decided to do away with colors 12 years ago, preferring the minimalism of black and white in his work. "I don't want to paint beautiful paintings, but great ideas," he explained. "In the world everything is smeared and it's hard to understand if it's good or bad. In painting I can make it black and white." — AFP



The owner of the facility Akram Yehia (center) shows visitors some of the protected birds in the capital Khartoum.



The owner of the facility Akram Yehia with some of the protected birds in the capital Khartoum.



Some of the parrot it shelters perched on a tree in the Sudanese capital.

Sudan sanctuary offers haven for exotic birds

Tucked away east of Sudan's capital Khartoum, a sanctuary of lush green vegetation has been a haven for dozens of exotic birds from far and wide. "I have a passion for birds," said Akram Yehia, owner of the Marshall Nature Reserve which covers 400 square meters (4,300 square feet). "I wanted to create an ideal environment that simulates their natural habitat." Yehia, 45, set up the huge caged aviary in his house's front yard four years ago, and has handcrafted dozens of birdhouses. He created

a habitat of trees, adding a garden pond and mist nozzles for cooling off against Sudan's scorching heat.

Over 100 birds of 13 different species currently inhabit the reserve. Ring-necked parakeet, rosella birds, as well as Meyers and red-rumped parrots flit across branches and compete over birdhouses in the reserve. "I have trained and tamed them over the years so they won't attack each other," he said. Yehia says his favorite is an African grey parrot who answers to the name "Kuku" and has a knack for mimicking human sounds and movements as well.

Sudanese and foreign visitors are allowed to drop in for two to three hours a day only. "It's only limited time so we don't disturb their habitat," said Yehia. Business, however, has been impacted since an October military coup that has triggered regular mass protests met by a violent crackdown. Visits often get called

off on protest days as streets are blocked, making it hard to move around the capital. "The tear gas fired during the protests is very dangerous for the birds," Yehia said. "I know people living closer to large protest sites and who've lost all the birds they own."

Yehia has also been grappling with increasing expenses in Sudan, where the local currency has plummeted against the dollar, and food and fuel prices have soared. "I want to expand the reserve but it's very expensive now," he said. To visitors, the reserve is a welcome break from the hustle and bustle of Khartoum. "I never knew that such a place exists in Khartoum," said Anna Shcherbakova, a visitor from Ukraine. A local visitor, Hossameddine Sidahmed, said he hopes the reserve expands and grows "even more beautiful". — AFP



A visitor poses for pictures with some of the protected birds in the capital Khartoum.



An undated handout photo obtained from Khartoum's Marshall Nature Reserve for exotic birds, shows a visitor posing for pictures with some of the protected birds in the capital Khartoum. — AFP photos



Photo shows some of the parrot it shelters perched on a tree.

'Top Gun' and Russian dissident fire up Cannes



US actor and producer Tom Cruise poses during the red carpet ceremony of the film "Top Gun: Maverick!"

Tom Cruise was set to jet into Cannes on Wednesday with "Top Gun: Maverick" as a Russian dissident in the main competition showcases an alternative side to the world's top film festival. Cruise, last at Cannes 30 years ago, is tipped to make a spectacular entrance accompanied by a French Air Force aerobatic display team dazzling with a fly-past over the red carpet.

Critics have treated the sequel to his superstar-making 1986 blockbuster to giddy reviews, with hopes the film will boost movie theatres still struggling to recover from the pandemic. "In the history of cinema... (Cruise) has one of the highest success rates," festival director Thierry Fremaux said this week. "This is someone that we haven't seen on streaming platforms, TV series, or doing adverts... He is someone who is devoted to cinema."

Before that, in the main competition for the top prize Palme d'Or, Cannes was set to welcome Russian dissident Kirill Serebrennikov with a very different offering: "Tchaikovsky's Wife" about the legendary composer's brief and tragic marriage. The director was unable to attend the festival for two previous nominations due to a controversial court case that barred him from leaving Russia. Now in exile following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, his new film is unlikely to improve his standing with the Kremlin given that it shines a light on the composer's

homosexuality—a story that remains taboo for Russian conservatives.

'Speak up'

The war has already been a major theme at the festival, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky making a surprise appearance via video at the opening ceremony on Tuesday. "Will cinema keep quiet, or will it speak up? If there is a dictator, if there is a war for freedom, once again, everything depends on our unity. Can cinema stay outside of this unity?" Zelensky said.

There will be a special screening of "Mariupolis 2", a documentary about the conflict by Lithuanian director Mantas Kvedaravicius, who was killed in Ukraine last month—reportedly by Russian forces. Ukraine's beleaguered filmmakers will get a special day at the festival 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 head of the jury charged with selecting the winners this year, French actor Vincent Lindon, said the invasion of Ukraine had penetrated even the glamorous bubble that is Cannes, which was founded in 1946, he noted as a response to fascism. "The torments of the world, which is bleeding, suffering, burning... they rack my conscience," he told the opening ceremony.

According to analysis site The



(From left to right) US Actor Danny Ramirez, US actress Monica Barbaro, US actor Jon Hamm, US actress Jennifer Connelly, US actor and producer Tom Cruise, US actor Miles Teller and US filmmaker Joseph Kosinski pose during the red carpet ceremony of the film "Top Gun: Maverick!" at the Cinepolis Parque Tere, in Naucalpan de Juarez, Mexico state. — AFP photos

Numbers, Cruise's 39 films as lead actor have pulled in just shy of \$8.5 billion (8 billion euros) worldwide. "Top Gun: Maverick" could add as much as \$390 million from the United States alone, according to Box Office Pro. Empire magazine praised its "slick visu-

als, crew camaraderie, thrilling aerial action, a surprising emotional wallop and, in Tom Cruise, a magnetic movie-star performance as comforting as an old leather jacket." — AFP

How Tom Cruise survived the end of the star era

Tom Cruise jets into Cannes on Wednesday for the first time in 30 years to launch "Top Gun: Maverick", and much has changed in the film industry since his last visit—except his continued box office power. That kind of longevity is a rare thing in Hollywood where superhero franchises have become far more financially important to studios than individual actors and actresses.

When Cruise was last in Cannes for the premiere of the ill-fated "Far and Away" with his then-wife Nicole Kidman, he was just one among many in the Hollywood star system. It was 1992 and the likes of Kevin Costner, Mel Gibson and Bruce Willis ruled the roost—all names that have since faded.

"Cruise is unusual as someone who has managed to retain that commercial weight even as the studios have become dominated by superhero franchise films," said Paul McDonald, professor of media industries at King's College London. "And it's particularly remarkable given that he's going to be 60 this year." According to analysis site The Numbers, Cruise's 39 films as lead actor have pulled in just shy of \$8.5 billion (8 billion euros) worldwide.



US actor and producer Tom Cruise gives the thumb up as he arrives for the red carpet ceremony of the film "Top Gun: Maverick!" at the Cinepolis Parque Tere. — AFP

"Top Gun: Maverick" could add as much as \$390 million from the US alone, according to Box Office Pro. And with gushing reviews from critics, it looks set to cement his status as, in the words of IndieWire, "the last Hollywood movie star of his kind—short as ever but still larger-than-life in an age where most famous actors are only as big as their action figures."

Career wobble

Cruise's continued success looked far from certain in the early 2000s when his ties to the controversial Church of Scientology—and the infamous time he leapt around on Oprah Winfrey's couch professing his love for Katie Holmes—threatened to derail his career. The

Hollywood machine was also changing, with stars like Cruise becoming less important than superhero brands.

"Batman is a great example of the shift that happened around 2000 when franchise films took over. For half the film or more he's covered with a mask—people don't hugely care who's in there, whether it's Robert Pattinson or Ben Affleck or anyone else," said McDonald. Cruise managed to recover and thrive by presenting himself as something like a real-life superhero.

"Part of the mystique is that he does his own stunts—flies jets, jumps off buildings—it's hard not to watch him without thinking: is there anything this guy can't do?" said Paul Dergarabedian, of media analysts Comscore.



Chethana Raj

Indian actress dies after 'botched' liposuction

A 21-year-old budding Indian actress died after what her family says was a botched liposuction procedure, according to police on Wednesday. Liposuction, a medical procedure to remove fat, is very common and cheap in India—but is still mostly unregulated outside big hospitals. Chethana Raj, who acted in several television series and films in her native Karnataka, died Tuesday.

Her grandmother Narayanamma told local media that the actress had asked for 150,000 rupees (around \$1,900) for the operation but the family refused. "We did not encourage her to have the operation as she was healthy and not fat," the Times of India quoted her as saying. Raj cobbled together the money herself and went to a clinic in the southern city of Bangalore without telling her parents.

But she developed complications and was rushed to hospital where she was pronounced dead. Vinayak Patil, deputy commissioner of police, told AFP that officials have registered a case of unnatural death after the woman's father accused the clinic of botching the procedure. "My daughter died due to the negligence of the hospital," The News Minute website quoted her father Govinda Raj as saying. — AFP

Venezuelan becomes oldest living man

A 112-year-old Venezuelan farmer has been officially recognized as the oldest living man following the death of a Spaniard who was the previous holder of the title, Guinness World Records said Tuesday. Juan Vicente Perez was confirmed as the oldest living man in February, Guinness said in a statement on its website. He "has exceptional health and memory. He remembers his childhood, marriage, the name of his siblings, children and grandchildren," said Guinness.

"He loves to be surrounded by family and friends as they tell stories and engage in good conversation." Perez was born on May 27, 1909 in the western Tachira state, where by the age of five he was already helping his parents to harvest sugar cane and coffee. As an adult, he worked as a sheriff resolving land disputes in the town where he lived. — AFP



112-year-old Venezuelan farmer Vicente Perez gestures at his home in San Jose de Bolivar, Tachira state, Venezuela, on January 24, 2022. — AFP



In this file photo (from left) Gem, Noel Gallagher, Andy Bell and Liam Gallagher, members of the British rock band "Oasis" pose for a photograph during a photocall in Hong Kong. — AFP

Guitar that broke up Oasis sells for \$390,000

Noel Gallagher's Gibson guitar, which was broken in 2009 at the same time as the British group Oasis imploded, sold for 385,500 euros at an auction in Paris on Tuesday. Later repaired, the red Gibson's destruction at the French capital's Rock en Seine festival in 2009 was "a cult moment" in music history, said Jonathan Berg, a guitar expert and cofounder of the Arpegges gallery that held the auction.

With a starting price at 150,000 euros (\$160,000), the auctioneers said bids for the guitar could have reached as high as 500,000 euros. A flagship of the 1990s Britpop movement built around the notoriously fractious Gallagher brothers, Oasis scored global success, selling 60 million albums and birthing hits like "Wonderwall" and "Don't Look Back In Anger". The band had been slated to play at Rock en Seine in 2009 towards the end of their year-long "Dig Out Your Soul" global tour—named for their album of the same name.

'Devoted to cinemas'

With two more installments of the hugely successful "Mission: Impossible" coming in 2023 and 2024 — possibly followed by a long-rumored film to be shot in space—there is little sign of Cruise fading into obscurity. "Theatre owners have an intense love for Tom Cruise because his whole life is devoted to the cinema experience. His movies are conceived and executed with the big screen in mind," said Dergarabedian. Cruise has become an ambassador for cinemas—even sneaking into a screening of Christopher Nolan's "Tenet" at the height of the pandemic in summer 2020 in a bid to boost sales.

"I've produced 30 to 40 movies," he told Empire magazine recently. "I am responsible for thousands, if not tens of thousands, of jobs." That devotion has put him at odds with his own studio partners: Cruise reportedly sued Paramount last year for only giving the next "Mission: Impossible" a 45-day window in cinemas before streaming, according to The Hollywood Reporter—a dispute that remains unresolved.

But it goes down very well in Cannes—which is part-run by theatre owners and has banned streamers from competing at the festival. "This is someone that we haven't seen on streaming platforms, TV series, or doing adverts," said festival director Thierry Fremaux. "He is someone who is devoted to cinema. To see Tom Cruise, you have to see a feature film in a cinema theatre." — AFP



US actor Johnny Depp gestures while departing the courtroom at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP

Depp lawyers wrap up cross-examination of Amber Heard

Lawyers for Johnny Depp wrapped up their grilling of his ex-wife Amber Heard on Tuesday after seeking to portray her as the aggressor in their volatile relationship. Under cross-examination, the 36-year-old Heard rejected the accusations that she was the one who instigated violence between the couple, who were married from 2015 to 2017.

"I never assaulted Mr Depp or anyone else that I had been romantically linked to," Heard told the jury on Day 17 of the defamation case filed against her by her former husband. The 58-year-old "Pirates of the Caribbean" star 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 representing domestic abuse."

Heard, who had a starring role in "Aquaman," did not name Depp in the op-ed, but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. The Texas-born Heard countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands.

Depp, during his four days on the witness stand, denied ever striking Heard and claimed that she was the one who was frequently violent. "Is it your testimony under oath that you never struck Mr. Depp as the initial aggressor?" Depp's lawyer Camille Vasquez asked Heard during cross-examination.

"I tried to defend myself when I could," Heard said. "But it was after years of not defending myself. "There are many times I had to use my body to defend myself, and that included swinging wherever I could if it meant I could get away, absolutely," Heard said. "If it meant the difference between a sore face and a broken nose." In one audio recording played for the jury, Heard acknowledged starting a physical fight with Depp on one occasion but insisted that she did not "punch" him. "You're fine. I did not hurt you," she said in the recording. "You are such a baby."

Heard was also asked by Depp's lawyers about a report that she allegedly assaulted her then-girlfriend, Tasya van Ree, at a Seattle airport in 2009. Heard denied ever doing so and said the accusation was part of a "smear" campaign by Depp's side. Heard was also asked why she thought Depp, during the entire time she was on the witness stand, refused to look at her directly. "Because he's guilty," she said. "He knows he's lying."

During her testimony, Heard said Depp would become a physically and sexually abusive "monster" when he was drinking. She said filing for divorce against Depp in May 2016 was "the hardest thing I've ever had to do." — AFP

Sports

Djokovic braced for Alcaraz and Nadal challenge at French Open

13-time French Open champion suffers recurrence of foot injury

PARIS: Novak Djokovic admits he will be fired up by the fiasco of his high-profile deportation from Australia when he targets a record-equalling 21st major on his Grand Slam return at the French Open. World number one Djokovic captured a second Roland Garros title in 2021 followed by a sixth Wimbledon to move to 20 majors alongside Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. However, his unseemly exit from Melbourne following his refusal to be vaccinated opened the door for Nadal to claim a second Australian Open and 21st Grand Slam crown. "It's something that I never faced before," said Djokovic, who turns 35 on Sunday, the opening day of the French Open.

"The amount of pressure and everything that I was feeling in the first few months of the year, as much as I've felt pressure in my life and my career, that was something really on a whole different level." Djokovic has played only five tournaments in 2022 but arrives in Paris buoyed by a sixth Italian Open title, becoming just the fifth man to win 1,000 career matches in the process. It was his 38th Masters triumph, two more than Nadal at the top of the all-time list.

He did not drop a set in Rome as he finished a memorable week with a final victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas, the man he defeated from two sets down in the 2021 French Open title match. With 13-time French Open champion Nadal suffering a recurrence of a foot injury, another Spaniard is likely to be Djokovic's biggest headache in Paris. Carlos Alcaraz, just 19, has rocketed to six in the world on the back of four titles-three on clay-in 2022.

'Special' Alcaraz

He won a second Masters title in Madrid,

sweeping Nadal, Djokovic and third-ranked Alexander Zverev on the way. "He definitely is special," admitted Djokovic of Alcaraz who also claimed the prestigious Miami Masters earlier in the year. Alcaraz was ranked 97 this time last year. He was only two when Nadal won the first of his 13 French Opens in 2005 but he made his mark at the 2021 tournament where he came through qualifying to reach the third round.

Djokovic has been responsible for two of only three losses suffered by Nadal in Paris. One of those came in a bruising semi-final 12 months ago, the most recent clash of the pair's epic 58-match rivalry. Nadal comes into Paris with major question marks over his ability to lift a 14th title. A rib injury in March was followed by the re-emergence in Rome of his chronic foot injury where he limped to defeat in the last-16. The 35-year-old Spaniard is due to practice at Roland Garros for the first time on Wednesday where he will have his own doctor on hand to assess his fitness.

'Living with injury'

"I am a player living with an injury; it is nothing new," said Nadal, now ranked fifth in the world. "Since I came back, the foot has been tough. It's tough for me to be able to practice the proper way." Russian world number two Daniil Medvedev, who gave up a two-sets lead to lose to Nadal in the Australian Open final, only returned to action in Geneva this week after undergoing a hernia operation.

The US Open champion has 13 titles to his name but has yet to master the draining demands of clay. At Roland Garros, he was winless in his



ROME: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning the final match of the Men's ATP Rome Open tennis tournament against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas at Foro Italico. —AFP

first four visits before managing to stop the rot with a quarter-final run in 2021. Medvedev is likely to use the ban on Russian players at Wimbledon this year as fuel for a surprise title tilt. Greek

world number four Tsitsipas has enjoyed a solid clay season. He defended his Monte Carlo title before making the last-eight in Barcelona and semi-finals in Madrid. — AFP

Unstoppable? Swiatek heavy favorite for French Open title

PARIS: Riding a 28-match unbeaten run into Roland Garros and a winner of her past five tournaments, Iga Swiatek is the undeniable favorite for a second French Open title in three years. Since the shock retirement of world number one Ashleigh Barty, the 20-year-old Swiatek has swept aside all-comers and transformed herself into the player to beat in women's tennis. The Pole hasn't lost since falling to another former Roland Garros champion, Jelena Ostapenko, in Dubai in February. Her winning streak is the longest on the WTA tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013.

"It's pretty hard to describe it because all these tournaments that I've won seem pretty surreal right now. I feel like just continuing the same things that I did before really was the key to that," Swiatek said after defending her Rome crown. She is only the second player to win four WTA 1000 titles in a season.

Swiatek dominated on the hard courts in Doha, Indian Wells and Miami, and made a seamless switch to clay-her triumph in Rome came after she skipped

Madrid to rest following another victory in Stuttgart. "Honestly I'm going to do the same way I've done here, also at other tournaments," said Swiatek. "I'm going to try to do step by step, just think of the next match as I did in these tournaments. "If I'm going to treat it as any other tournament, I think it's going to be fine and I'm going to be able to keep it that way." Williams, who turns 41 in September, has not played since retiring in the first round at Wimbledon last year, and her long-time coach Patrick Mouratoglou is now working with two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep, who won her first major in Paris in 2018.

Unpredictable

Unlike the men's event where Rafael Nadal has won 13 of the past 17 editions, a first-time women's Grand Slam champion has been crowned in each of the past six French Opens. Most recently, Barbora Krejickova emerged as an unlikely victor, the first player to win both the singles and doubles at Roland Garros since Mary Pierce in 2000.

However, the Czech world number two faces a race against time to recover from an arm injury that has sidelined her since late February. Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, last year's runner-up, has already pulled out. Third-ranked Paula Badosa reached the quarter-finals at Roland Garros a year ago, while Maria Sakkari was one point away against Krejickova from becoming the first Greek woman to play in a Grand Slam final. Aryna Sabalenka is showing signs of finding her best form after struggling to start the year,



ROME: Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts after defeating Tunisia's Ons Jabeur to win the final of the Women's WTA Rome Open tennis tournament at Foro Italico in Rome. —AFP

while 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu has soared back into the top 75 following her latest battle with injury.

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, the first Arab or African player to capture a WTA 1000 title with her victory in Madrid, has dreams of replicating her 2011 junior triumph on the Parisian clay. Jabeur, 27, has made three clay finals this season-losing to Belinda Bencic in Charleston and Swiatek in Rome - and arrives at the French Open at a career-high ranking of sixth. All eyes will be on Naomi Osaka as, injury permitting, as the Japanese star returns to the scene of her dramatic withdrawal following the bitter fall-out from her media boycott. — AFP

All eyes on Tiger's comeback, Jordan Slam quest at PGA

TULSA: Tiger Woods and his incredible injury comeback and Jordan Spieth's quest for a career Grand Slam will seize the spotlight in Thursday's opening round of the 104th PGA Championship. Woods, a 15-time major champion, and three-time major winner Spieth are grouped with four-time major winner Rory McIlroy in a marquee trio for the first two days at Southern Hills.

Top-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler, 2021 British Open winner Collin Morikawa and second-ranked Spaniard Jon Rahm are among the most fancied players and are together as well, but might struggle to match the Woods group spectator count. "Tiger's here, so nobody really remembers that I'm here," Scheffler said. "So it's all good."

Woods suffered severe leg injuries in a February 2021 car crash, spending weeks hospitalized and months unable to walk. His emotional return at last month's Masters ended with a share of 47th and a stamina struggle, but he saw walking 72 holes as a major feat and says he's stronger as another endurance test looms. "I've gotten stronger since then, but still it's going to be sore and walking is a challenge," Woods said.

Asked if he can win, Woods said, "I feel like I can, definitely. I just have to go out there and do it." Among those trying to stop him will be Rahm, who comes off a victory two weeks ago at the US PGA Mexico Open. "He's Tiger. He's a competitor," Rahm said. "He's going to try to win every single time and anytime he tees up, the world wants him to win. "Yeah, totally expected for the attention to be on him, but it doesn't really change anything of what I want to be doing this week."

Like Rahm, Spieth wants to be having his name engraved on the Wanamaker Trophy. If he wins, Spieth will join Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen as the only players to sweep all four major titles in their careers. Spieth won last month's Heritage title and was second at last week's hometown Byron Nelson event. He expects Southern Hills will be formidable. "I think it's going to be one of the higher scoring PGAs that we've seen," Spieth said. "It's a great test."

World number four Cameron Smith of Australia, a top-five Masters finisher in three of the past five years, is ready for the struggle of playing in the group just ahead of Woods. "There can be a lot of external noise with crowds and just a lot more moving parts," Smith said. "Just another thing to really think about. Just make sure to spend a little bit more time worrying about what's happening outside to make sure when you're inside that shot, everything's perfect." —AFP



TULSA: Tiger Woods of the United States plays his shot during a practice round prior to the start of the 2022 PGA Championship at Southern Hills Country Club on May 18, 2022 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. — AFP

Gatting: Le Mans could be a breakthrough for women drivers

PARIS: Danish driver Michelle Gatting believes a podium finish for the all-female Iron Dames team in the historic Le Mans 24 race in June would "open doors for a new generation" of women pilots, she told AFP. The 28-year-old-who became the first woman driver to be crowned Ferrari Challenge champion last year-teams up with Rahel Frey and Sarah Bovy to race in the car category in what is the only all-female combination in the June 11-12 race.

They will be part of the four-car Italian team Iron Lynx and will bid to improve on their ninth place in the LMGTE AM class in last year's edition. Iron Dames was created and is led by French former racing driver Deborah Mayer-who was named head president of FIA's Women in Motorsport Commission in February-with the aim of supporting women in motorsport. Active since 2019, they have been the first all-female team in history to compete in many endurance races.

Gatting says despite winning the Ferrari Challenge they still needed to change the mindset of the male-dominated world of motorsport. This mindset is "that women don't belong in the sport, and that we are not good enough, or tough enough, or competitive enough, or strong enough", which hurts. Given Gatting's title last year plus three successive finishes for their car in Le Mans-filling ninth spot in their class on every occasion and a best overall final placing of 34th in 2020 - it seems it will take an earthquake to shift the male attitude.

"For sure if we end up on our class podium which is the best case scenario it would be mind changing for people, as it is the biggest endurance race in the world," Gatting told AFP in a Zoom interview. She is quick though to downplay expectations in case she is seen as over-confident. "We are not coming to the race saying 'yeah we will be on the podium' as everything has to be in our favor," she said. "However, if we succeed in changing mindsets we will be a generation opening doors for a new generation." — AFP



CHITTAGONG: Sri Lanka's wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella reacts after Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (center) is bowled out during the fourth day of the first Test cricket match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on May 18, 2022. —AFP

Mushfiqur ton guides Bangladesh to lead over Sri Lanka

CHITTAGONG: Mushfiqur Rahim struck his eighth Test century and became the first Bangladeshi to pass 5,000 runs as the hosts took the upper hand in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Chittagong on Wednesday. Bangladesh were all out for 465 runs with a first-innings lead of 68 when last man Shorif Islam was unable to carry on his innings after a blow to the hand while batting. Mushfiqur reached his career milestone in the morning session when he nudged Fernando towards fine-leg for two runs, to cheers from a sparse crowd at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

"It is a great feeling to become the first Bangladeshi to reach 5,000 Test runs. But I am sure I am not the last one," Mushfiqur said after the day's play. "There'll be a lot of capable players among our seniors and juniors who can reach 8,000 or 10,000 runs." The 35-year old right-hander later glanced Fernando for his fourth boundary

to bring up his hundred, making the most significant contribution in Bangladesh's innings on the day with 105 off 282 balls before Embuldeniya bowled him in the third over of the final session.

Following the Bangladesh innings, Sri Lanka lost two early wickets to reach 39-2 in 17.1 overs in their second innings before stumps were drawn on the fourth day, reducing their deficit to 29. Oshada Fernando was run out for 19 with a direct throw by Taijul Islam from midwicket. The left-arm spinner later bowled nightwatchman Lasith Embuldeniya for two and stumps were taken immediately after with Dimuth Karunaratne 18 not out at the other end. Embuldeniya was earlier given out caught at silly point off Taijul on the same score but he survived on review.

The hosts were hoping for some quick runs before a possible declaration after Liton and Mushfiqur survived the opening session of the day to share 165 runs for the third wicket. But pace bowler Kasun Rajitha led the Sri Lankan bowling attack with 4-60, playing the match as a concussion substitute for Vishwa Fernando. Rajitha dismissed Liton Das and Tamim Iqbal in the first two balls after lunch before Asitha Fernando removed Shakib Al Hasan for 26 to halt Bangladesh's progress. "Our team goal was to get as close as possible to their score," Mushfiqur said. —AFP

Sports

Third Gulf Games: Kuwait's shooters grab four medals

Bahrain remains on top of the medal table



By Abdellatif Sharaa, Agencies

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti shooting team won four medals - two gold, one silver, and one bronze - during the 3rd Gulf Games. The event at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex saw Talal Al-Rashidi, Nasser Al-Meqlid and Abdulrahman Al-Faihan securing the gold medal of the teams' trap shooting. The UAE and Saudi Arabia came in second and third respectively.

In singles' Trap Shooting, Kuwait's Al-Meqlid struck gold against, winning the event with silver and bronze going to his compatriots Al-Rashidi and Al-Faihan. As for the 10m singles rifle shooting event, Oman's Salem Al-Nab'ee won gold, while the UAE's Ibrahim Khalil won silver and Omani Essam Al-Bloushi won bronze. Oman won another gold medal in the 25m rapid-fire pistol competition by shooter Mu'ath AlBloushi. The silver and bronze medals went to Bahraini Abdulmajed Abdulkhaleq and Abdullah Rahma respectively. The Gulf Games will continue until May 31st.

Also, the Kuwaiti women's athletics team won two gold and silver medals. Mudhawi Al-Shimmiri and Nadiya Al-Haqan won the gold medals in the



200 meters race and high jump competitions, securing more medals for Kuwait. Al-Shimmiri came first in the 200 meters race with a time of 32.74 seconds. The silver and bronze medals went to athletes from Bahrain. In the high jump, Al-Haqan clear 1.53 meters with Kuwaiti compatriot, Dalal Al-Faraj snatching the silver medal. The bronze medal was shared between athletes from Saudi Arabia and Oman. The Gulf Games will continue until May 31st.

Meanwhile, Bahrain remained on top of the medal list of the Third Gulf Games after winning 23



medals (11 gold, 8 silver and 4 bronze) at the end of the second day. Kuwait moved to second place with 24 medals (6 gold, 9 silver and 9 bronze). Qatar grabbed the third place with 15 medals (6 gold, 6 silver and 3 bronze). Saudi Arabia took the fourth position with 19 medals (5 gold, 5 silver and 9 bronze). Oman (fifth), with 12 medals: 4 gold, 3 silver and 5 bronze while UAE secured 10 medals: 3 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze.

Kuwait's shooter Abdullah Al-Harby won the bronze medal following a strong competition with



Oman's Issam Alballushi who won gold while the silver went to Saudi Arabia's Abdelaziz Alenezi. In the 10 meter air pistol event, Atallah Alenezi (from Saudi Arabia) won gold while UAE's Ahmad Alameeri won silver as the bronze medal went to Oman's Sulaiman Al-Rahbi.

GAZOO Racing wins 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps

KUWAIT: The GAZOO Racing (GR) team earned its first win of the 2022 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) season after an eventful 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps. World Champions Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi, and Jose Maria Lopez, driving the No.7 Toyota GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar, overcame a strong challenge from Hypercar competitors, as well as adverse weather, to win round two of the 2022 season, the final event before the Le Mans 24 Hours.

With the stunning performance at the 7.004 km circuit in Stavelot, Belgium, the team celebrated its sixth consecutive victory at Spa-Francorchamps with seven wins out of eight races for Toyota GR010 Hybrid Electric since the Hypercar was introduced at Spa in 2021. The race had started full of promise for the GR team that showcased its unmatched capabilities throughout the stages. As the race progressed, extreme weather conditions led to several off-track incidents, interruptions, and red flag periods.

However, Mike and Kamui maintained steady performance throughout the race amid the challenges. Inside the last hour-and-a-half, Jose Maria took the wheel of the No.7 Toyota GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar for the final stint, which saw a close battle among the three Hyper car contenders amid weather-driven disruptions. But eventually, Jose Maria managed to lead the race's final stages, especially as track conditions improved continuously and crossed the line after six hours to win by 27.473secs from the competitor car.

Akio Toyoda, President and CEO of Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: "Thank you to Mike, Kamui, and José Marla for their first victory of this season. I am pleased with the first victory of the new Team Principal, Kamui, and thank you for your hard work in your dual role. Heavy rain posed a significant challenge, but we at Toyota truly believe that the car must be safe to drive in any circumstance.

The race gave us yet another opportunity to gain



invaluable insights into making ever-better cars that drivers can drive with confidence. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone in the team work closely together to support our two GR010 Hybrid Electric vehicles to deliver an exciting race at Le Mans. Thank you to all the fans for your support for us this time as well."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all of its motorsport's activities under one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone. The GR team will challenge for a fifth consecutive victory at the Le Mans 24 Hours, the highlight of the WEC season set to take place from 11-12 June.

'Historic' equal pay deal for US men and women soccer teams

WASHINGTON: The US men's and women's national soccer teams will receive equal pay under a "historic" agreement announced by the US Soccer Federation on Wednesday, following years of pressure from female players. The move makes the federation the first in the world to equalize World Cup prize money awarded to its men's and women's teams.

"This is a truly historic moment. These agreements have changed the game forever here in the United States and have the potential to change the game around the world," said US Soccer president Cindy Parlow Cone. The terms of Wednesday's landmark agreement include "identical compensation for all competitions, including the FIFA World Cup, and the introduction of the same commercial revenue sharing mechanism for both teams," USSF said.

The deal stipulates that players from both teams "pool and share" the otherwise unequal prize money paid by FIFA for participation in their respective World Cups. For non-World Cup tournaments, players from "both teams will earn an equal amount of the total prize money paid when both teams participate in the same competition."

In February, the US national women's team won a \$24 million payout and a promise of equal pay in a major settlement with US Soccer, that was contingent on the new collective bargaining agreement. The

question of World Cup prize money had formed a prominent part of the lawsuit, which was filed in 2019 and accused the federation of "stubbornly refusing" to pay its men and women's players equally.

"The accomplishments in this CBA (collective bargaining agreement) are a testament to the incredible efforts of WNT players on and off the field," said US women's captain Becky Sauerbrunn, who is also her team's players association president. She added that she hoped the agreement "will similarly serve as the foundation for continued growth of women's soccer both in the United States and abroad."

'Achieved it'

The agreement, which runs through 2028, also aims to improve "player health and safety, data privacy and the need to balance responsibilities to both club and country," USSF said. Women's star Megan Rapinoe, who has forged a reputation as an unflinching advocate for social justice causes including equal pay and conditions for her and team-mates, said in February that the settlement marked a moment in which "US Soccer changed for the better." Center-back Walker Zimmerman, a member of the men's team players association, welcomed Wednesday's deal saying that "we hope this will awaken others to the need for this type of change."

"They said equal pay for men and women was not possible, but that did not stop us and we went ahead and achieved it," he added. The United States women have won four Women's World Cup titles and four Olympic gold medals. They are chasing an unprecedented third consecutive Women's World Cup crown after hoisting trophies in 2015 at Canada and 2019 in France. They last won Olympic gold in London in 2012. — AFP

assisted time of 9.99 seconds in the heats in front of a small crowd at the low-key meeting on the Italian Riviera. The 27-year-old will contest the final later on Wednesday.

Italian Jacobs was due to go head to head in Nairobi last weekend with Fred Kerley for the first time since his shock win at last year's Tokyo Games. However he had to pull out of the event with intestinal problems meaning he made his comeback at a rustic event under glorious sunshine in Italy. In March Jacobs stormed to victory to take the world indoor 60m gold in Belgrade, chasing down the American world 100m champion Christian Coleman in the final. — AFP

Olympic champ Jacobs wins on return to 100 m

SAVONA: Lamont Marcel Jacobs made a winning return to the 100 metres at a meeting in Savona on Wednesday, cruising to victory in his first race over the distance since claiming double gold at the Tokyo Olympics. Jacobs crossed the line in a wind-

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

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Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988



MIAMI: Victor Oladipo #4 of the Miami Heat dives for the ball against Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics during the third quarter in Game One of the 2022 NBA Playoffs Eastern Conference Finals at FTX Arena on May 17, 2022.—AFP

Heat overwhelm Boston Celtics

Butler brings heat as Miami sink Boston in series opener

MIAMI: Jimmy Butler scored 41 points as the Miami Heat produced a devastating comeback to defeat the Boston Celtics 118-107 in their opening Eastern Conference finals series clash on Tuesday. Butler led a revitalized Miami second-half display as the Heat transformed an eight-point half-time deficit into a double-digit lead against a depleted Celtics side at Miami's FTX Arena.

Trailing 62-54 at the break, Miami outscored the Celtics 39-14 in the third quarter to set up a victory that gives the Eastern Conference top seeds a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven series. Butler received scoring support from Tyler Herro, with 18 points, and Gabe Vincent with 17 points.

But the win owed as much to Miami's renewed defensive effort in the second half, with the Heat shutting down Boston's Jayson Tatum and forcing a series of crucial turnovers and 11 blocks throughout the game. "The guys were just really disappointed at half-time," Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "I barely needed to say anything. Everyone was just really disappointed at our defensive focus and effort," added Spoelstra, praising the leadership of Butler during the third-quarter blitz.

"Jimmy just inspired everybody in that third quarter," Spoelstra said. "Every time and pocket in

the game when we needed control, or to get the right shot, or make the right decision, Jimmy had his fingerprints on it." Butler said Miami had decided to go back to basics in the second half. "Keep the game easy, simple, learn to capitalize off their mistakes," Butler said. "That's what changed in the second half. I didn't change anything. I continued to play basketball the right way. Shoot the ball when I'm open, hit the open guy."

'Lost composure'

The Celtics shrugged off the injury absence of Marcus Smart and Al Horford (COVID-19 protocol) to look the sharper side in the first half, taking a 10-4 lead in the opening minutes. Miami were initially unable to cope with the movement of Tatum, who bagged a career-high 21 points in the opening two quarters, shooting nine-of-14 from the field. Boston led by as much as 13 at one stage in the second quarter before Miami trimmed the deficit to eight points at the interval.

Robert Williams, starting in place of Horford, also delivered a big first-half performance with 5-of-5 shooting for 12 points as well as two crucial blocks to deny Miami. But it was a different story after the break as Miami out-hustled the Celtics defensively

while raining down a deluge of buckets. An incredible 22-2 run changed the complexion of the game and powered Miami into a 12-point lead at 76-64.

A nine-point Boston run cut the Miami lead to three points at 76-73, but the Heat rediscovered their scoring momentum and pulled away once more. Two more Butler free throws made it 93-76 heading into the fourth quarter, and a 17-point lead became 20 soon afterwards. Boston chipped away at the Miami lead to get within single digits, but Miami held on to claim the series opener. Boston coach Ime Udoka could not hide his disappointment at the decisive third quarter that changed the game. The Celtics outscored Miami in every other quarter.

"We just lost our composure," Udoka said. "We won three quarters other than that one. We semi bounced back in the fourth and played well again and matched their physicality. But 39-14 is tough to overcome. We had one poor quarter that hurt us and it was strictly from a physicality standpoint. It wasn't anything different that they did. They just came out and imposed their will. Disappointing that we came out as flat as we did. They increased the physicality and it made that much of a difference." Game two takes place in Miami on Thursday.—AFP



HANOI: Thailand's Puripol Boonson poses as he celebrates winning gold in the men's 100m final at the 31st Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) at My Dinh National Stadium in Hanoi on May 18, 2022.—AFP

Record-breaking Thai teen wins SEA Games sprint double

HANOI: Thai teenager Puripol Boonson destroyed the opposition to win the men's 100m in 10.44secs at the SEA Games on Wednesday and grab a sprint double in Hanoi. Kayla Anise Richardson of the Philippines won the women's 100m to add to 200m bronze in the Vietnamese capital. But the night belonged to wonder kid Puripol, 16, who easily beat the rest of the field to silence the almost wholly local crowd at My Dinh stadium.

"Before the competition I was under a lot of pressure... but I made it and I'm very glad," he told reporters. The teenager had already made headlines at the regional showpiece after twice breaking the Games record in the 200m, his best time of 20.37secs bringing gold. "My target for this year is that I will try to consistently improve my record and break my own record," Puripol said. He finished ahead of Thai teammate Soraoat Dapbang, who took silver, with Singapore's Marc Brian Louis in bronze.

Richardson found herself nearly neck-and-neck with her rivals as she crossed the finish line in 11.60secs to win women's gold, a mere 0.02secs in front of Singapore's Veronica Shanti Pereira. She eclipsed her performance when winning gold at the 2015 SEA Games, then clocking in at 11.76secs, and called Wednesday's triumph a "little personal victory". "Just to be able to put it together for today feels amazing, I'm so grateful. I've such a great support system. I'm just so happy," the 24-year-old said.

Her bronze in the 200m came behind twin sister Kyla in silver, with Pereira taking gold. Richardson, who holds dual citizenship in both the Philippines and the United States, said she was going to try and qualify for the World Athletics Championships in July. The sprinter's main goal is the Paris 2024 Olympics. "2024 is definitely a goldmine, it's reachable for both me and my sister so that's definitely something that I'm keeping in mind throughout all these seasons coming up," she said.—AFP

Liverpool push title race to the final day

SOUTHAMPTON: Jurgen Klopp rated Liverpool's chances of winning the Premier League as "not likely but possible" after the under-strength quadruple chasers took the title race to the final day of the season with a 2-1 win against Southampton on Tuesday. After Liverpool defeated Chelsea on penalties in a gruelling FA Cup final just three days earlier, Klopp took a gamble with nine changes at St Mary's. Despite effectively fielding a reserve team and trailing to Nathan Redmond's early strike, Liverpool hit back through goals from Takumi Minamino and Joel Matip.

The Reds are just one point behind leaders Manchester City, with both teams having one game left. A title race for the ages will go City's way if they win against Aston Villa at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday. Klopp insisted at the weekend that he does not expect City to drop points against Villa. But Liverpool would be crowned champions for the second time in three seasons if they beat Wolves at Anfield and City fail to win.

"Of course it is unlikely because City play at home against Aston Villa, who play only on Thursday. It is possible, not likely but possible. That is enough," Klopp said. "It is our last home game of the season, the atmosphere will be outstanding, and we will try to use it. Of course it could happen. Football is a tricky game sometimes. The only chance we had tonight was to win. We did our job. We never give up." Klopp's side will be expected to do their part of the equation against Wolves, especially now their refreshed key players can return to the team.

Sadio Mane, Luis Diaz, Andrew Robertson, Thiago Alcantara and Trent Alexander-Arnold were among those left out against Southampton, while Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk were sidelined with injuries suffered at Wembley. "I never had a group like this. They push each other constantly. In the end, it is absolutely outstanding and tonight is really special," Klopp said. "We would



SOUTHAMPTON: Liverpool's Japanese midfielder Takumi Minamino heads the ball during the English Premier League football match between Southampton and Liverpool on May 17, 2022.—AFP

have had much more problems today if we'd played the game on television and if he tuned in, it would have made for frustrating viewing as Southampton squandered the lead. But it was Riyad Mahrez's missed penalty in the final minutes of City's 2-2 draw at West Ham on Sunday which had given Liverpool renewed hope of catching the leaders. And the Reds, hoping to become the first English club to win all four major trophies in one season, will settle their bid for history in the last two games of their incredible, marathon campaign. First, Liverpool will try to avoid a repeat of 2019, when they beat Wolves on the last day but were still pipped to the title by City.

History bid

City boss Pep Guardiola said he planned to watch the game on television and if he tuned in, it would have made for frustrating viewing as Southampton squandered the lead. But it was Riyad Mahrez's missed penalty in the final minutes of City's 2-2 draw at West Ham on Sunday which had given Liverpool renewed hope of catching the leaders. And the Reds, hoping to become the first English club to win all four major trophies in one season, will settle their bid for history in the last two games of their incredible, marathon campaign. First, Liverpool will try to avoid a repeat of 2019, when they beat Wolves on the last day but were still pipped to the title by City.

Then they head to Paris to face Real Madrid in the Champions League final on May 28. Liverpool were hit on the break when Ralph Hasenhuttl's side took the lead after 13 minutes. Redmond sprinted away down the left flank, cutting inside to the edge of the area and unleashed a fierce strike that took a deflection off James Milner as it flashed into the far corner. With their title hopes in jeopardy, Liverpool showed the desire and character that inspired Klopp to label them "mentality monsters".

Japan forward Minamino made the most of a rare Premier League start with a brilliant equaliser in the 27th minute. Joe Gomez fizzed a pass into Jola and his perfectly weighted lay-off reached Minamino, who beat Alex McCarthy at the near post with a ferocious rising drive. Liverpool's relentless pressure was rewarded in the 67th minute. Matip and Kyle Walker-Peters challenged for Tsimikas's corner and the ball looped in over McCarthy, forcing City to keep the champagne on ice for now.—AFP