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# Speaker slams 'surrenderers', urges support for Palestinians

## Ghanem calls for financial aid for 'soft Palestinian forces'

CAIRO: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem on Saturday called for supporting moderate Palestinian forces in the face of recurring Zionist attacks and breaches, slamming those whom he branded as "surrender dealers". Ghanem, addressing the



CAIRO: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem attends the inaugural session of the 33rd conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union on Saturday. — KUNA

inaugural session of the 33rd conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, affirmed the necessity of holding the session on Palestine regardless of demoralizing rhetoric by some parties, whom he dubbed as "traders of surrender."

Contesting the argument that Arabs' gatherings on Palestine have been rhetorical, Ghanem said, "Every meeting and forum where the name of Palestine is mentioned is important...because our conflict with the enemy is actually a strife between memory and memory loss, an existential presence vis-a-vis extermination plots". "The enemy is scared of the memory of Palestine and the land and has done a great deal to portray itself as an oasis of democracy, plurality, freedom and progress. However, day after another it has proven to be an arena for state terrorism and plunder of land history," the chief Kuwaiti lawmaker added.

"When I say the Palestinian is the enemy's eternal curse, I do not exaggerate, for the Palestinian is a ghost and an eternal nightmare haunting him (the Zionist)," Ghanem said. "I am not exaggerating in this context because Shireen Abu Akleh did not carry guns or stones or a placard; she simply was guarding the Palestinians' memory through her media profession and the enemy is aware that the picture is stronger than the rifle in many cases."

Affirming the crucial role of Palestinian journalists and writers in the struggle against the Zionist entity's occupation, Ghanem said: "Since the time of Ghassan Kanafani until the time of Shireen Abu Akleh, the enemy has been afraid of Palestinian soft forces. The Palestinians have their own poetry, narrations, songs, films, dabkeh (folkloric dance), hymns, food, rites, old stories and all heritage assets upon which the genuine landlord hinges."

Continued on Page 6

## Kuwait votes in Municipal Council polls



KUWAIT: Kuwait's 13th Municipal Council elections were held on Saturday, with 38 candidates running in eight constituencies. The government will later appoint six members in the 16-seat Municipal Council. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh (See Page 2)

## Radicals target Muslim sites in India, even Taj



VARANASI: Policemen stand guard near the Gyanvapi Mosque during Friday noon prayer on May 20, 2022. — AFP

NEW DELHI: Thirty years after mobs demolished a historic mosque in Ayodhya, triggering a wave of sectarian bloodshed that saw thousands killed, fundamentalist Indian Hindu groups are eyeing other Muslim sites - even the world-famous Taj Mahal. Emboldened under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aided by courts and fueled by social media, the fringe groups believe the sites were built on top of Hindu temples, which they consider representations of India's "true" religion.

Currently most in danger is the centuries-old Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities, where Hindus are cremated by the Ganges. Last week reports claimed a leaked court-mandated survey of the mosque had discovered a shivalinga, a phallic representation of the Hindu god Shiva, at the site.

"This means that is the site of a temple," government minister Kaushal Kishore, a member of

Continued on Page 6

## Concern, caution as teens glued to TikTok in Kuwait

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced last week that TikTok was the most used app in Kuwait in the first quarter of 2022. Despite its popularity among young people, many have complained about its potential mental, health and social impacts. Kuwait Times spoke with parents, academics and teenagers to learn more.

## Albanese wins as Aussie voters end conservative rule

SYDNEY: Centre-left leader Anthony Albanese claimed victory in Australia's general election Saturday, as voters angered by climate inaction pulled the plug on a decade of conservative rule. "The Australian people have voted for change" said the 59-year-old Labor leader, promising a less pugilistic form of leadership and a raft of reforms to make the country fairer and greener.

## Sandstorms pose serious risk to human health

PARIS: Sandstorms have engulfed the Middle East in recent days, in a phenomenon experts warn could proliferate because of climate change, putting human health at grave risk. At least 4,000 people

Nadine Al-Kaouri, a mother of two, told Kuwait Times that her daughter has become addicted to TikTok and spends a long time scrolling the app, which has significantly affected her, while Iman Elssadany, a teacher, affirmed that such apps have had a negative effect on teenagers in her class. Hatan Fatafta, a 16-year-old, told Kuwait Times TikTok is preventing her from concentrating on her studies.

TikTok addiction is not only impacting teenagers, but adults too. Omar Yasser said he downloaded TikTok to check what his son was watching, but ended up being addicted to it instead. But many academics, including Prof Huda Al-Shuhaibi, advise parents not to try to ban TikTok, but rather teach their children how to use it and limit their usage time, while warning them of its impact on them and directing them to spend their free time in a balanced way. (See Page 3)

With almost two-thirds of the votes counted, Albanese was set to lead the largest party in parliament, but had yet to secure an outright majority. The election was a stinging rebuke for Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who admitted it was a "difficult" and "humbling" night for his conservative coalition.

His Liberals lost seats to Labor across the country, but they suffered the most painful defeat at the hands of climate-focused independent candidates in a string of once ultra-safe conservative urban seats. The so-called "teals" - mostly women - ran on pro-environment, anti-corruption and pro-gender equality tickets. "What we have achieved here is extraordinary," said Zoe Daniels, an independent who claimed victory in a once safe Liberal seat in Melbourne.

Continued on Page 6

went to hospital Monday for respiratory issues in Iraq where eight sandstorms have blanketed the country since mid-April. That was on top of the more than 5,000 treated in Iraqi hospitals for similar respiratory ailments earlier this month.

The phenomenon has also smothered Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with more feared in the coming days. Strong winds lift large amounts of sand and dust into the atmosphere, that can then travel hundreds, even thousands, of kilometers. Sandstorms have affected a total of 150 countries and regions, adversely



A child launches TikTok on a phone in this illustrative file photo.



SYDNEY: Australian opposition leader Anthony Albanese gestures as he addresses Labor supporters after winning the 2022 general election on May 21, 2022. — AFP

impacting on the environment, health and the economy, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said.

"It's a phenomenon that is both local and global, with a stronger intensity in areas of origin," said Carlos Perez Garcia-Pando, a sand and dust storm expert at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center and the Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies. The storms originate in dry or semi-dry regions of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Central Asia and China.

Continued on Page 6

Local

# Kuwait's 13th Municipal Council elections go smoothly: Minister

Electors voted to select 10 members out of 38 candidates



KUWAIT: Citizens are seen at a polling station during the Municipal Council elections on Saturday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A Kuwaiti man casts his vote in Rumaihiya.



A voter casts his vote in Bayan.



A female citizen registers to cast her vote.



A health worker assists a senior citizen at a polling station.



A voter casts her vote in Sabah Al-Salem.



A passport is stamped at a polling station.



A Kuwaiti woman registers to cast her vote.

KUWAIT: The Minister of Justice and Minister for Integrity Promotion Affairs Advisor Jamal Al-Jallawi stressed that the 13th Municipal Council elections went smoothly on Saturday. Jallawi said in remarks to Kuwait TV and KUNA on the sidelines of an inspecting tour of the polling centers, that he expects further turnout during the upcoming hours. There is a coordinating committee among the participating bodies in the elections that commenced its task 40 days before, he added. He praised the great role played by the governmental bodies that were in charge of the elections, including the

Ministry of Education, Interior, Electricity and Water as well as Kuwait Municipality.

The elections to elect 10 out of 38 candidates for the 16-seat council were held in 443 committees distributed over 76 schools in eight electoral constituencies. The remaining six members of the

council will be appointed by the government. Kuwait Municipality was established in 1930, during which Kuwaiti citizens had a chance to elect their representatives in the Municipal Council, a historic development within Kuwait community. — KUNA



## Medical staff pay special attention to voters

KUWAIT: Polling stations of the 13th legislative term of Municipal Council elections witnessed a wide spread of medical equipment and staff to serve voters. Ambulances were distributed among nine high-density centers, in addition to the keenness of the Health Ministry to provide 34 medical clinics in all polling stations, including nursing staff and paramedics. Similar efforts were made by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRSC), in providing wheelchairs and umbrellas, in addition to the deployment of volunteers to assist the elderly and the disabled and to facilitate their transportation to the electoral commissions. — KUNA



## Security personnel deployed at ballot stations

KUWAIT: A large number of security personnel were deployed in and around ballot centers in Kuwait's 2022 Municipal Council elections Saturday. The forces, in addition to

their tasks, aided the elderly and citizens of special needs to cast their votes at the centers, manifesting solidarity between the civilians the personnel. —KUNA



Local

# TikTok, Kuwait's most used app, a sensation among youngsters

## Don't ban app: Academics advise parents to guide kids on proper use

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** With more than a billion users, the social media app TikTok has skyrocketed to prominence. Kuwait's Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced last week that TikTok was the most used app in Kuwait in the first quarter of 2022. Despite its popularity among young people, many have complained about its potential mental, health and social impacts. Kuwait Times spoke with parents, academics and teenagers to learn more.

Nadine Al-Kaouri, a mother of two, told Kuwait Times that her daughter has become addicted to TikTok and spends a long time scrolling the app, which has significantly affected her negatively. "This has become a daily routine for many children and adolescents. It is not only my daughter's problem but also of her friends her age. When I tried to remove the app from her mobile, she took it badly, since her friends were updated with new trends and she was not," Kaouri said.

Teacher Iman Elssadany affirmed that such apps

are affecting teenagers in her class. "There are concerns about the effects of TikTok short clips on the level of focus of youngsters. Many students in my class are obsessed with trendy sounds and memes and they use them a lot in class. Observations by parents and teachers have indicated that children's concentration and attention spans are declining, with TikTok and similar apps to blame," she said.

Hatan Fatafta, a 16-year-old, told Kuwait Times that TikTok has affected her adversely. "As a teenager, the time I spend on the app has no meaning. TikTok and its contents are not useful and affect my mind, at a time when I need full focus to study and concentrate on my future and direct on my

interests," she said. "We are addicted because we are teenagers - we want to know what is new, trendy and strange. We do not use books to develop ourselves; we watch clips that make no sense and even if they are wrong. We spend hours watching what that influencer wears, or what is the lifestyle of that TikTok creator. We don't criticize them and copy them blindly without being aware of their negative

aspects on the society," she added. Fatafta hopes to uninstall the app for good. "I am still addicted to it. I only delete the app when I want to study for an exam, and redownload it later."

### Useful content

TikTok addiction is not only impacting teenagers, but adults too. Omar Yasser said he downloaded TikTok to check what his son was watching, but ended up being addicted to it instead. "I signed up as a joke last month to supposedly just take a quick look, but I did not realize that I spent hours watching dozens of videos," he told Kuwait Times. "I found out TikTok is not just a silly app. There is a lot of useful content that teaches people hobbies and much more. Also, many small business owners are showcasing their products at reasonable prices," he said.

Many academics have advised parents not to try to ban TikTok, but rather teach their children how to use it and limit their usage time, while warning them of its impact on them and directing them to spend their free time in a balanced way. Professor Huda Al-Shuhaibi explained that TikTok has become a space for publishing immoral videos promoting nudity and dancing, and invading the privacy of the home, driving a wedge between spouses and families, to gain followers and search for fame to earn money. She called on parents to be respon-



sible, intervene and carry out their awareness roles to rationalize the use of technology.

She noted that parents can focus on making sure their children are following the right TikTok creators, as there are a lot of talented youth who promote a healthy culture, criticizing attempts to impose guardianship on teenagers to prevent them from expressing their opinions freely.



### Opinions vary on negative impact, useful content

## Pharmacist warns against consuming expired medicines

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Expired medicines cannot be sold in pharmacies due to strict rules and inspections by the ministry of health. But many people store unused medicines at home, which then expires. This rarely happens with antibiotics, as the prescribed dose is consumed completely in a few days. Unconsumed medicines are usually painkillers, eyedrops, cough syrups, etc.

Many people believe it won't hurt to use expired medicine - at most it won't bring relief.

But this is not always the case, as medicines differ according to their purpose of use. According to pharmacist Dr Riham Ahmad, it's never recommended to consume expired medicines. "Consuming some kinds of expired medicines can harm the patient, especially the liver. I advise people not to take the risk. In some medications, the expiry date does not include the day, and only the month and year are mentioned. In this case, it can be used till the end of that month," she told Kuwait Times.

Storing medicines properly is more important than the expiry date. "The way of storing medicines is always detailed in the leaflet. In general, most medicines should be stored at room temperature of around 25 degrees Celsius. Wrongly storing medicines will make them useless even if the expiry date is still valid," stressed Ahmad.

"Besides the temperature, ideal storage con-

ditions include avoiding humid places and storing medicines very close to the roof or the floor. Hot weather may lead to a loss in some of the medicine's efficacy. Some medicines should also be stored in the refrigerator, such as insulin, eye pressure drops and others. But these should be stored at room temperature after opening. Conversely, some medicines should be stored in the fridge after opening, such as children's antibiotic syrups after dissolving in water. The remaining quantity should be always stored in the fridge," she explained.

"Some medicines do not include the expiry date on the packaging, and instead only include a number like 6, 9, 12 or others. This indicates the expiry of this medication or skincare product is six months after opening. This is usually for creams and skincare products. For this reason, we can open these products for the customer to smell, for instance," concluded Ahmad.



## One dead in accident near Mubarak Al-Kabeer

**KUWAIT:** A motorist died in an accident that happened at the crossroad between Qurain and

Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Kuwait Fire Force said. Firemen responded to the scene and removed the man's body from the vehicle, it said in a statement, adding that an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the accident.

Separately, the Interior Ministry said yesterday that coastguards stopped a ship in Kuwait's territorial waters carrying around 240 tons of smuggled diesel fuel, adding that the smugglers were referred to the proper authorities for further action.



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Airways announced allocating its sales branch in Farwaniya exclusively to issuing government-related tickets and tickets for citizens sent on treatment abroad starting from Sunday.

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## Gulf Bank's 'Timeless Proverbs' campaign a resounding success

**KUWAIT:** Launched by Gulf Bank at the beginning of this year, Gulf Bank's Ramadan campaign, "Amthal Tadoom" (Timeless Proverbs) has continued to gather millions of views and wide interaction from the local community. Gulf Bank had launched the Ramadan campaign during the holy month as an extension of its slogan "Always With You."

Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, Najla Aleisa, revealed that the Bank's Ramadan campaign, "Amthal Tadoom", garnered more than 10 million views through social media and local TV channels, in addition to 1 million comments and social interactions.

She stated: "Building on last year's Ramadan campaign success, we were motivated to move forward with a new season this year, capturing the special atmosphere that only the holy month can inspire. Due to the great engagement we witnessed from the general public on this year's campaign, we decided to launch our interactive 'Amthal' game within two weeks."

Aleisa stated that this year's Ramadan campaign received lots of public interest, with Gulf Bank increasing public engagement through a series of puzzles inspired by Kuwaiti proverbs. Each episode included a puzzle that could only be solved by assembling words from different scenes; to solve the puzzle and win a prize, viewers connected the clue words and solved for the Kuwaiti proverb. In keeping with its commitment to being the most rewarding bank for customers in Kuwait, Gulf Bank rewarded winners with valuable prizes.

She added: "The blessed month of Ramadan always brings back childhood memories, and that is why we preferred to film our campaign in the form of competitions that brought back nostalgic memories of the past, including 'Fawazeer Ramadan.' Sultan Al-Faraj, the beloved local star and comedian, was chosen to be the star of Gulf Bank's campaign, playing more than 36 different characters over the course of the six-puzzle competition."

She continued: "The month of Ramadan is the biggest season for television advertisements in the Arab world, and it represents a wonderful opportunity to spread joy and entertain local communities. Furthermore, the month is a great opportunity for Gulf Bank to highlight its Kuwaiti identity, having been an integral part of Kuwait's community over the past 60 years. Gulf Bank is so much more than the most rewarding bank in the country - for many of us, it is also the closest one to our culture."

She stated that the holy month ignites enthusiasm and competitions annually between marketers and advertisers across various sectors, companies, and major banks, inspiring stakeholders to come up with unique marketing campaigns that will impress wide audiences. Aleisa emphasized that achieving this goal typically requires effort and creativity, as audiences have become more perceptive of Ramadan campaigns with every passing season, and have come to look forward to innovative and unique advertising campaigns. Gone are the days in which audiences would settle for a witty advertisement or an attractive song, notes Aleisa, adding that "the key to excellence is very simple: proper communication and engagement, with an element of entertainment."

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.

# Despite reassurances, some consumers hoard products

## Co-ops union reassures the situation is under control

By Majd Othman

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the General Administration of Customs have banned certain food items including frozen chicken, vegetable oils, sheep and livestock in sedans leaving through the land border, amid a global rise in prices of basic goods. Some consumers have started to stock up some foodstuff like rice, meat and canned food, fearing a sudden rise in prices, while others are seeing it as an unnecessary step.

Kuwait Times visited several co-ops to learn more about the situation. Ahmed Al-Azmi, General Director of Al-Fintas Cooperative Society, said although sales are normal, many customers are



Costomers look for offers on high-price items



**KUWAIT:** This file photo shows people shopping inside a co-op society in Kuwait. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

hoarding products that are running out, such as frozen chicken and oils, causing them to stop offering promotions on such products.

Azmi said high prices worldwide have had a significant impact on inventory, especially as the government continues to ban price hikes, adding multinational companies have increased their prices significantly, reaching up to 30 percent. Abdulaziz Asad, Chairman of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, told Kuwait Times that the current situation is under control in terms of the availability of basic products and price stability, adding there is no increase in demand for basic products.

An expat told Kuwait Times that despite reassurances and continuous action by the ministry of commerce to control prices at co-ops, he has begun to stock up on basic staples in case of any emergency. Another expat, a father of two, bought twice the usual amount of groceries due to concerns about price hikes and food security for his family. He agreed with the decision of the ministry of commerce to ban the export of some products, which contributes to controlling prices.

Meanwhile, some customers believe stocking up on foodstuff is unnecessary. Saad Al-Krebani said he will stock up on food only if there is a shortage of products in the market. Abu Khaled stressed

there is no need to fear because there is food security in the country. Jassem Mohammed, another shopper, also refused to stock goods over concerns about their expiry dates.

Haifa Al-Musallam stressed local markets are stable and there is no need to hoard, noting that social media is the main reason for panic buying among people. One expat said her previous experience in stockpiling goods during the pandemic prevented her from repeating the same scenario. "I will not store goods because of the availability of products in the local market and their expiry dates. If prices rise, the co-ops will provide offers on these products," she explained.



**KUWAIT:** Group photo outside Zain's main headquarters in Shuwaikh.

## Zain conducts evacuation drill at main headquarters

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, conducted an emergency evacuation drill at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The drill was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior's General Department for Civil Defense and witnessed the participation of all Zain employees operating in the company's three main buildings.

The evacuation drill was held under the supervision of Civil Defense officials, who carefully

reviewed the evacuation plan and ensured all official guidelines and regulations set by the Ministry of Interior were followed and implemented to guarantee the safety of all employees during emergencies.

This step came in line with Zain's Enterprise Risk Management strategy, which carefully looks to implement all guidelines and regulations outlined by the Department for Civil Defense, including the appointment of employee marshals in each floor of its three main buildings to supervise evacuations during emergencies, as well as maintain signboards in all of the company's entrances and exits.

Zain also ensures the readiness of all safety equipment including alarm systems, internal speaker systems, fire hoses, and smoke alarm systems, while also specifying emergency gathering points

and conducting evacuation drills and first aid training programs on a regular basis.

Zain is keen on partnering with the various government institutions, including the ministries of Interior and Health, to implement the official policies and procedures that ensure the safety and security of its employees at all times. The company also regularly hosts representatives from both ministries to hold informative seminars, engage employees in awareness campaigns, hold vaccination programs, blood donation drives, and more.

Zain considers its employees the main pillar of its overall success, being the leading digital service provider in the country. The company will always cater to the many different aspects of its employees' lives and will always put their safety and security at the forefront of its priorities.

## EQUATE honors Sheikh Mubarak

**KUWAIT:** EQUATE Petrochemical Company held a dinner in honor of Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah in the presence of Chairman of the Board and several petrochemicals' officials, as well as Board Members of Dow Chemical and Petrochemical Industries Company, a subsidiary of Kuwait National Petroleum Company.

The ceremony was in recognition of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah's efforts in EQUATE's board as the largest industrial company in Kuwait, and among the largest foreign investment companies in Kuwait. It was also in recognition of him representing Al-Qurain Company for 12 years, as well as the company's success during his chairmanship in various aspects including the number of its shareholders which exceeded 50,000 Kuwaitis. Chairwoman of EQUATE



**KUWAIT:** Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah is honored during the event.

Nadiya Al-Hajji lauded the efforts of Sheikh Mubarak and his full understanding of the oil market's requirement, and his outstanding role in lifting the Kuwait

economy. CEO of EQUATE Group Nasser Al-Dousary appreciated Sheikh Mubarak's effort who had a positive effect in the field and his colleagues.



A group photo during the ceremony.



For desperate migrants, hope is in breach at US border wall

Two million stranded as worst floods hit Bangladesh's northeast



SEOUL: Activists protest against the visit of US President Joe Biden near the presidential office, where he will hold meetings with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol in Seoul. — AFP

Biden, Yoon signal expanded military drills

'Trip is about demonstrating unity and strengthening coordination between our allies'

SEOUL: US President Joe Biden and South Korea's new President Yoon Suk-yeol signalled Saturday an expanded military presence in response to the "threat" from North Korea...

nearly 2.5 million people had been sick with "fever" with 66 deaths as the country "intensified" its anti-epidemic campaign. Biden, while adding that he would not exclude a meeting with Kim if he were "sincere"...

likely to enrage Pyongyang, which views the drills as rehearsals for invasion.

Biden-Yoon 'personal relationship'

Biden began his day by paying respects at Seoul National Cemetery, where soldiers killed defending South Korea, including many who fought alongside US troops in the Korean War, are buried.

He then held closed-door talks with Yoon ahead of the joint press conference and a state dinner. A US official said that in addition to tensions over North Korea and the US-led campaign to punish Russia for invading Ukraine...

Biden's Asia trip "is about demonstrating unity and resolve and strengthening the coordination between our closest allies", a senior US official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

regional trade, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. A day later, he will join a regional summit of the Quad — a grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the United States.

Cutting-edge investments

On arrival Friday in South Korea, Biden accompanied Yoon on a tour of a massive Samsung semiconductor factory. The microchips are a vital component in almost every piece of sophisticated modern technology...

Biden emphasised Samsung's decision to build a new semiconductor plant in Texas, opening in 2024. In the southern US state of Georgia, the governor on Friday announced that South Korean auto giant Hyundai will build a \$5.5 billion plant to produce electric vehicles and batteries.



ANDREAS: File photo shows The 'luventa', a rescue ship run by German NGO 'Jugend Rettet' (Youth Saves), sailing off the Libyan coast during a rescue mission in the Mediterranean Sea. — AFP

Sicily judge to weigh trial of migrant rescue NGOs

ROME: Charities running migrant rescue ships in the Mediterranean face a pre-trial hearing in Sicily Saturday over alleged collusion with people traffickers after a controversial probe that involved mass wiretapping.

"Our crews rescued over 14,000 people in distress from unseaworthy and overcrowded boats... and are now facing 20 years in prison," Kathrin Schmidt, who sailed with Jugend Rettet's ship Luventa, said ahead of the hearing.

Trapani judge Samuele Corso must rule whether or not to proceed to trial after a five-year investigation mired in controversy for the mass wiretapping of charity workers, lawyers and journalists in what critics say is a politically-motivated bid to stop sea rescues.

Italy has long been on the front line of seaborne migration from Africa to Europe, with a record 180,000 arrivals in 2016, dropping to 120,000 in 2017. It has registered some 17,000 arrivals so far this year, according to the interior ministry.

Hezbollah grip on Lebanon must end, says Christian leader

MAARAB: Lebanon's hijacked sovereignty must be restored after an election denied the powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah a parliamentary majority, said Christian leader Samir Geagea.

"No one... should be able to transport missiles from one place to another without the permission and knowledge of the military," the 69-year-old added, referring to Hezbollah. Geagea's campaign for the May 15 election centred mainly on disarming Hezbollah, cementing his role as the movement's staunchest domestic rival.

The Iran-backed Shiite group, which held a majority in the outgoing parliament together with its allies, is the only militia to have not disarmed after the end of Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. Hezbollah, whose arsenal outguns the army's, is described by its supporters as a bulwark against Zionist entity, but it is blacklisted as a "terrorist" organisation by the US and other Western countries.

Anti-Hezbollah alliance

Lebanon's latest election yielded a polarised and fractured parliament that denied any single bloc a clear-cut majority. Geagea's party, which has strong ties to Saudi Arabia, clinched 18 seats, with an additional spot going to an allied lawmaker who is not a party member.

At least 13 independent lawmakers who emerged from an anti-government protest movement in 2019 could also bolster their ranks, said Geagea. "We are in intensive talks" with them, he said. "We agree at a minimum on the need to build an actual Lebanese state... away from corruption, clientelism, quotas, and private interests."



MAARAB: Samir Geagea (R), leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces party, speaks to one of his advisers, following an interview with an AFP journalist at his residence in Maarab. — AFP

speaker, a position Nabih Berri has held since 1992. Berri is expected to hold on to the post with the backing of Hezbollah and his Amal party which, together, account for all Shiite lawmakers.

But Geagea called on incoming lawmakers to chart a new political path by selecting a speaker who would work to "preserve" the state's sovereignty. "We can't nominate Berri at all because he is aligned with the other team," Geagea said, referring to Hezbollah. Another hurdle set to face the new parliament is the process of forming a government, which could take months.

IMF & Gulf allies

Lebanon is grappling with an unprecedented financial crisis widely blamed on corruption and mismanagement by a bickering ruling elite that has dominated the country since the civil war. The country has been battered by triple-digit inflation, soaring poverty rates and the collapse of its currency since a 2020 debt default.

Saudi Arabia and its allies have long pushed for Hezbollah's exit from parliament and cabinet by backing politicians like Geagea. "Our ties with Gulf Arab states will certainly be restored and Gulf aid will gradually flow to Lebanon," if a government is formed "that can inspire trust and confidence," said Geagea.

The swift formation of such a cabinet will also streamline IMF negotiations, according to the Christian politician. The IMF and Lebanon in April struck a conditional deal for \$3 billion in aid. Enacting reforms, including a financial recovery plan which was approved by government on Friday, is one of many prerequisites for the package.

Macron names new ministers in cabinet shake-up

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron named new foreign and defence ministers on Friday as part of a government re-shuffle intended to create fresh momentum ahead of parliamentary elections next month.

Sebastien Lecornu, former minister for overseas territories, was promoted to the defence ministry, Macron's chief of staff Alexis Kohler announced at the presidential palace. Macron decided to shuffle the portfolios despite the conflict in Ukraine, Europe's biggest since World War II.

Macron needs a parliamentary majority in polls next month in order to push through his domestic reform agenda which includes welfare and pension changes, as well as tax cuts. The biggest surprise came in the education ministry where renowned left-wing academic Pap Ndiaye, an expert on colonialism and race relations, will take over from right-winger Jean-Michel Blanquer.

Ndiaye first gained national prominence with his 2008 work "The Black Condition, an essay on a French minority" and is an outspoken critic of racism and discrimination. In his first public comments, he acknowledged that he was "perhaps a symbol, one of meritocracy, but also perhaps of diversity".

"I don't take pride in it, but rather a sense of the duty and responsibilities which are now mine," he said. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen called his elevation "the last step in the deconstruction of our country, its values and its future".

On Monday, Macron named Borne to the post of prime minister, the first time a woman has held France's top cabinet job in more than 30 years and only the second time in history. Opposition figures had accused the president of deliberately delaying naming a new cabinet, almost four weeks since his re-election on April 24, when he defeated far-right leader Le Pen.

The issue has been the subject of feverish media speculation in recent days, overshadowing the parliamentary campaign and drowning out opposition parties. Macron's centrist LREM party, allied with the centrist MoDem and centre-right Horizons among others, is expected to face its biggest challenge from a rejuvenated left-wing next month.

## International

## Tucker Carlson: Voice of white America's outrage and fears

'This is a poison that is being spread by one of the largest news organizations in our country'

WASHINGTON: In the world of Tucker Carlson's hit TV show, America is under assault by Democrats, by health authorities, by immigrants, by Black Lives Matter protests—and white conservatives are in a fight for their very survival. Anti-white racism is on the rise. Modern liberals hate Christianity. Migrants are invading. These are just a few of the claims made by the host of "Tucker Carlson Tonight."



Program could contribute to tragedies

In broadcast after broadcast, the 53-year-old appeals to viewers' outrage and plays on their fears, propelling his show to the heights of cable TV, making him millions of dollars, and providing ample fodder for conspiracy theorists and racists in the process. Fox lawyers contended in court that Carlson presents opinions rather than facts on his show, which launched in 2016 and today draws millions of viewers per episode. But critics say the program could contribute to tragedies such as the racially motivated shooting that killed 10 people at a Buffalo, New York grocery store this month. Blue eyes locked on viewers for an hour, five nights a week, Carlson discusses current events on a show billed as "the sworn enemy of lying," and which promises to "ask the questions that you would ask—and demand answers."

#### 'Great Replacement'

Carlson frames the issues he discusses as "they" versus "you"—"they want to control your thoughts," or

"they call you a racist." His appeals to fear are effective, said Jennifer Mercieca, a historian of American political rhetoric who teaches at Texas A&M University.

"Tucker Carlson is very good at eliciting that fear response in his audience," she told AFP. "He covers anything that he thinks will outrage his audience." And therein lies the danger. Payton Gendron, a young white supremacist accused of trying to kill as many African Americans as possible in the Buffalo shooting, was influenced by the "Great Replacement" theory, a far-right belief that the white population will be replaced by immigrants. Carlson has spread a similar notion—that Democratic politicians and other elites want to replace whites through immigration—during more than 400 episodes of his show, according to The New York Times. Citing this figure, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said: "This is a poison that is being spread by one of the largest news organizations in our country."

Contacted by AFP, Fox News referred to Carlson's on-air statements in which he has defended himself against accusations that he bears responsibility for the killings. "Gendron was mentally ill," Carlson said Monday, dismissing the long manifesto by the suspect—which does not mention the show—as "not recognizably left-wing or right-wing, it's not really political at all."

#### 'Uniquely powerful'

Despite the criticism he engenders, Fox News backs Carlson at all costs. The network's lawyers argued in a 2020 slander lawsuit that viewers knew to treat material on his show with skepticism—something not borne out by the many people interacting with and spreading his content online.

The father of four seems impervious to criticism, saying in an appearance on "The Rubin Report" talk show: "You should only care about the opinions of



NEW YORK: File photo shows Fox News personalities, including Bret Baier, Martha MacCallum, Tucker Carlson, Laura Ingraham, and Sean Hannity, adorn the front of the News Corporation building, in New York City. — AFP

people who care about you." It is a lesson learned from what he has called his "weird childhood," marked by the departure of his artist mother when he was only six years old. She moved to France and never saw her children again.

Carlson was raised by his journalist father and followed in his footsteps after unsuccessfully trying to join the CIA. The road to fame was long: Carlson previously worked at CNN and even found himself temporarily unemployed around his 40th birthday. But Mercieca says he is now "uniquely powerful."

In evidence of Carlson's influence, Republican Ted Cruz willingly subjected himself to a dressing down on

the Fox host's show in January after being widely criticized by conservatives for describing the January 6, 2021 riot at the US Capitol as a "violent terrorist attack." Despite the political influence he wields, Carlson—who says he has never owned a television—lives far from the heart of the United States government, in a rural corner of Maine, where he usually records his show.

Will politics be the next step? For a time, there were rumors that he could parlay his fame into a 2024 run for the presidency. Carlson dismissed the idea with a laugh on conservative podcast "Ruthless" in January. "I'm a talk show host; I enjoy it," he said. — AFP

## Canada celebrates political icon 'Hurricane Hazel'

TORONTO, Canada: Hazel McCallion, 101, was recently reappointed to the board of Canada's largest airport as she forges ahead with a career that has included being a city mayor for 36 years and playing professional hockey. Her tenacity earned her the nickname "Hurricane Hazel."

"I don't know how it came about (that) they call me 'Hurricane Hazel,'" she said in an interview with AFP at a Mississauga, Ontario exhibit celebrating her life, adding with a boisterous laugh: "I know I move quickly."

And nothing seems to stop her. Throughout her long life, she says she followed the mantra: work hard and be prepared. "Hard work never killed anybody, my mother told me that," she said. "If you want to go anywhere you have to work hard." Born in 1921, in Port Daniel, Quebec, Hazel is the youngest of five children. Her father worked in the fishing industry while her mother was a nurse. She left the family farm at age 16 to continue her education, before taking up secretarial work during the Second World War at a Montreal engineering firm.

She also played on a professional women's hockey team for two seasons, losing two teeth while earning Can\$5 (US\$4) per match, which she described as "a princely sum in those days." In 1951, she married Sam McCallion with whom she had three children. "She wasn't always there, but she was there when she needed to be," recalled her son Peter McCallion, describing her as a "wonderful" grandmother to her only granddaughter.

Inspired by former Ottawa mayor Charlotte Whitton—the first female mayor of a major Canadian



MISSISSAUGA: 101-year-old Hazel McCallion poses next to a bust at a museum dedicated to her long life and accomplishments in public service, in Mississauga. — AFP

city—and Margaret Thatcher, she entered politics in the 1960s. In 1978, she won the mayoralty of Mississauga on the shores of Lake Ontario, neighbouring Toronto—helped at the polls by her refusal to be baited by her opponent's sexist remarks during the campaign.

Today, she spurns questions on gender and politics. "It has not been difficult at all. I have been supported by men both in business and in politics," she said, adding that she's been "fortunate."

McCallion has left an indelible mark on Mississauga, which has dramatically changed over the past decades as it grew to become Canada's seventh largest city. She had been in office only a few months when a train carrying toxic chemicals derailed in a populated area of the city, and erupted in flames. McCallion gained a national profile for managing the mass evacuation of 220,000 residents, in which nobody died or was seriously injured. "To live a happy life you have to be very positive and you have to feel that you're contributing. You can't think of 'me' all the time," she says, explaining her commitment to public service. — AFP

phase out coal use, or to block the opening of new coal mines. He may now have to cut deals with independents demanding deeper commitments that would risk the ire of the pro-coal and mining union factions of his party. Albanese said he was "humbled" by victory.

Official projections indicated Labor had won 72 of the 76 seats it needs for a majority. With many votes still to be counted, it could yet secure a majority on its own. "It says a lot about our great country that that a son of a single mum who was a disability pensioner, who grew up in public housing... can stand before you tonight as prime minister," said Joan O'Donnell, a Labor member for 21 years, embracing her fellow branch members. "The right wing has had power for too long."

Earlier Saturday, Albanese asked voters to give his center-left party a "crack" at running the country, and urged people to spurn a "divisive" prime minister. Australians "want someone who is fair dinkum, someone who will 'fess up if they make a mistake,'" said the Labor leader. Albanese often notes he would be the first Australian with a non-Anglo or Celtic surname to be prime minister. — AFP

resistance is not confined to the armed struggle, the Kuwaiti parliament speaker said the struggle against the occupation involves Palestinians of all walks of life and diverse specialties and knowledge, such as the engineer, doctor, novelist, poet, painter, etc.

"The enemy's dilemma is not solely with the Palestinian martyr but also with the Palestinian witness: for Abu Akleh is a witness and the enemy is naturally scared of witnesses," Ghanem said. He called for financial aid for "soft Palestinian forces" — those who struggle against the occupation without guns. — KUNA

## For desperate migrants, hope is in breach at US border wall

YUMA, United States: Gladys Martinez's voice is almost lost in the crackling midday heat of Arizona as she steps onto US soil. "We come seeking asylum," she whispers as she thrusts forward pictures she says show her murdered daughter. Martinez, a Honduran, is one of dozens of people who arrive daily in Yuma, a small city on the Mexican border where there are gaps in the wall that separate the two countries.

She has travelled more than 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles), some of it on foot, from her native Colon, fleeing violence and poverty, desperately hoping she will be given sanctuary in the world's wealthiest country. She has nothing but the clothes she stands up in and some documents in a small backpack.

"Here are the papers, look! look!" she says, pointing to some grisly photographs that show the lifeless face of a young woman. "They killed my daughter, they choked her to death with a pillow and a bag," she sobbed.

#### Wall

The wall that separates the United States from Mexico crosses dunes and hills as it snakes its way from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. Despite the promises of politicians, it is not solid or insurmountable. In some places it is 30 feet (nine meters) high, but desperate migrants still climb it.

Some of them fall. Some die. In other places, like in Yuma, there are gaps large enough just to walk through. US border officers say—off the record—a gate should have been built here to allow for official access but work was halted when President Joe Biden took office.

Most of the people who arrive at the wall have come from Central or Southern America. Many fly to Mexico

or Nicaragua and then continue overland, often paying a coyote—a human trafficker—to get them there. The stories they tell of their journeys are all different, but all contain the same phrase: "It is very painful."

On the Mexican side, a few meters from the opening, hardscrabble plants cling to life in shifting sand as the hot desert sun beats down. Every few minutes, vehicles pull up on the roadside, and migrants spill out, most just carrying a small backpack.

They are guided through the blistering landscape by men and women who melt away as they near the wall. "Everyone has their own routes here, and no one likes it when one gets in the way of the other," says one man who has paused in the shade of a tree.

He and his companion say vaguely they work in "commerce", but the conversation gets gradually less friendly as it becomes clear they are talking to a reporter. "We don't like people asking questions here," the older man says. "If I ask him to make you disappear, he makes you disappear," he says, pointing to his snarling younger colleague.

#### 'Mommy, I want to go'

Back on the US side, border patrol officers offer water to the thirsty migrants, a moment of humanity for people who have seen little of it for weeks or months. Miguel, from Peru, arrived with his daughters and his wife, who was bleeding from a head wound.

"Someone threw a rock at her, this is her blood," he says, pointing to the bright red stain on her t-shirt as paramedics tend to the injury. "Mommy, I want to go," cries a young daughter, as she hugs one of the huge steel bars that make up the wall.—AFP

## Albanese wins as Aussie voters end...

Continued from Page 1

The teals tapped into deep seated anger in wealthy suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne at Morrison's unbridled support for the coal industry, despite three years of climate-worsened bushfires, drought and floods that upended life for millions. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg was in danger of becoming their biggest scalp — all but conceding as his seat in Melbourne was projected to fall to teal independent Monique Ryan.

"People are saying the climate crisis is something they want action on," said an elated Australian Greens leader Adam Bandt. "We have just had three years of drought, and then fires and now floods and then floods again. And people can see it, that this is happening and it's unfolding." Albanese has vowed to end Australia's "climate wars", adopt more ambitious emissions targets, introduce a federal corruption watchdog and extend to indigenous people a constitutional right to be heard on national policy-making.

He vowed to transform the country a renewable energy "superpower". But he has refused calls to

## Speaker slams 'surrenderers'...

Continued from Page 1

The late Kanafani was a famous Palestinian writer who published novels and narrations about Palestine and the Palestinians' struggle. Abu Akleh, a journalist who worked for Al-Jazeera television, was recently shot dead in the head in Jenin. Affirming that the

## Radicals target Muslim sites in...

Continued from Page 1

Modi's BJP party, told local media, saying that Hindus should now pray there. Muslims have already been banned from performing ablutions in the water tank where the alleged relic — mosque authorities say it is a fountain — was found. The fear now is that the Islamic place of worship will go the way of the Ayodhya mosque, which Hindu groups believe was built on the birthplace of Ram, another deity.

The frenzied destruction of the 450-year-old building in 1992 sparked religious riots in which more than 2,000 people died, most of them Muslims, who number 200 million in India. The demolition was also a seminal moment for Hindutva — Hindu supremacy — paving the

## Sandstorms pose serious risk to...

Continued from Page 1

Other less affected areas include Australia, the Americas and South Africa.

The UN agency WMO has warned of the "serious risks" posed by airborne dust. The fine dust particles can cause health problems such as asthma and cardiovascular ailments, and also spread bacteria and viruses as well as pesticides and other toxins. "Dust particle size is a key determinant of potential hazard to human health," the WMO said. Small particles that can be smaller than 10 micrometers can often become trapped in the nose, mouth and upper respiratory tract, and as a result it is associated with respiratory disorders such as asthma and pneumonia.

way for Modi's rise to power in 2014. The movement's core tenet has long been that Hinduism is India's original religion, and that everything else — from the Mughals, originally from Central Asia, to the British — is alien.

Some groups have even set their sights on UNESCO world heritage site the Taj Mahal, India's best-known monument attracting millions of visitors every year. Despite no credible evidence, they believe that the 17th-century mausoleum was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan on the site of a Shiva shrine. "It was destroyed by Mughal invaders so that a mosque could be built there," Sanjay Jat, spokesman for the hardline organization Hindu Mahasabha, told AFP.

This month a court petition was filed by a member of Modi's party trying to force India's archaeological body, the ASI, to open up 20 rooms inside, believing they contained Hindu idols. The ASI said there were no such idols and the court summarily dismissed the petition. But it was not the first such case — and it is unlikely to be the last. — AFP

The most at-risk are the oldest and youngest as well as those struggling with respiratory and cardiac problems. And the most affected are residents in countries regularly battered by sandstorms, unlike in Europe where dust coming from the Sahara is rare, like the incident in March. Depending on the weather and climate conditions, sand dust can remain in the atmosphere for several days and travel great distances, at times picking up bacteria, pollen, fungi and viruses.

"However, the seriousness is less than with ultrafine particles, for example from road traffic, which can penetrate the brain or the blood system," says Thomas Bourdrel, a radiologist, researcher at the University of Strasbourg and a member of Air Health Climate collective. Even if the sand particles are less toxic than particles produced by combustion, their "extreme density during storms causes a fairly significant increase in cardio-respiratory mortality, especially among the most vulnerable," he said. — AFP

## International

# Thousands of COVID-negative Beijing residents sent to quarantine

## 26 new infections discovered in recent days

**BEIJING:** Thousands of COVID-negative Beijing residents were relocated to quarantine hotels overnight due to a handful of infections, as the capital begins to take more extreme control measures resembling virus-hit Shanghai.

Beijing has been battling its worst outbreak since the pandemic started. The Omicron variant has infected over 1,300 since late April, leading city restaurants, schools and tourist attractions to be closed indefinitely.

China's strategy to achieve zero COVID cases includes strict border closures, lengthy quarantines, mass testing and rapid, targeted lockdowns. Over 13,000 residents of the locked-down Nanyuan residential compound in southeast Beijing were relocated to quarantine hotels overnight Friday due to 26 new infections discovered in recent days, according to photos and a government notice widely shared on social media.

"Experts have determined that all Nanyuan residents undergo centralised quarantine beginning midnight May 21 for seven days," authorities from Chaoyang district said Friday. "Please cooperate, otherwise you will bear the corresponding legal consequences."

Social media photos showed hundreds of residents with luggage queuing in the dark to board

coaches parked outside the compound. "Some of us have been locked down for 28 days since April 23, and we all tested negative throughout," wrote one resident on the Twitter-like Weibo. "A lot of my neighbours are elderly or have young children."

"The transfer really makes us feel like we're in a wartime scene," resident and real estate blogger Liu Guangyu posted on Weibo early Saturday. Liu told AFP that they were only notified of the move half a day in advance, but said he was satisfied with the hotel.

Residents were told to pack their clothes and essential belongings, and that their homes would be disinfected afterwards, according to screenshots shared on Weibo.

Last month, thousands of COVID-negative Shanghai residents were bussed to makeshift quarantine centres hundreds of kilometres away as the metropolis of 25 million doubled down on efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

Weibo users expressed widespread anxiety that Beijing authorities were taking a similar approach to Shanghai, where residents have chafed under a months-long lockdown that has denied many people adequate access to food and medical care.

The Weibo hashtag "All residents of Nanyuan compound were dragged to quarantine" was blocked

### Battling its worst outbreak



## US leads criticism of UN rights chief for China trip

**GENEVA:** The UN rights chief came under fire Friday for announcing a visit next week to China's Xinjiang, with the United States saying she was failing to stand up for the region's Uyghur community. After years of requesting "meaningful and unfettered" access to far-western Xinjiang, Michelle Bachelet will finally lead a six-day mission to China starting Monday, her office said.

The visit, at the invitation of Beijing, marks the first trip to China by a UN rights chief since Louise Arbour went there in 2005. The United States, in forceful criticism, said it was "deeply concerned" that Bachelet, a former president of Chile, was going ahead without guarantees on what she can see.

"We have no expectation that the PRC will grant the necessary access required to conduct a complete, unmanipulated assessment of the human rights environment in Xinjiang," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters, using the acronym for the People's Republic of China.

Price also voiced alarm that Bachelet has not released a long-anticipated report on Xinjiang, where the United States and several other Western nations say Beijing is carrying out "genocide" against the Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim, Turkic-speaking people. "Despite frequent assurances by her office that the report would be released in short order, it remains unavailable to us and we call on the high commissioner to release the report without delay and not to wait for the visit," Price said.

Her "continued silence in the face of indisputable

evidence of atrocities in Xinjiang and other human rights violations and abuses throughout the PRC is deeply concerning," he said, saying Bachelet should be a leading voice on human rights.

#### Meeting officials, students

Bachelet herself has been demanding access to all regions of China since she took office in 2018. She has repeatedly voiced concern about allegations of widespread abuses in Xinjiang but has been criticised for not taking a strong enough stance. Rights campaigners accuse the ruling Communist Party of widespread abuses in the name of security, saying at least one million mostly Muslim people have been incarcerated in "re-education camps" in a bid to forcibly integrate them into China's Han majority.

Beijing has vociferously denied genocide allegations, calling them the "lie of the century" and arguing that its policies have countered extremism and improved livelihoods. In March, the UN rights office announced an agreement had finally been reached on arranging a visit.

Bachelet will meet "a number of high-level officials at the national and local levels", her office said Friday, adding that she would "also meet with civil society organisations, business representatives, academics, and deliver a lecture to students at Guangzhou University." An advance team was sent to China several weeks ago to prepare the visit, and has completed a lengthy quarantine in the country, currently in the grip of fresh COVID outbreaks. Bachelet, who will not need to quarantine, is not travelling to Beijing due to COVID restrictions but will go to Kashgar and Urumqi in Xinjiang.

#### 'Legacy' at stake

Despite Bachelet's demands for unfettered access, rights groups noted that the terms of the visit have not been disclosed. They have voiced concern that



**BEIJING:** Health workers wearing personal protective equipment are seen at the entrance of a fenced residential area under lockdown due to COVID-19 coronavirus restrictions in Beijing. —AFP

by Saturday morning. "This is exactly the same as Shanghai, the first step is to cut off water and electricity, then demand keys... then disinfect homes. Electrical appliances, wooden furniture, clothes, food — they're all done for," read one comment.

Chaoyang District disease control authorities

told AFP that it does not release information externally and to rely on the Beijing authorities' Covid press conference. Beijing authorities on Saturday extended work from home guidance to one more district, one day after halting the vast majority of public bus and subway services. —AFP



**GENEVA:** File photo shows United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet delivering a speech at the opening of a session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. — AFP

Chinese authorities, who have always insisted they were only interested in a "friendly visit", could manipulate the trip.

"It defies credibility that the Chinese government will allow the high commissioner to see anything they don't want her to see, or allow human rights defenders, victims and their families to speak to her safely, unperturbed and without fear of reprisal," Sophie Richardson, the China director of Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

The trip is not without risk for Bachelet, who is nearing the end of her four-year term and has not indicated whether she will seek a second mandate. A spokeswoman for Bachelet said Tuesday that the long-delayed report on Xinjiang would not be released before her trip and that there was no clear timing for making it public. Richardson said: "Bachelet's legacy as high commissioner will be measured by her willingness to hold a powerful state accountable for crimes against humanity committed on her watch." — AFP

## Five killed in Iraq drone attack

**SULAIMANIYAH:** Drone strikes targeting Kurdish rebels killed at least five people, including two civilians, in northern Iraq on Saturday, local officials and the rebels said, blaming Turkey for the attack. Turkey routinely carries out attacks in northern Iraq, where the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has bases and training camps.

Saturday's drone strikes targeted mountainous areas of Chamchamal district, west of the city of Sulaimaniyah, the officials said. "Two Turkish drones struck twice," said Heimin Bahjat, mayor of the village of Agjar. "The second strike hit a pick-up truck, killing five people, including two civilians."

A medical source confirmed that the bodies of two civilians had been brought to Chamchamal hospital. A PKK spokesman said: "Three... guerrillas were targeted by the Turkish armed drones and heavily wounded. When the civilians ran to help them and take them to hospital, they were also targeted by the drones. Two civilians lost their lives, along with the three wounded guerrillas."

There was no immediate reaction from Turkey. Repeated Turkish operations targeting Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq have tested relations between Baghdad and Ankara, key trade partners. They have also complicated ties with authorities in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region who have an uneasy relationship with the PKK.

In December, three Turkish soldiers were killed in an attack in northern Iraq which Ankara blamed on the PKK. —AFP

## Biden offers aid, vaccines to North Korea

**SEOUL:** US President Joe Biden said Saturday that America had offered COVID-19 vaccines to Pyongyang but "got no response" despite a spiralling epidemic in North Korea, where nearly 2.5 million people have fallen sick with "fever". Biden, who is in Seoul on his first trip to Asia as president, said the United States and South Korea had also made a fresh offer of COVID aid to Pyongyang but not heard back.

"We've offered vaccines, not only to North Korea but to China as well, and we're prepared to do that immediately," he said at a press conference in Seoul. "We've got no response," he added. North Korea reported its first cases of Omicron earlier this month, and despite a "maximum emergency" epidemic campaign, the virus has torn through its unvaccinated 25 million population. On Saturday, North Korean state media reported nearly 2.5 million people had been sick with "fever", with 66 confirmed deaths since the outbreak started. It added that the country had "intensified" its anti-epidemic campaign.

Biden and new South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol expressed concern Saturday over North Korea's spiralling COVID-19 outbreak. "The ROK and the US are willing to work with the international community to provide assistance to the DPRK to combat the virus," they said in a joint statement.

Experts have warned of a major health crisis in the North, which has one of the world's worst healthcare systems. The impoverished country has poorly equipped hospitals, few intensive care units and no COVID treatment drugs or mass-testing capability. Yoon said the offer of aid was being made according to "humanitarian principles, separate from political and military issues" with Pyongyang. The two leaders separately announced they would look at ramping up joint military exercises in response to the "threat" posed by North Korea, a suggestion likely to enrage Pyongyang, which views the drills as rehearsals for invasion. —AFP



**SYLHET:** Rickshaw pullers transport customers along a flooded street following heavy rainfalls in Sylhet. —AFP

## Two million stranded as worst floods hit Bangladesh northeast

**SYLHET:** Rivers in Bangladesh have burst their banks and caused the worst floods in the country's northeast for nearly two decades, with about two million people marooned by rising waters, officials said Saturday.

Floodwater rushing from India's northeast breached a major embankment on the Barak River, inundating at least 100 villages at Zakiganj in Bangladesh, said Mosharrar Hossain, the chief government administrator of the Sylhet region. "Some two million people have been stranded by floods so far," he told AFP, adding that at least 10 people have been killed this week.

Many parts of Bangladesh are prone to flooding, and experts say that climate change is increasing the likelihood of extreme weather events around the world. Every extra degree of global warming increases

es the amount of water in the atmosphere by about seven percent, with inevitable effects on rainfall.

In Zakiganj bus driver Shamim Ahmed, 50, told AFP: "My house is under waist deep water. There is no drinking water, we are harvesting rain water. Rain is simultaneously a blessing and a curse for us now." People were seen fishing on submerged roads and some residents took their cattle to flood shelters. All the furniture in widow Lalila Begum's home was ruined, she said, but she and her two daughters were staying put, hoping the waters would recede within a day or two.

"My two daughters and I put one bed on another and are living on top of it," she said. "There's scarcity of food. We're sharing one person's food and one meal a day." Floodwater has entered many parts of Sylhet city, the largest in the northeast, where another official told AFP about 50,000 families had been without power for days.

Hossain, the chief administrator, said the flooding was driven by both rains and the onrush of water from across the border in the Indian state of Assam. But officials said the broken embankment on the border at Zakiganj could only be fixed once the water level dropped. —AFP

## Iraq irrigation reservoir close to drying out

**HAMRIN:** Iraq's Lake Hamrin, a once-vast reservoir northeast of Baghdad that is the sole source of water for irrigation across Diyala province, has nearly dried out, a senior official said Friday. Successive years of low rainfall and a sharp reduction in the flow of water down the Sirwan River from neighbouring Iran have reduced much of the lake to a dust bowl, the official told AFP.

"There has been a sharp reduction in the water level-reserves currently stand at 130 million cubic metres against two billion cubic metres normally," said Aoun Dhiab, a senior adviser in the water ministry. Dhiab said a number of factors were to blame including the prolonged drought and Iranian dam construction and river diversion projects upstream.

Dhiab said it was not the first time water levels had fallen so low. "In 2009, the lake dried out completely. There was just a stream." He said the impact on surrounding farmland should not be underestimated. "There are no other sources of water in the province-the volume arriving in Lake Hamrin is the volume used in the province."

He said the government had asked Iran to increase the flow of water across the border. Otherwise all that could be done was to pray for higher rainfall next year. The problem is not exclusive to Diyala province. The World Bank predicts that without major changes, Iraq will have lost 20 percent of its water resources by 2020. The country is classified as one of five most vulnerable to climate change effects and desertification. Water shortages have led this year to reduced quotas for rice and wheat farmers. Iraq's upstream neighbours Iran, Turkey and Syria experience similar shortfalls, meaning that its appeals for help generally fall unheeded. —AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2022

## Hive mind: Tunisia beekeepers abuzz over early warning system

### SmartBee device helps prevent beehives from environmental variables

TESTOUR, Tunisia: Elias Chebbi inspected a beehive in a field in Tunisia minutes after a buzz on his phone warned him of a potential problem. The 39-year-old beekeeper opened a flap in the hive to reveal a low-cost, locally made sensor dedicated to measuring key environmental variables. An app on his phone then warns him if action needs to be taken. "Thanks to this, I can relax," he said. "It tells me remotely everything that's happening."

Chebbi has two of the sensors, entirely produced in Tunisia by the only company of its kind in North Africa. He periodically places one in each of the 100 or so hives he keeps, on a grassy hillside an hour's drive from the capital Tunis. The devices, each costing under 300 Tunisian dinars (around 92 euros), send live updates on temperature, humidity and the weight of the hive to a central computer.

It then analyses the data and helps him react quickly to potential problems—as well as selecting the most resilient, productive queens for breeding. That is a major asset as bee colonies face multiple threats, including climate change and increasingly common collapses of entire hives.

#### Key role of bees

Chebbi remembers being stung by a sudden heatwave in 2013, before he started using the system, when he lost around a quarter of his hives. "I had big losses, 26 hives, because of humidity and the sudden change in temperature," he said. But since he started using the SmartBee system—developed in 2020 by a group of young Tunisian engineering graduates—his losses have dropped dramatically, to under 10 percent of his hives in a given year.



"Thanks to this, I can relax,"

He has also boosted his honey production by 30-40 percent. Today, Khaled Bouchoucha, 34-year-old CEO of manufacturer Beekeeper Tech, says the sensors gather "a huge amount of information on the bees' yield and the threats they face". The gadgets "gather reliable data in real time, so beekeepers can make good decisions and avoid collapse of their hives", he said.

This data is then fed wirelessly to the company's cloud computing system, which analyses it to identify potential problems. If it does, it sends a warning to the beekeeper to intervene—by cooling overheating hives, adding insulation to those that are dangerously cold, or providing sugar solution to those whose weight shows that they have not produced enough honey to survive the winter.

Beekeeper Tech has sold over 1,000 of the systems, mostly in Tunisia and neighboring countries. Bouchoucha says customers are swarming to the app and the firm's workers are preparing another 1,500 orders for customers in Libya, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and even New Zealand.

#### Boosting food security

Bee populations around the world are facing disaster from overuse of pesticides, mites and temperature extremes due to climate change. That also spells catastrophe for humans, as we depend on pollination by bees for over a quarter of all the food we consume. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, three quarters of the world's main crops depend on pollinators—but the insects are in decline worldwide, mostly due to human activities.

Beekeeping itself is also a vital livelihood for



TESTOUR, Tunisia: Tunisian beekeeper Elias Chebbi who uses a locally-made SmartBee device that remotely monitors internal factors in real time and accesses key performance indicators inside his hives, holds a honeycomb in the northern Tunisian area of Testour, in the Beja province. — AFP

many. In Tunisia, with its population of 11 million, the sector employs some 13,000 people and produces some 2,800 tons of honey every year, according to its agricultural union.

The FAO marks a World Bee Day every year on May 20 to raise awareness about "the essential role bees and other pollinators play in keeping people and the planet healthy."

The SmartBee app offers more than an early warning system. The data it collects also tells bee-

keepers about the health and productivity of each hive, its resistance to changes in climate.

Mnaouer Djemali, chief scientific officer at the National Agronomic Institute of Tunisia and a co-founder of Beekeeper Tech, said data from the hives "enables us to measure the profitability of each queen" and to select the best for breeding. "That can help us boost our food security and sovereignty," he said. "We are sorely in need of that in a world full of diseases and wars." — AFP

## Russia halts gas supplies to Finland

MOSCOW: Russia on Saturday stopped providing natural gas to neighboring Finland, which has angered Moscow by applying for NATO membership, after the Nordic country refused to pay supplier Gazprom in rubles. Following Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has asked clients from "unfriendly countries"—including EU member states—to pay for gas in rubles, a way to sidestep Western financial sanctions against its central bank.

Gazprom said in a statement Saturday that it had "completely stopped gas deliveries" as it had not received ruble payments from Finland's state-owned energy company Gasum "by the end of the working day on May 20". Gazprom said it had supplied 1.49 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Finland in 2021,

equal to about two thirds of the country's gas consumption. However, natural gas accounts for around eight percent of Finland's energy.

Gasum said it would make up for the shortfall from other sources through the Balticconnector pipeline, which links Finland to Estonia, and assured that filling stations would run normally.

"Natural gas supplies to Finland under Gasum's supply contract have been cut off," the company said in a statement. In April, Gazprom Export demanded that future payments in the supply contract be made in rubles instead of euros. Gasum rejected the demand and announced on Tuesday it was taking the issue to arbitration.

Gazprom Export said it would defend its interests in court by any "means available". Gasum said it would be able to secure gas from other sources and that gas filling stations in the network area would continue "normal operation".

#### Rift over NATO bid

In efforts to mitigate the risks of relying on Russian energy exports, the

Finnish government on Friday also announced it had signed a 10-year lease agreement for an LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminal ship with US-based Exxcelerate Energy. On Sunday, Russia suspended electricity supplies to Finland overnight after its energy firm RAO Nordic claimed payment arrears, although the shortfall was quickly replaced.

Finland, along with neighboring Sweden, this week broke its historical military non-alignment and applied for NATO membership, after public and political support for the western alliance soared following the invasion of Ukraine.

Moscow has warned Finland that any NATO membership application would be "a grave mistake with far-reaching consequences". Both Finland and Sweden are seemingly on the fast track to joining the military alliance, with US President Joe Biden offering "full, total, complete backing" to their bids.

But all 30 existing NATO members must agree on any new entrants, and Turkey has condemned the Nordic neighbors' alleged toleration of Kurdish



IMATRA, Finland: In this file photo taken on May 12, 2022 pipes at the Gasum plant are pictured in Raikkola, Imatra, Finland. Russia on May 20 stopped providing natural gas to neighboring Finland, which has angered Moscow by applying for NATO membership, after the Nordic country refused to pay supplier Gazprom in rubles. — AFP

militants and has so far voiced opposition to letting them in. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has said the Kremlin would respond to any NATO expansion by creating more military

bases in western Russia. Saturday's halt to gas shipments follows Moscow cutting off Poland and Bulgaria last month in a move the European Union described as "blackmail". —AFP

## UAE's ADNOC announces new oil discoveries

ABU DHABI: The state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) announced that multiple onshore oil discoveries are in place, totaling 650 million barrels of oil. It said that it includes 500 million barrels of oil in place at Abu Dhabi's largest onshore field - Bu Hasa. Bu Hasa is part of the ADNOC Onshore Concession and is operated by ADNOC Onshore.

Additionally, 100 million barrels were discovered in Onshore Block 3 operated by Occidental. In 2019, ADNOC awarded the US-based Occidental Petroleum the Onshore Block 3. Occidental was handed a 35-year concession and invest \$244 million during the exploration phase of the block, which spans an area of 5,782 sq km in the Al-Dhafra region of Abu Dhabi. It announced that around 50 million barrels were discovered in the Al-Dhafra Petroleum Concession offering the potential to develop more premium Muruban grade oil. The Al-Dhafra Petroleum Concession is operated by Al-Dhafra Petroleum, a joint venture between ADNOC, the Korea National Oil Company (KNOC) and GS Energy. —Agencies

## Lebanon cabinet passes financial recovery plan

BEIRUT: The cabinet of bankrupt Lebanon, at its final session on Friday, passed a financial recovery plan needed to secure international aid, but its implementation will depend on the fractious incoming parliament. The session came five days after Lebanon held its first election since an economic crisis, widely blamed on corruption and negligence by the ruling elite, dragged the country to the brink of becoming a failed state.

"Any delay in implementing the financial recovery plan will be very costly to Lebanese," Prime Minister

## Moody's cuts Ukraine debt rating again

KYIV: Moody's on Friday cut Ukraine's debt rating for the second time in three months and lowered the outlook to negative due to the growing risk the Russian invasion will affect the nation's debt sustainability. The ratings agency cut the grade a notch to Caa3, after lowering it two notches from

Najib Mikati said at a press conference after cabinet met. The International Monetary Fund and Lebanon in April struck a conditional deal for \$3 billion in aid. Enacting reforms, including a financial recovery plan, is one of many prerequisites for the package, and analysts have expressed scepticism that the reforms can take place.

It will be up to the new government and parliament to implement the plan approved by the outgoing cabinet. The financial plan passed by ministers includes restructuring and recapitalizing the banking system, and protecting small depositors "as much as possible", according to an official five-page document seen by AFP.

Sunday's election yielded a polarized and fragmented legislature likely prone to the kind of deadlock that has characterized Lebanese politics for decades. This could complicate the formation of a new government and delay implementation of the reforms.

B3 in early March, saying the country could face "a more protracted military conflict than Moody's initially expected" following the invasion in late February.

That "increases the likelihood of a debt restructuring and losses being imposed on private-sector creditors," the statement said. Despite large financial support from the international community to help with immediate needs, "the resulting significant rise in government debt is likely to prove unsustainable over the medium term" and could "impede further access to official financing."

The US Congress on Thursday approved a gargantuan \$40-billion aid package for Ukraine to help

Lebanon has been battered by triple-digit inflation, soaring poverty rates and the collapse of its currency since a 2020 debt default. In a move adding to the economic pain, cabinet also raised telecom prices. Starting July, the internet bill of Lebanon residents will more than double, as will mobile phone bills. Telecommunications Minister Johnny Corm warned Thursday the cash-strapped sector might collapse if there were no hikes, because current prices were set according to pre-inflation rates.

The outgoing Lebanese cabinet will continue to function with limited caretaker powers until a new one is formed, a process that could take months. "I call on elected lawmakers to expedite the formation of a new government," Mikati said. Also on Friday, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated their call for "structural reforms" in Lebanon. — AFP

fight Russia and keep the government operating, after a \$14-billion package in March. The International Monetary Fund in March approved a \$1.4-billion aid package for the war-torn country, while the World Bank has approved a loan of \$350 million as part of a total package of more than \$700 million.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his government needs \$7 billion a month to keep its economy afloat, while Moody's estimates Ukraine faces financing needs of around \$50 billion this year. The agency expects the country's economy to contract by 35 percent this year as the war does massive damage to its productive capacity, in addition to the heavy human toll. — AFP



## Business

# Irish PM urges UK to abide by post-Brexit trade deal

## Washington warns London its brinkmanship with Europe threatens peace

**BELFAST:** Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin urged the UK government to stand by its post-Brexit trade commitments in Northern Ireland, as Washington warned London its brinkmanship with Europe threatens peace. Martin was visiting Belfast following anger on both sides of the Atlantic at a UK pledge to overhaul the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol, agreed as part of its Brexit divorce deal with the European Union.

Its requirement for checks on goods arriving from England, Scotland and Wales has infuriated unionists in Northern Ireland, who say it drives a wedge between the province and the rest of the UK.

They are refusing to join a new power-sharing government in Belfast until the issue is resolved, forcing its suspension. "There is no substitute for a substantive series of negotiations between the European Union and the United Kingdom government in respect of solving issues in relation to the protocol," Martin told reporters in the Northern Ireland capital.

"We believe there can be a resolution of issues... but the only way to do that is through a negotiated settlement." Hours earlier Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, warned that the UK could forget about a free trade deal if it rewrites the protocol.

"It is deeply concerning that the United Kingdom now seeks to unilaterally discard the Northern Ireland Protocol, which preserves the important progress and stability forged by the (1998 Good Friday) Accords," which ended decades of bloodshed in the province, Pelosi tweeted. "If the United Kingdom chooses to undermine the Good Friday Accords, the Congress cannot and will not support a bilateral free trade agreement with the UK."

### 'Committed'

A US Congress delegation jetted into Brussels on Friday and presented a united front against the UK with European Commission vice-president Maros Sefcovic. "We're equally committed to protecting the Good Friday



**BELFAST, UK:** Ireland's Prime Minister Micheal Martin speaks with members of the media after a series of meetings with the main Stormont parties to discuss the Northern Ireland Protocol and the assembly crisis, at the Grand Central Hotel in Belfast. — AFP

(Belfast) Agreement," Sefcovic tweeted. "Joint solutions implementing the Protocol are the only way to do so."

"The greatest strength between the United States and the @EU\_Commission is our unity," wrote US congressman Richard Neal. Britain says the protocol needs changing to end the political paralysis in Northern Ireland, and that its plans are a backup if talks fail with Brussels.

Martin earlier dismissed accusations that the EU was being inflexible and urged the biggest unionist party to

rejoin the executive in Belfast. Nationalists Sinn Fein are the biggest party for the first time in Northern Ireland's history.

Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill is set to become first minister in the executive. The position has equal power to the deputy first minister to ensure a balance of power between unionists and nationalists but her nomination is hugely symbolic as it has the post has never been held before by a pro-Irish nationalist party. "The European Union has said repeatedly that we can move on issues,"

## China cuts key mortgage reference rate as COVID bites

**BEIJING:** China on Friday announced it would cut a key interest rate in a boost to home buyers and debt-mired developers as the country's economy is slowed by COVID-19 restrictions ripping across major cities. Prolonged virus lockdowns have constricted supply chains, quelled demand and stalled manufacturing in the last major economy welded to a zero-COVID approach to the pandemic.

The five-year loan prime rate (LPR) — which many lenders base their mortgage rates — was trimmed to 4.45 percent from 4.6 percent, China's central bank said on Friday. Since the rate is "the benchmark for pricing most mortgages, we think the move is aimed at supporting housing demand," Julian Evans-Pritchard, an analyst at Capital Economics, said.

The cut "should help drive a revival in housing sales." The one-year loan prime rate, which guides how much interest commercial banks charge to corporate borrowers, remained unchanged at 3.7 percent.

The reduction in the mortgage reference rate comes as a wave of defaults ripples through the country's real estate sector, with developers sagging under massive debts and struggling with a slump in demand. Sunac, one of China's largest developers to default on payments in

recent months, said last week that sales in major cities had fallen dramatically in March and April due to the coronavirus wave. Economic data this week highlighted the stark impact of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns in many major Chinese cities. Figures on Monday showed retail sales and factory output last month slumped the most since the start of the pandemic, while unemployment edged back toward its February 2020 peak. The haircut to the LPR was greater than the market expected, analysts said, as China's planners try to inject life into a slowing economy.

"Monthly economic indicators published recently suggest severe growth pressure," according to Chaoping Zhu, global market strategist at JP Morgan Asset Management. "Aside from weakness in consumption, industrial production and investment activities, the sharp decline in bank loans reveals a more fundamental challenge — a lack of confidence among both corporate and household sectors." 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.

Borders remain closed to most foreigners and a slew of international sports events have been scrapped over pandemic concerns. China's premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday called for government departments to "step up their sense of urgency" and said "new measures that can be used should be used" to prop up the world's second-largest economy.

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 its economy lost steam in the latter half of last year. — AFP



**BEIJING:** China on Friday announced it would cut a key interest rate in a boost to home buyers and debt-mired developers as the country's economy is slowed by COVID-19 restrictions ripping across major cities.

## Hyundai to build \$5.5bn electric vehicle plant in US

**SEOUL:** South Korean automaker Hyundai will build a \$5.5 billion electric vehicle and battery plant in the southern US state of Georgia, its governor announced Friday, as President Joe Biden pursued his trip to Seoul. Brian Kemp made the announcement alongside Hyundai Motor Company president Jay Chang at the future factory site near Savannah, hailing the more than 8,000 jobs the venture is expected to create. "We are proud to welcome Hyundai Motor Group to Georgia as we forge an innovative future together," Kemp said, according to a statement released by his office. He called the plant "the largest economic development project in our state's history."

Hyundai suppliers are expected to invest an additional \$1 billion in the factory, which will have an annual capacity of 300,000 units, according to the statement. The automaker said it plans to begin construction in January 2023 and to complete the plant in the

first half of 2025. It did not yet give any details on which of its electric models will be produced at the Georgia location.

"This new EV plant is the future of our business, and it will help us meet the growing demands of our US customers," Chang said in the statement. Hyundai has projected that 27 percent of its global fleet will be electric within seven years. By building battery production into the new factory, Hyundai "aims to establish a stable supply chain for EV battery and other EV components in the US market," the statement said. Biden arrived on Friday in South Korea, on a trip aimed at cementing economic ties with Seoul. He is due to meet with Chang on Sunday, according to the White House.

The Hyundai plant will be the second electric vehicle factory in Georgia: electric truck maker Rivian announced in December that it will invest \$5 billion to build its second US assembly plant there.

Hyundai aims to be the third-largest provider of electric vehicles in the United States by 2026, but it faces stiff competition. The sector is currently dominated by Tesla, but traditional automakers General Motors and Ford plan to invest tens of billions of dollars to increase their electric offerings in the coming years, and many start-ups are also trying to break into the industry. — AFP

Martin told BBC radio. He accused the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of holding the assembly to ransom by refusing to nominate ministers after recent elections.

"We can't have a situation where one political party determines that the other political parties can't convene in a parliament," Martin added. But DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson said the Brexit protocol had tipped the delicate balance in Northern Ireland that is needed for power-sharing to work.

"Power-sharing only works with the consent of unionists and nationalists," he told the BBC.

"There must be new arrangements if we are to move forward... the protocol has damaged both Northern Ireland's economic and democratic arrangements. "It must be replaced by arrangements that can command the support of unionists as well as nationalists."

### Green channel?

The protocol recognized Northern Ireland's status as a fragile, post-conflict territory that shares the UK's new land border with the European Union. Keeping the border open with neighboring Ireland, an EU member, was mandated in the Good Friday Agreement, given that the frontier was a frequent flashpoint during three decades of violence. But it means checks have to be carried out elsewhere, to prevent goods getting into the EU single market and customs union by the back door via Northern Ireland.

The UK proposes creating a "green channel" for British traders to send goods to Northern Ireland without making any customs declaration to the EU. US interest stems from the fact that it helped broker the Good Friday Agreement. But Pelosi's warnings appeared to irk some in the UK's ruling Conservatives, as well as unionists in Northern Ireland.

"If Nancy Pelosi wants to see the agreement protected then she needs to recognize that it is the protocol that is harming and undermining the agreement and that is why we need to deal with it," Donaldson said. — AFP

## IMF bailout is 'indispensable' for Tunisia: CB

**TUNIS:** Tunisia has no choice but to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund as it battles a surging budget deficit made worse by the war in Ukraine, its central bank governor said Friday. As the conflict has sent global commodities prices spiraling, the import-dependent North African country has adjusted its budget deficit projections from 6.7 percent to 9.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product, Marouane Abassi told a conference in the coastal business hub of Sfax.

He blamed the jump on "the Russian-Ukrainian crisis" which has dramatically bumped up prices of both wheat and energy imports, on which Tunisia depends heavily. To prevent these costs hitting the poorest households in a country where the minimum monthly wage is equivalent to just 125 euros, the Tunisian state subsidizes bread and fuel. But the country is mired in debt equal to almost 100 percent of GDP after years of feeble growth, and is no longer able to borrow on global capital markets. A new IMF deal — the third in a decade — is therefore "indispensable" for Tunisia, Abassi said.

"It would allow access to financing at reasonable costs" and pave the way to loans "from other lenders and the international financial markets." After the COVID-19 pandemic dealt Tunisia an "unprecedented" 8.7 percent hit to GDP in 2020, the country managed a "modest" comeback last year with growth of just over three percent, he said, forecasting 2.6 percent growth this year. The Ukraine war has hiked grain prices in a country where bread is a vital part of the diet and where historic hikes on the price of a loaf have sparked riots. The conflict has also sent oil and gas prices surging, with a barrel of oil costing over \$110 — far above the \$75 per barrel projected in Tunisia's 2022 budget.

It has impacted Tunisia's exports, hitting demand in the country's main export market, the European Union. As well as a grinding economic downturn, Tunisia has faced years of political deadlock culminating in a power grab by President Kais Saied in July last year.

In exchange for a bailout of around \$4 billion, the IMF has called for far-reaching changes including a freeze on the public sector wage bill, subsidy reforms and a restructuring of publicly owned companies.

### Somalia funding

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund has agreed to extend the duration of a crucial aid package to Somalia, a senior official said, following a long-overdue presidential election last weekend. The three-year \$400-million (380-million-euro) aid package from the IMF had been set to automatically expire on May 17 if a new administration was not in place by then, with multiple election delays adding to the heavily indebted country's turmoil. But last week the IMF Executive Board accepted the Somali government's request for a three-month extension until August 17, giving newly-elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's government time to examine and endorse planned reforms.

"The extension will provide the time needed to confirm policy understandings with the new government and confirm financing assurances with development partners," Laura Jaramillo Mayor, the IMF's mission chief for Somalia, told AFP in an email sent late Thursday.

Somalia's international partners have welcomed the election of President Mohamud, with many hoping it will draw a line under a long-running political crisis that has distracted the government from other threats, including a violent insurgency and a devastating drought. Under the terms of the IMF program, Somalia's debt could fall to \$557 million as early as 2023, Jaramillo told AFP in an interview in February. — AFP



**NOVA KAKHOVKA, Ukraine:** This photo taken on May 20, 2022, shows a view of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant, Kherson Oblast, amid the ongoing Russian military action in Ukraine. — AFP

## A naval corridor for Ukraine cargo ships? Easier said than done

**PARIS:** Fears over global food shortages as the Ukraine war grinds on is spurring calls for a safe corridor for ships to exit the Black Sea, but the logistics are daunting and would need Russian cooperation.

Dozens of container ships are blocked in Ukrainian ports that are surrounded by Russian forces, choking off exports of wheat, sunflower oil and other foodstuffs, as well as fertilizer for crops. That has already sent prices rising and the United Nations warns that millions of people are at risk of malnutrition or even famine.

"Stop blocking the ports in the Black Sea. Allow for the free flow of ships and trains and trucks carrying food out of Ukraine," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a UN Security Council meeting on Thursday. "About 400 million people throughout the world depend on grain supplies from Ukraine," Serhii Dvornyk, a member of Ukraine's mission to the UN, told the meeting. "We demand that Russia stop illicit grain stealing, unblock Ukrainian seaports, restore freedom of navigation and allow trade ships to pass," he said. Russia denies the claims, yet such assurances are not about to be tested by shipping firms hoping to get vessels to and from Ukraine. A Western diplomatic source told AFP around 20 million tons of grain are currently blocked in Ukraine and trying to send out such quantities by truck or rail is not feasible.

### Pressure on Putin

"In concert with the UN, we are working to create a safe conduct for Ukrainian boats transporting grain," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in New York on Wednesday. Turkey is trying to act as a mediator with Russian President Vladimir Putin but Francois Heisbourg of the Paris-based Foundation for Strategic Research said broader support was needed for a UN resolution that would force Moscow to accept a naval corridor. "The ones who should be pressing on the food blockade issue are the big importers in Asia (eg Indonesia), MENA (eg Egypt) and West Africa," he wrote on Thursday on Twitter, referring to the Middle East and North Africa.

James Stavridis, the US Navy admiral who was NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe from 2009 to 2013, said the solution could be escorted convoys as during Operation Earnest Will, which protected Gulf oil tankers during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. But in a strategic review published by Bloomberg this month, he acknowledged that Putin might insist on trying "to sever the Ukrainian economy from global markets." — AFP

## Business

# Davos returns under Ukraine cloud after COVID-19 break

## Ukraine war set to dominate World Economic Forum

**DAVOS:** The world's political and business elite will hobnob in Davos next week after a two-year break caused by COVID, with the Ukraine war set to dominate the exclusive Swiss mountain summit. The world has changed drastically since the last time the World Economic Forum took place in person at the ski resort in January 2020.

At the time, US President Donald Trump and climate campaigner Greta Thunberg headlined the show and the coronavirus had yet to spread widely outside China. Since then, the outbreak in China turned into a pandemic that rocked the global economy, Trump lost the US election to Joe Biden, countries have endured climate change-driven weather disasters, inflation has surged and Russia invaded Ukraine.

After a virtual forum in 2021 and the postponement of this year's in-person event due to the Omicron variant, the WEF returns to its Davos den on Monday under the theme "History at a Turning Point".

But the hub of cheerleaders of capitalism and globalization will lack its usual scenic snowy backdrop-and the usual Russian contingent. President Vladimir Putin spoke at the online meeting last year, but organizers decided to exclude Russians this time as Western powers have imposed sanctions on Moscow over the Ukraine conflict. Instead, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will address the summit via video link while around a dozen officials from his country will attend in person.

WEF founder Klaus Schwab said it would be "the most timely and consequential" meeting since the creation of the forum more than 50 years ago. "Russia's aggression on the country will be seen in future history books as the breakdown of the post-World War II and post-Cold War order," Schwab

said in a pre-summit briefing, adding that Davos will do what it can to support Ukraine and its recovery.

WEF president Borge Brende said that excluding the Russians from the forum was "the right decision".

"We do hope, though, that Russia will follow a different path ... in the years to come to start to stick to the UN charter and to their international obligations," Brende said.

### Few stars

More than 50 heads of state or government will be among the 2,500 delegates ranging from business leaders to academics and civil society figures attending the four-day gathering. Some of the biggest names include Germany's new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen, NATO head Jens Stoltenberg and US climate envoy John Kerry.

While war will overshadow the meeting, the forum will also have panels on everything from climate change to rising energy prices, global supply chain problems, gender inequality, poverty, football and the metaverse. This year's meeting, though, lacks some of the star power of the past. Some, such as Chinese President Xi Jinping, spoke in a virtual version in January.

"I am sure that this is kind of a disappointment," said Adrienne Sorbom, co-author of "Discreet Power", a book on the World Economic Forum. "I think that the discreet diplomacy that the... forum arranges for is one of the things that is truly to the heart of the forum and what Klaus Schwab sees as his greatest achievement," said Sorbom, a sociology professor at Stockholm University.

While the forum's relevance is questioned every year, it keeps attracting titans of industry and government leaders-as well as some of its biggest crit-



The logo of the World Economic Forum (WEF) is pictured during the Davos Agenda 2022, in Cologne near Geneva, Switzerland, 18 January 2022.

ics. When Sorbom attended Davos in 2014, "business leaders were saying, 'if you're not here you do not exist'." "Everyone that wants to be someone needs to go there," she said.

### 'Festival of wealth'

The forum has produced some consequential moments. It hosted the first ministerial meetings between North and South Korea in 1989 as well as talks between South Africa's apartheid-era president F. W. de Klerk and then dissident Nelson Mandela in 1992. The forum, however, regularly

faces criticism as evidence of the cozy relationship between the political and corporate elite.

"At this Davos, at this festival of wealth, I think we're going to see just how profoundly unequal our world has become," said Nabil Ahmed, head of strategy at global charity Oxfam.

But Oxfam, which is pushing for taxes on the rich, is also among Davos regulars. "I think it's important to go to Davos to challenge power, to put forward hard facts, to talk directly to these governments and corporations and amplify the voices they're not listening to," Ahmed said. "That's why we go." —AFP

## NBK Capital named Refinitiv Lipper Fund Awards Kuwait 2022

**KUWAIT:** NBK Capital has been named the Refinitiv Lipper Fund Awards Kuwait 2022, winner of six awards for the NBK Kuwait Equity Fund, as Best Equity Kuwait Fund over three, five and ten years in the categories of MENA Markets Fund Awards and MENA Markets Domestic Fund Awards.

For more than 30 years and in over 17 countries worldwide, the highly respected Refinitiv Lipper Awards have honored funds and fund management firms that have excelled in providing consistently strong risk-adjusted performance relative to their peers and focus the investment world on top-funds. The merit of the winners is based on entirely objective, quantitative criteria. This coupled with the unmatched depth of fund data, results in a unique level of prestige and ensures the award has lasting value. Renowned fund data and proprietary methodology is the foundation of this prestigious award qualification, recognizing excellence in fund management.

On this occasion, Shadi Khadder, Head of MENA Asset Management at NBK Capital said, "We are proud of this recognition which is an important testament to the great abilities of our award-winning asset management team and being the leader in Kuwait and one of the best in the Gulf region. It reflects the success of our investment philosophy that focuses on sustainable capital growth and sound investment strategies. Winning these prestigious awards is an additional evidence of the team's professional experience, proven track record over more than 12 years, and the strong performance of our



Shadi Khadder

Kuwait and Gulf Equity investment products."

Khadder added, "NBK Capital's leading industry position comes as a result of its relentless pursuit of developing innovative solutions that cater to our clients' needs and objectives and achieve rewarding financial returns in the long-run."

Khadder concluded his statement by thanking the Asset

Management team, whose efforts and hard work have resulted in distinguished results culminated in winning Lipper Awards for the second year in a row. Robert Jenkins, Head of Research, Lipper, Refinitiv stated: "The 2022 Refinitiv Lipper Fund Awards recognize award winning managers who are successfully facing down market factors not seen in decades including rising inflation, a thinning labor pool and continuing constraints on the global supply chain. Markets are ebbing and flowing along with the sentiments and emotions of investors as the pandemic continues to cloud outlooks and change perspectives. Fund managers find themselves looking beyond earnings statements and factoring in impacts of viral waves - making active management more challenging than ever. We applaud the 2022 Refinitiv Lipper Fund Award winners such as NBK Capital for delivering outperformance and the accompanying comfort of consistency to investors' portfolios in a time of unprecedented change."

NBK Capital is a leading asset manager in the region, having more than US\$7.8 billion assets under management locally, regionally and globally, as of 31 March 2022 it has professional investment teams located in Kuwait and several other markets in the GCC.

\$3.5 billion in the renewable, revolving credit line. "I am delighted that Chile has accepted the Fund's offer of an SLL, becoming the first user of this special and innovative instrument," IMF Deputy Managing Director Bo Li said in a statement.

"Chile has very strong fundamentals and policy frameworks, and a sustained track record of implementing policies that have supported the country's resilience in the face of large shocks."

Disbursements under the credit line are not phased nor tied to compliance with policy targets as in regular IMF-supported programs. Chile also exited the \$24-billion, two-year Flexible Credit Line arrangement that the IMF approved in May 2020.

The two programs have the same criteria for qualification and are designed to help prevent a crisis by allowing funds to be readily available. However, only five countries have used the FCL. —AFP

and economic indicators.

"However, these figures still show a continued longer-term downward trend. "April's rise was driven by an increase in supermarket sales, led by alcohol and tobacco and sweet treats, with off-licenses also reporting a boost, possibly due to people staying in more to save money." Inflation rocketed in April to 9.0 percent, the highest since 1982, driven largely by soaring domestic energy prices.

The squeeze on UK household budgets tightened further in April after a British tax hike as the government looks to improve state coffers battered by COVID support. "The unexpectedly strong rise in retail sales in April suggests that the cost of living crisis has not caused consumer spending to collapse and means that the economy may have a little more momentum than we thought," noted Capital Economics analyst Nicholas Farr. Pantheon Macroeconomics analyst Samuel Tombs cautioned that the worst was perhaps yet to come. —AFP

## KFH holds training program for new recruits

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) inaugurated a comprehensive training program for a new batch of Kuwaiti youth recruits in line with KFH's keenness to attract, develop and qualify national talent according to the highest levels of quality and excellence resulting in providing outstanding customer service.

Mohammed Al-Musalam, Executive Manager - Talent Management at KFH stated that the program would continue for one month where the new recruits will be trained on banking products including accounts, cards, deposits and digital banking services. The training program includes an introduction to the concepts of Islamic Banking, Shariah-compliant banking products and a variety of workshops on the basics of customer service excellence.

Al-Musalam noted that the training program contributes in preparing KFH's Talent in the best manner and in accordance with KFH standards and foundations, bearing in mind that 95 percent of the



Mohammed Al-Musalam

training program is delivered by internal trainers where KFH is proud to have highly qualified and experienced talent in their line of work who can add value and enrich the knowledge of the new recruits in the Islamic financial services, thus empower them to optimally serve customers.

It is worth mentioning that the new recruits

undergo several exams throughout the training program to ensure KFH reaps the best results through raising employees' efficiency, strengthening their skills, developing their experiences, enriching their banking knowledge, which will put them on the right track to perform their customer service duties in the best possible manner, using the latest e-banking programs and tools which will result in the achievement of KPI's and Efficiency targets.

Al-Musalam concluded that KFH emphasizes on empowering its Human Resources through training programs in various fields to provide the best tools that further improves KFH's performance.

## IMF extends first short-term credit line for Chile

**WASHINGTON:** The IMF board on Friday granted its first short-term credit line to Chile, a new tool meant to serve as a backstop anytime a country faces a sudden funding need. The one-year Short-term Liquidity Line, created in 2020, is only available to qualified countries with a strong policy track record, who can draw on the funds at any time, the IMF said.

Chile accepted the global lender's offer to sign up for the new facility and will be able to tap about

## UK retail sales rebound but outlook gloomy

**LONDON:** British retail sales unexpectedly rebounded in April, data showed Friday, but remain on a long-term downward trend amid a cost-of-living crisis that saw inflation rocket to a 40-year high. Total sales volumes jumped 1.4 percent last month after a 1.2-percent drop in March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

However, sales fell 0.3 percent in the three months to April compared the previous three months, extending a downward trend in place since summer 2021 according to the ONS. "Retail sales picked up in April after last month's fall," said Heather Bovill, ONS deputy director for surveys



## Japan inflation hits 7-year high

**TOKYO:** Japan's core consumer prices posted their biggest jump in seven years in April, official data showed Friday, as global commodity prices soared and the yen slumped against the dollar.

The core consumer price index, which excludes fresh food, jumped 2.1 percent year-on-year, according to figures released by the internal affairs ministry. It was the first time since March 2015 that the figure has breached the 2.0 percent set by the Bank of Japan as its long-term inflation target.

The reading, against market expectations of 2.0 percent, is the eighth consecutive monthly increase following a 0.8 percent rise in March. And excluding energy, prices were up 0.8 percent in April, against market expectations of a 0.7 percent rise. That was the first positive figure since July 2020, underpinning the impact of skyrocketing energy costs which have been magnified by higher import prices. After years of price stagnation, some manufacturers and stores in Japan who rely on imported resources have begun to raise prices.

Last month, the Bank of Japan hiked its full-year inflation forecast but cautioned that it sees rising prices, driven by a surge in commodity costs partly caused by the Ukraine war, as a temporary and volatile trend. Despite climbing prices and a slump in

the yen to a 20-year low against the dollar, the bank left its ultra-loose monetary policy unchanged.

The bank argues that the price rises are not likely to last and therefore do not mean its inflation target has been achieved. Some economists agree, with UBS economists Masamichi Adachi and Go Kurihara saying "goods-driven inflation is unlikely to be sustainable" and "upside risk appears limited especially in energy prices."

Others pointed out that last month's leap was driven in large part by a plunge last April in mobile phone fees. Rising energy prices and other hikes are squeezing Japanese consumers and businesses, with Japan's 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. Bank of Japan's governor Haruhiko Kuroda has repeatedly said there is no need to change the central bank's super-loose monetary policy aimed at battling the country's decades of deflation or weak inflation and shoring up the economy.

"Importantly, we expect no significant rise in wage growth and inflation expectations," the UBS economists said. "We thus believe two percent inflation this time is unsustainable," they said. That combination of factors is likely to mean the central bank will not shift tack, said Marcel Thiellant, senior Japan economist at Capital Economics. "With GDP yet to surpass its pre-virus level and wage growth still subdued, that won't convince the Bank that tighter monetary policy is required," he said in a note. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A sculpture of the late Virgil Abloh, the founder of Off-White and the Men's Artistic Director of Louis Vuitton, at the Greenpoint Terminal Warehouse.



Shoes are on display during an immersive exhibition showcasing 47 limited editions of the Nike 'Air Force 1' sneakers created by Virgil Abloh in partnership with Nike for Louis Vuitton May 20, 2022 at the Greenpoint Terminal Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York. — AFP photos

## NY sneaker expo presents some of Abloh's last works

Some of Virgil Abloh's final creations will be on public display in New York in an expo that also confers further mystique to the lucrative world of specialty sneakers. Opening Saturday and running through the end of May, the show will present 47 customized Nike "Air Force 1" sneakers designed by Abloh and assembled at Louis Vuitton's manufacturing facility in Venice.

A barrier-breaking figure in fashion who rose to become Louis Vuitton's first black creative director, Abloh died in November at the age of 41 due to a rare form of cancer. A close associate of Kanye West, Abloh brought street wear and a less elitist approach to the world of luxury. The exhibit comes after a

February Sotheby's auction raised \$25 million from the sale of some 200 Abloh Air Force One sneakers for a scholarship fund set up in Abloh's honor to support aspiring designers of Black, African American or African descent.

Each of the sneakers contains the famous Nike swoosh in compositions across the color palette, with some also featuring personalized details such as the flag of Ghana, a tribute to Abloh's heritage. Another shoe contains the phrase "tourist vs. purist," an "Ablohism" that the designer used to describe the relationship in art and culture between the expert/specialist (purist) and the general public audience (tourist). — AFP

## Vintage Mercedes fetches record €135m at auction

A 1955 Mercedes-Benz, one of only two of its kind, was auctioned off earlier this month for a whopping 135 million euros (\$143 million), making it the most expensive car ever sold, RM Sotheby's announced Thursday. The Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut was sold to a private collector, the classic car auction company said in a statement, fetching almost triple the previous record price for a car, which was set in 2018 by a 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO that went for over \$48 million.

The invitation-only auction took place on May 5 at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart, Germany, the auction house said, adding that the vehicle's high price places it in the "top 10 most valuable items ever sold at auction in any collecting category." According to an AFP ranking of artworks sold at auction in recent years, the 300 SLR ranks sixth or seventh, with the all-time record being held by Leonardo da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi", which sold in Nov 2017 for \$450.3 million. Next is "Shot Sage Blue Marilyn" by Andy Warhol, which also sold this month for \$195 million. The car is one of just two prototypes built by the Mercedes-Benz racing department and is named after its creator and chief engineer, Rudolf Uhlenhaut, according to RM Sotheby's. "The private buyer has agreed that the 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupe will remain accessible for public display on special occasions, while the second original 300 SLR Coupe remains in company ownership and will continue to be displayed at the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart," the auction company added.

According to RM Sotheby's and press reports, the 300 SLR, recognizable by its unusual lines and butterfly doors, was modelled on the W196 R Grand Prix race car, which won two Formula 1 world championships in 1954 and 1955 with Italian Juan Manuel Fangio in the driver's seat. But in June 1955, tragedy struck the Mercedes-Benz team, when at the 24 Hours of Le Mans race, a crash of one of its 300 SLR vehicles killed French driver Pierre Levegh and 83 spectators. — AFP



1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupe

## Rihanna, A\$AP Rocky welcome first child

Superstar Rihanna and rapper A\$AP Rocky have reportedly welcomed their first child, after a pregnancy the singer flaunted in a radical revamp of normally covered-up maternity style. The entertainment and fashion mogul behind the hits "Diamonds" and "Umbrella" gave birth to a boy on May 13 in Los Angeles, according to TMZ, which first reported the news.

People Magazine confirmed the celebrity birth, citing a source close to the couple who said they are at home with the baby and that "Rihanna is doing well. They are very excited to be parents." Representatives for the couple did not immediately respond to an AFP request for confirmation. No other details, including the child's name, have been made public.

The Barbadian-born Robyn Rihanna Fenty, 34, in recent years has become a billionaire, parlaying her music achievements into successful makeup, lingerie and high-fashion brands. Rumors that she and A\$AP Rocky, 33, were dating swirled for years before the pair confirmed last year that their romance was official. The pair announced they were expecting in January with a set of glamorous snow-dusted images taken in Harlem, the mother-to-be sporting a long pink jacket buttoned only at the top, paired with a long bejeweled necklace over her bare belly.

Since then, Rihanna has triggered a paparazzi frenzy and left the fashion industry in awe, appearing in barely-there maternity looks that showcased her growing baby bump, no holds barred. Weeks



Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky

after announcing her pregnancy, the pop icon dazzled the fashion week circuit in look after look, notably arriving in Paris in a completely see-through Dior lace cocktail dress, under which she donned lingerie from her own Savage X Fenty line.

Paired with spiky heeled knee-high boots, a leather trench coat, and silver necklaces, the star walked with such grace and confidence she appeared to float. "You're late!" shouted someone off-camera in a viral clip. Rihanna slowly turned her head, held her bump and narrowed her piercing eyes: "No sh\*t."

## 'Not that amazing', says record-breaking Everest climber

British climber Kenton Cool made headlines around the world this week for reaching the summit of Mount Everest for the 16th time, the most of any non-Nepali climber - but says his title is largely meaningless. Mountain guide Cool, 48, first climbed Everest in 2004 and has since had an expedition almost every year taking clients up the world's highest peak.

His 15th summit last year tied him with American Dave Hahn for the most summits by a non-Nepali climber, and his latest ascent gave him the title alone. But he told AFP he was "surprised" by the attention. "In reality, it's not that amazing," he said. "I'm really surprised by the inter-

est in my 16th ascent, considering that so many of the Sherpas have so many more ascents."

Nepali guides - usually ethnic Sherpas from the valleys around Everest - are considered the backbone of the climbing industry in the Himalayas for bearing huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders. Most of them have multiple Everest summits under their belt - Cool's own long-time Nepali climbing partner Dorje Gyalgen Sherpa made it to the summit with him, for his 20th ascent. And this month, Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa extended his record as the person with the most Everest summits with 26 ascents as he opened the route for other climbers.

"People go 'it's a world record', it's not a world record," Cool said Thursday. "It's just that I happen to hold the non-Sherpa record, for whatever that is worth, which in my mind, (is) not very much." Still, he added that every summit was magical. "It's work, it is how earn my money, I am an Everest guide. But more than that I love Nepal... and I love the mountains, it has been very kind to me over the years."

The climber had been told he would not walk again unaided after a rock-climbing accident in 1996 that broke both

### 'Rewriting' pregnancy rules

It's a quip that's come to encapsulate the artist's embrace of her changing body - Rihanna didn't just bare her belly, she boasted of it, adorning herself in jewels, sequined bras, and low-slung miniskirts. "She's changed something profound in fashion - single-handedly rewriting the rules of pregnancy dressing with one jaw-dropping style maneuver after another," wrote Vogue, which featured Rihanna on its May cover.

"I'm hoping that we were able to redefine what's considered 'decent' for pregnant women," the performer told the magazine. "My body is doing incredible things right now, and I'm not going to be ashamed of that. This time should feel celebratory." She's far from the first celebrity to show off her pregnant belly: Demi Moore posed nude while expecting on Vanity Fair's cover in 1991, a stunning move for the time.

Since then, Britney Spears, Cindy Crawford and Serena Williams have all sat for similar glossy pregnancy portraits. Beyonce meanwhile announced her twins with a highly polished, belly-baring Instagram post chock full of art-world references including Botticelli's Venus. But Rihanna's scantily clad looks have been far less calculated and far more frequent, a statement on maternity that goes beyond the magazine cover to be an everyday celebration of self.

"Right now I'm really into pushing the idea of sexy," she told the lifestyle website Refinery29 in February. "When women get pregnant, society tends to make it feel like you hide, hide your sexy." "I don't believe in that sh\*t," she continued. "So I'm trying stuff that I might not have even had the confidence to try before I was pregnant. The strappiest, the thinnest, and the more cut-outs - the better for me." — AFP



Mycenaean signet ring, marked with a pair of winged sphinxes. — AFP

## Nobel Foundation returns ancient gold ring to Greece

Greece's culture ministry on Friday said the Nobel Foundation in Sweden had returned an ancient gold ring stolen from the island of Rhodes during World War II. The announcement came just days after a UNESCO body said Greece and Britain had agreed to hold formal talks on the Parthenon marbles currently on display at the British Museum in London.

The Mycenaean signet ring, marked with a pair of winged sphinxes, was formally returned at a ceremony in Stockholm on Thursday, the ministry said. It had been found in Rhodes during a 1927 excavation at a Mycenaean necropolis by the Italian School of Archaeology, at a time when the island was under Italian control.

The ring was stolen during World War II from the local archaeological museum alongside other antiquities that have yet to be recovered, the ministry said in a statement. It eventually surfaced in the United States, purchased by Hungarian Nobel prize-winning biophysicist Georg von Bekesy, whose collection was acquired by the Nobel Foundation following his death in 1972. The ring was kept at the Stockholm Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities. Its identity was confirmed in 1975 by the museum's then director, archaeologist and Mycenaean era expert Carl Gustaf Styrenius. The ring will return to the Rhodes archaeological museum, the ministry said. The Mycenaean era was the last phase of the Bronze Age in ancient Greece, spanning the period from approximately 1600 to 1100 BCE.

Earlier last week, the UNESCO committee on the return of cultural property (ICPRCP) said Britain in April had invited Greece to talks on the fate of the Parthenon Marbles. Greece had accepted "and a meeting between the parties is about to be arranged in due course," the UNESCO committee said. The Parthenon temple was built in the 5th century BCE on the Acropolis to honour Athena, the patron goddess of Athens.

In the early 1800s, workmen stripped entire friezes from the monument on the orders of the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Lord Elgin. Elgin sold the marbles to the British government, which in 1817 passed them on to the British Museum where they remain one of its most prized exhibits. Athens says the sculptures were stolen. — AFP



Kenton Cool



Passengers travel with their dogs on a shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo to the resort town of Karuizawa on May 21, 2022. — AFP photos

## A paw-some day trip: Dogs ride Japan bullet train

On Japan's bullet trains, dogs usually have to travel in a carrier, but on Saturday they could stretch their paws and enjoy the scenery on a special pet-friendly express. At Ueno station in Tokyo, 21 furry passengers boarded the sleek shinkansen train for a one-hour ride to the resort town of Karuizawa with their owners. "We're having fun," Yukari Seino, 48, told AFP, petting her seven-month-old chihuahua

named Chobi, perched comfortably on her lap.

"We travel a lot together, but in the past I've felt bad about keeping my dog in a cage," she said, adding that the journey had been stress-free so far. Other four-legged day trippers on board the first ever "doggy holiday" service run by Japan Railways included Pomeranians, a terrier and a pointy-eared, cheerful-looking Shiba Inu. "It's

like we're at home. I'm happy we can ride the train without worrying," said 39-year-old Yoko Okubo, who joined the trip with her corgi.

Pets are allowed on the shinkansen but they must be kept inside a holder, and their total weight including the cage must not exceed 10 kg. A whole carriage was dedicated to the pooches on Saturday's tour, a pilot project organised by railway company JR East and its sub-

sidary JR East Start Up. They are keen to organize more regular pet-friendly excursions in the future, Start Up official Shino Furukawa told AFP. "We've received requests from customers who want to have a relaxing time with their dogs on the train," she said.

"We want to create an environment where people can live in harmony with their pets, who are part of the family. This is a big step towards making pet-

friendly public transport a reality." Japanese trains are famous for being spotlessly clean, and one of the biggest challenges was to maintain the impeccable standards on board, she said. Staff put plastic covers on all the seats and brought four air purifiers into the carriage, which will be spruced up after the trip to remove all dog hair. — AFP



Aerial view of an urban garden in the Manguinhos favela in Rio de Janeiro on May 4, 2022.

## Rio's urban gardens produce healthy food for the poor

Gun-toting youths watch over a street in a Rio de Janeiro slum hit hard by drug trafficking, but walk a bit further and this rough area also boasts the largest urban vegetable garden in Latin America. This success story is unfolding in a favela called Manguinhos in the north of Rio, and thrives as the rest of the country frets over rampant inflation and worries over Russian fertilizer, a major concern for Brazil's powerful agriculture sector.

The first seed was planted in late 2013 on a parcel of land known then as "cracklandia" because it was home to

so many drug addicts. And little by little it has established itself and come to be respected in a neighborhood where drug traffickers are in charge. These days the garden feeds some 800 families a month with produce that is pesticide free and affordable, two features that do not always go hand in hand.

"Why do poor people have to be doomed to eating poisoned food? My goal is to stop organic food from just being for the elite," Julio Cesar Barros, one of the managers of the garden, told AFP, alluding to high priced fruit and vegetables sold in wealthy neighborhoods like Copacabana and Ipanema. The Manguinhos garden is one of 56 in Rio that Barros launched with city authorities in 2006. And it has been praised by an international agreement called the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact as one of the best such systems in the world.

This particular garden is the size of four football fields and every month it produces 2.5 tons of yuca, carrots, onions, cabbage and other vegetables. Half is sold to families for an average of two reales (40 US cents) per kilo and the rest is donated to orphanages and shelters.



A butterfly is seen on a plant.

### A way out of drugs and crime

Wearing a cap to ward off the hot sun, Dione Enedina Da Silva, 73, crouches down and rips up weeds growing among the rows of vegetable plants. "The garden changed everything for me: the way I lived, the way I ate," this woman with 10 grandchildren and many great grandchildren said. "Before I barely had money to buy carrots and onions."

Da Silva is one of 25 employees of the garden, who are paid with revenue from sales. She used to work cleaning hospitals, but other workers at the garden were involved in drugs and crime in the slum and had a grim future, said Barros. That is the case of a 40-year-old employee who prefers not to give his name or details of his past. "Working here is therapy. I come every day, rain or shine. I am not leaving," he said. He is now proud of what he does and says his work means his 11 year old daughter eats good, healthy food.

### Obesity vs. education

"Food education here is awful," said Barros. Indeed, the rate of obesity among people over age 20 rose from 12.2 percent to 26.8 percent from 2002 to 2019, according to government statistics. "What

happens if a child arrives home with a vegetable they planted at school? Education changes and the child begins to influence the parents to eat better," said Barros, whose projects also features gardens at schools. "Eating healthy is important but food is not always affordable," said Alesandra Almeida, 39, a slum resident who shops at the Manguinhos garden every week.

Barros said the quality of the produce from these gardens is drawing the attention of health-oriented restaurants in Rio, who have started buying at community projects. "I have a problem: is the food no longer going to be for those who need it and go back to the rich? We have to figure out a way to resolve this."

In the meantime, Barros's project is going full steam ahead. The Rio city government has announced plans to expand a garden in the Parque de Madureira area of the city to make it almost four times the size of Manguinhos. Officials said that would make it the world's largest urban garden. — AFP



Workers harvest vegetables from the urban garden to sell.



A man waters vegetables in the urban garden. — AFP photos

## McGregor return to 'Star Wars' inspired by love for prequels

When Ewan McGregor first played a lightsaber-wielding Jedi hero in the much-maligned "Star Wars" prequel trilogy, he didn't feel much love from the fans. Initial audience excitement about returning to a galaxy far, far away in 1999's "The Phantom Menace" was quickly doused by the prequels' corny dialogue, arcane inter-galactic politics and Jar Jar Binks.

But as he steps back into his role for Disney+ series "Obi-Wan Kenobi," out next Friday, McGregor says he has been pleasantly surprised by a major re-evaluation of the prequels, particularly among younger viewers. "One of the difficult things about being in the prequels was that when they came out, they were not seemingly well received," McGregor told a virtual press conference Thursday.

"Because there was no social media, there was no direct avenue to the fans at the time. And also, the fans were kids," McGregor added: "Gradually, I started realizing that people really liked them, and that they meant a lot to that generation. So that warmed my feelings about them, I guess, or my experience of being in the 'Star Wars' world."

As a result, McGregor and Hayden Christensen - who played Anakin Skywalker - are back for a six-episode limited series, set in between the events of the prequel trilogy and the original "Star Wars". Taking place a decade after the tragic finale of "Revenge of the Sith," which saw the evil Emperor seize power and turn Kenobi's apprentice into Darth Vader, "Obi-Wan Kenobi" finds its hero leading a lonely, broken existence.

"For 10 years Obi-Wan has been in hiding, he can't communicate with any of his old comrades, and he is living a pretty solitary life," said McGregor. "He's not able to use the Force. So in a way he's lost his faith. It's like somebody who stepped away from their religion or something. The only responsibility to his past life is looking over Luke Skywalker." Kenobi must also fend off the Inquisitors, a terrifying new set of villains charged with eradicating the remaining Jedi.

"Obi-Wan Kenobi" is a product of Disney's recent decision to pivot "Star Wars" resources from movies to television. The wildly popular sci-fi franchise has been assigned a key role in growing streaming platform Disney+. — AFP



Beninese artist Lionel Attere, also known as Lionel Davinci, poses for a portrait in front of a mural.



Brazilian artist Dos Santos Edgar Bernado, also known as Ed-mun, paints a mural.



Beninese artist Romario Agbo-Koffi, also known as Dr Mario, sprays on a wall.



Beninese artist Laurenson Djihouessi, also known as Mr Stone, poses with a spray can.

# GRAFFITI BRINGS BENIN'S WALLS ALIVE WITH TREASURES FROM PAST

On a blue and yellow background, the graffiti artist retouches a spray-painted image of the half-man, half-shark statue of King Behanzin, one of the stolen treasures returned to Benin by France late last year. The image is just one by 26 local and international graffiti artists who have created a mural depicting Benin's history and culture stretching more than one kilometer along a wall in Benin's main city of Cotonou.

Their objective is to eventually create the largest mural fresco in the world as part of a festival under the theme of "New Benin". "To create the Benin of the future, we must keep the Benin of the past in our sight," said Laurenson Djihouessi, known by his artist name Mr Stone, who is the festival promoter. Many of the graffiti artists have chosen to represent the restored treasures, which were stolen by French colonial forces and returned to Cotonou this year after negotiations with Paris.



A general view of one of the works produced by the Togolese artist Sitou Matthia, as part of the Effet Graffiti festival, whose objective is to achieve one of the longest murals in the world, in Cotonou on May 18, 2022. — AFP photos

The artefacts have been on display for the first time in Benin since February in a historical exhibition at the presidential palace, located a few hundred meters from the mural. "There, the audi-

ence comes to the art, but here the art comes to the audience," said Stone, whose images pay homage to the Amazons, the elite, all-female soldiers of the Kingdom of Dahomey, one of Benin's

kingdoms before French colonization.

The artist said he wanted to place the Beninese woman "at the heart of action and development", for them to be the "Amazon of modern times". But it is not only the royal history of Benin's past that is painted on the fresco that attracts dozens of passersby. Supported by the Claudine Talon Foundation, run by the First Lady of Benin, and the Ministry of Culture, the wall also highlights recent achievements in the West African country.

There are cranes symbolizing the reform of Cotonou's port and agricultural machinery, a reference to the modernization of the agricultural sector. Images of roads are meant to show part of the infrastructure projects touted by President Patrice Talon as one of his successes. Since his first election in 2015, Talon has launched dozens of projects in what he calls a campaign to set his nation on the path to development.

While the economy may have been modernized, Benin's opposition says the country's democracy has also suffered under Talon's rule. On her part of the wall, female artist Drusille Fagnibo also painted the building of Economic Crimes and Terrorism Court, known as Criet. Critics say the special court, set up in 2016 in a bid to end to impunity in the political class, is used as a political weapon by the government to target opponents.

In December, the court sentenced opposition leader Reckya Madougou to 20 years in prison for terrorism, a term which her lawyers described as a political attack. The government denies any claims the court is manipulated for political purposes. More than 700 m of wall have been decorated since April 11, and the organizers want to expand it to 1,300 m during early 2023. They hope to beat the record for the longest graffiti fresco in the world. — AFP

## 'Straight to your soul': Japan's taiko reinvents drum tradition

In a hall on Japan's Sado island, 71-year-old Yoshikazu Fujimoto strikes the imposing drum mounted before him, producing a boom so powerful that it reverberates through the floorboards. Fujimoto is a veteran performer of Japanese taiko drumming, a musical form with roots in religious rituals, traditional theatre and the joyous abandon of seasonal festivals called matsuiri.

But for all its ancient pedigree, taiko as a stage performance is a fairly modern invention, developed by a jazz musician and popularized in part by one of Japan's most famous troupes: Sado island's Kodo. Fujimoto is the oldest of the 37 musicians that make up the group, which recruits members through a rigorous two-year training program. It was founded partly to attract people to Sado, off Japan's west coast, and tours internationally, spreading the gospel of taiko.

"Taiko itself is like a prayer," said Fujimoto, who came to Sado in 1972 to join the group that evolved into Kodo. "It used

to be said that the area reached by the sound of a drum made up a single community," he said. "Through taiko... I want to become part of a community with the audience and send a message of living together, a message of compassion."

It has been a life-long project for Fujimoto, who is a specialist performer of the o-daiko, an enormous single drum mounted on a stand that is struck by a musician standing with his back to the audience and arms raised overhead. The effect is an all-encompassing wall of sound that seems to enter the ribcage and vibrate through its bones. And it is highly physical, with Fujimoto grunting in exertion as the muscles in his almost-bare back flex beneath the straps of his tunic with every strike.

### 'One with the sound'

"I become one with the sound," he said. "Playing taiko makes me feel I'm alive." Kodo's performances range from the sombre power of the o-daiko solo to ensemble pieces featuring flute and singing, and even comic interludes that encourage audience participation. Taiko simply means drum in Japanese, and performers use two main types.

The first is made from a single, hollowed tree trunk with cow or horsehide nailed over each end. The second uses hide stretched over rings attached with ropes to a wooden body. They have been part of rituals and theatrical artforms like noh and kabuki in Japan for centuries. But drumming in those contexts is often a solemn practice, while modern taiko performance is closer to folk festivals where troupes often made up of

local residents play in streets or fields to unite the community, drive away malign influences or pray for a good harvest.

"Contemporary taiko drumming took a lot of inspiration from this local festival drumming and combined with more formal



Japanese taiko drum performer Yoshikazu Fujimoto.

traditional performing arts to evolve into what we see as taiko drumming today," explained Yoshihiko Miyamoto, whose company Miyamoto Unosuke has made taiko for over 160 years. Key to that evolution was jazz drummer Daihachi Oguchi, who moved festival drumming onto the stage in the 1950s and 60s. Then in 1969, musician Den Tagayasu moved to Sado to found a taiko troupe that he hoped would attract young people to the island and revitalize it.



This photo taken on May 7, 2022 shows Japanese taiko drum performers, including Hana Ogawa (center), of the Kodo troupe taking part in a performance on Sado island.



Japanese taiko drum performer Hana Ogawa.



Fujimoto warms up before a performance on Sado island.



This photo taken on April 26, 2022 shows a craftsman working on the renovation of a Japanese taiko drum at the Miyamoto Unosuke workshop in Tokyo. — AFP photos

## Cannes filmmakers urge France to face up to colonial past

Filmmakers are holding up a mirror to France over its colonial past at the Cannes festival, helped by star power and a growing French readiness to face up to injustices committed notably in Africa. The colonization of Algeria and the horrors of the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962) deeply scarred both nations and continues to mar relations, but was hardly discussed in France in public for decades.

Although President Emmanuel Macron has acknowledged crimes committed - including a massacre by police of Algerians in Paris in 1961 which he called "inexcusable" - his government has ruled out "presenting an apology" for France's colonial past. "I think you could say that I'm obsessed by the Algerian war," French director Philippe Faucon told AFP at the Cannes festival.

His film "Les Harkis" tells the story of Algerians who fought alongside French troops against the independence movement, only to be left behind for the most part when France pulled out of Algeria, and facing the vengeance of the victorious Algerians. The movie places the responsibility for this "criminal betrayal" and the subsequent massacres of Harkis firmly at the doorstep of then-president Charles de Gaulle. "It is necessary to recall this story and look the truth in the eyes," said Algerian-born Faucon, although historical "complexities" make easy judgments impossible.

### 'Everybody needs to know'

Fellow director Mathieu Vadepied also warned against facile conclusions about France's forced recruitment of Senegalese soldiers for its World War I war effort, the subject of his film "Tirailleurs" ("Father and Soldier"). French superstar Omar Sy - who has won a huge international following with his roles in "Untouchable" and the Netflix smash hit "Lupin" - plays the lead in the story about a father and a son who are both forced into the trenches.

"My idea is to put things into question," Vadepied told AFP. "Question France's historical relationship with its former colonies, what do we have to say about that today, do we even know what we did?" While rejecting any "frontally political" approach, he said that "if we deny the facts we can never move on, we need to tell these stories, everybody needs to know them." The idea was however "not to guilt-trip people, but to recognize the painful history and free ourselves".

Sy, the France-born son of west African immigrants, told the audience at the film's opening night: "We have the same story, but we don't have the same memories." The second Cannes week will see the screening of "Nos Frangins" ("Our Brothers") by French director Rachid Bouchareb who in 2006 sparked a nationwide debate with "Indigenes" ("Days of Glory"), a film about the contribution of North African soldiers to the French Free Forces during World War II. — AFP

## Sports

# Warriors' comeback stuns Mavs to take 2-0 series lead

## Six Golden State players finish in double figures

SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry scored 32 points as the Golden State Warriors staged a stunning fightback to defeat the Dallas Mavericks 126-117 on Friday and seize control of their NBA Western Conference finals series. A pulsating clash in San Francisco saw the Warriors recover after trailing by as much as 19 points at one stage in the first half for a victory that leaves the six-time NBA champions 2-0 up in the best-of-seven series.

Curry may have led the Warriors scoring but the remarkable turnaround owed everything to a dogged team performance and shrewd second-half adjustments by Golden State coach Steve Kerr. Six Golden State players finished in double figures, with Jordan Poole, Kevon Looney and Andrew Wiggins all coming up with crucial plays.

Looney in particular delivered with a career-high 21 points and 12 rebounds. Kerr had urged his team to discover "poise" after a first-half Dallas onslaught. "I told them that if we developed some poise in the second half that the game would come to us," Kerr said afterwards. "I thought we were so scattered in the first half, maybe emotionally more than anything. Dallas came out and punched us. We knew they were going to come out strong and they were fantastic. They played harder, executed better."

"We just needed to get poised and get the game under control. We felt confident that if we did that, they wouldn't make 15 three-pointers in the second half. And that if they did, you just had to pat them on the back." Luka Doncic produced another high-scoring masterclass for Dallas with 42 points, five rebounds and eight assists, while Jalen Brunson had 31 points. But the night and victory belonged to the Warriors, who had been left shellshocked by Dallas in a wild first half. The Mavericks erupted for 72 points in the first two quarters that left them 14 points clear at the break, 72-58.

### Doncic bombardment

Doncic led the offensive bombardment with 24 first-half points, with Brunson nailing four three-pointers for a 20-point haul. Reggie Bullock was also deadly from downtown, making four of out five attempts from three-point range in the first half. The Mavs led from the outset, with Doncic putting them 5-0 ahead before a 13-0 run left Dallas 23-8 up with



SAN FRANCISCO: Otto Porter Jr #32 of the Golden State Warriors drives to the basket during Game 2 of the 2022 NBA Playoffs Western Conference Finals against the Dallas Mavericks on May 20, 2022.— AFP

just a few minutes gone.

Stung into action, the Warriors produced a 13-0 run of their own to get back within three points at 26-23, but once again Dallas pulled clear with deadly long-range shooting. Dallas made 15-of-27 three-pointers during the first half, almost double the eight-of-15 converted by the Warriors. Doncic put the seal on an incredible display with a 29-foot three-pointer on the stroke of half-time. But the momentum swung back towards Golden State in the third quarter, with the Warriors chipping away at the Mavs lead to close within two at 85-83 heading into the fourth quarter.

A three-pointer from Otto Porter Jr gave the Warriors their first lead of the night at 86-85 early in the fourth quarter, and with their noses in front Golden State were not to be denied. The Warriors outscored

Dallas 43-32 in the final quarter to complete a thrilling win as the series heads to Texas for game three on Sunday. Dallas coach Jason Kidd bemoaned his team's tactics in continuing to shoot from three-point range in the third quarter. The Mavs made only 2-of-13 from beyond the arc in the third.

"We have to understand, when we shoot three or four threes in a row and miss, you've got to get to the rim and get to get the ball into the paint," Kidd said. Kidd noted that Dallas had trailed 2-0 to Phoenix in the previous round of the playoffs before recovering to win 4-3. "We're on the road against one of the best teams in the league," Kidd said. "It happens. They held serve. We've seen this in Phoenix so now we have to go back and just focus on game three and get ready for game three, understanding what's at stake."— AFP



PARIS: Serbia's Novak Djokovic (left) plays with a ball boy as he takes part in a training session ahead of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament in Paris on May 21, 2022. — AFP

## Djokovic and Nadal bid to derail Alcaraz hype at French Open

PARIS: Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, with 41 Grand Slam titles between them, will attempt to derail the growing hype surrounding teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz at the French Open from Sunday. All three have been placed in the top-half of the draw, meaning only one will make the Roland Garros final. Defending champion Djokovic is seeded to face 13-time winner Nadal in the quarter-finals. Alcaraz is a potential semi-final opponent.

"I feel I am always in contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy," said Djokovic who arrives in Paris fired up by his inability to defend his Australian Open title in January when he was deported over his vaccination status. "Reliving the memories from last year is

something that obviously gives me goose bumps and motivation to try to replicate that." Djokovic, who turns 35 on Sunday, captured a second French Open title in 2021. He did it the hard way, coming from two sets down to beat Lorenzo Musetti in the last-16, winning an epic four-set semi-final against Nadal before needing to overturn another two-set deficit to see off Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final. 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.

Djokovic starts his French Open against 94th-ranked Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan. Nadal has played down concerns over the chronic foot issue that resurfaced in Rome last week. On Wednesday, he practiced in front of thousands of fans at Roland Garros without any obvious discomfort. "There is nothing to recover," Nadal told reporters Friday. "What happened in Rome is something that happened very often in my practices." "I was suffering after that for a couple of days, but I feel better. That's why I'm here."—AFP

## Demare edges Giro sprint after Cavendish charge

CUNEO: Frenchman Arnaud Demare won a third mass sprint for the line on the Giro d'Italia on Friday as a breathless pursuit from the peloton caught an escape group just ahead of the home straight on stage 13. Demare narrowly edged a surging Phil Bauhaus as Mark Cavendish faded at the line after the Briton's Quick-Step team had led a cavalry charge to catch the escapees. Spaniard Juan Pedro Lopez continued his run in the leader's pink jersey. On a short 150km ride, only half the distance of the Milan-San Remo one-day classic, four riders opened a six-minute gap they nursed until the final 500m, setting up a frantic sprint.

"At one point I doubted we would catch them (the escape)," said Demare after this third win extended his lead in the sprint points race. "It was a monstrous lead-out," said the winner after outlasting Cavendish in a long shoulder-to-shoulder struggle that was only resolved at the finish line. The 30-year-old FDJ man also won consecutive sprint finishes in the first week, leaving him on 238pts, while Cavendish is second on 121.



PIEDMONT: Team Groupama-FDJ's French rider Arnaud Demare (2nd left) sprints in the last meters to cross the finish line to win, ahead of Team Bahrain's German rider Phil Bauhaus (left), Team Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl's British rider Mark Cavendish (right) and Team UAE Emirates' Colombian rider Fernando Gaviria (center) the 13th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2022 cycling race.— AFP

### Cavendish in mix

Cavendish turns 37 on Sunday and has one more opportunity to win a sprint on stage 18 if he continues racing. A potential Tour de France slot beckons for him however after a stage win and two podium spots so far. The long chase of the escape to ensure a sprint finish

possibly slowed Cavendish over the finale Friday. "We had to get over the climb, to chase the breakaway, which had a good gap," he explained, adding his teammates had gone beyond what was expected of them. "I gave everything I had and did the best sprint I could. I'm proud of the boys and their amazing work today."—AFP

### News in brief

#### FIFA to announce host cities

LOS ANGELES: FIFA plans to announce the host venues for the 2026 World Cup in North America on June 16 in New York, football's global governing body said Friday. The contenders for what are expected to be at least 16 venues include 17 stadiums in 16 US cities, with the Los Angeles area submitting both SoFi Stadium in Inglewood and the Rose Bowl in Pasadena—site of the 1994 World Cup final. FIFA are expected to select three venues each in Mexico and Canada for the first World Cup with three co-hosting nations, with the remainder to be in the United States, where 60 games are planned including all from the quarter-finals. FIFA awarded the tournament—which will be the first 48-team World Cup—in June of 2018. The venue selection process has since been slowed by the pandemic. Venues under consideration in Mexico include the iconic Estadio Azteca as well as stadiums in Guadalajara and Monterrey.— AFP

#### Wimbledon left pointless

PARIS: Wimbledon, widely regarded as the world's most prestigious tennis tournament, was stripped of ranking points on Friday by the sport's main tours in a move which threatens to reduce the Grand Slam to the status of a high-profile exhibition event. The decision by the ATP and WTA was in response to Wimbledon banning Russian and Belarusian players following the invasion of Ukraine. "It is with great regret and reluctance that we see no option but to remove ATP Ranking points from Wimbledon for 2022," said an ATP statement. "Our rules and agreements exist in order to protect the rights of players as a whole. Unilateral decisions of this nature, if unaddressed, set a damaging precedent for the rest of the Tour. "Discrimination by individual tournaments is simply not viable." When world number one Novak Djokovic won Wimbledon in 2021, he earned 2,000 points.— AFP

#### Zalatoris seizes PGA lead

TULSA: American Will Zalatoris fired a bogey-free five-under-par 65 to seize a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the PGA Championship while Tiger Woods battled his way into the weekend. Aided when gusting winds vanished in the afternoon at daunting Southern Hills, late-starter Zalatoris reeled off three back-nine birdies in a row and sank a seven-foot birdie putt at the 17th to finish 36 holes at Southern Hills on 9-under-par 131. "I had the luck of the draw. There wasn't any wind after the 11th hole," Zalatoris said. "I made the most of it with some good shotmaking." That enabled 30th-ranked Zalatoris, last year's Masters runner-up and the 2021 US PGA Tour Rookie of the Year, to grab a one-stroke lead over Chile's Mito Pereira, who fired a 64 to stand second on 132. "I guess shooting six-under wasn't really the expectation, but here we are," the 27-year-old from Santiago said.— AFP

#### Sindhu upstaged in Open

BANGKOK: Indian badminton powerhouse PV Sindhu topped out of the Thailand Open Saturday at the hands of Chinese Olympic champion Chen Yufei, who booked herself a finals berth. Chen, who is third in the world, was dominant in attack during the first game but seventh-ranked Sindhu's bid for a comeback came too little too late—losing 17-21. The Tokyo Olympic medalist came out firing in the second, racing off to a five-point lead ahead of the interval. But Chen quickly clawed back and took control of rallies with some stellar smashes and net work, sealing victory 21-16. Meanwhile, Thailand's eighth-ranked Ratchanok Intanon was unable to capitalise on a home-court advantage in her match against second in the world Tai Tzu-ying. The Taiwanese 27-year-old polished off the former world champion in a topsy turvy three-match nail biter 10-21, 21-13, 21-19.— AFP

#### Madrid look to Liverpool

MADRID: Real Madrid's last game before the Champions League final against Liverpool ended in a goalless draw against Real Betis on Friday as Marcelo bid farewell to the Santiago Bernabeu. Carlo Ancelotti picked a strong side for Madrid's last La Liga game of the season but with the title long sewn-up and the final in Paris just around the corner, neither team were keen to over-exert. Instead, the contest was notable for the tribute paid to Marcelo and the lack of one for Gareth Bale. Both players are expected to leave when their contracts expire this summer but only Marcelo was involved here, with Bale absent again from the squad. Marcelo came on in the second half to a standing ovation and was given the captain's armband by Karim Benzema, who played the whole 90 minutes. Marcelo accepted applause from his teammates after the final whistle and left, waving to the stands as he went. "One of the greats of world football is saying goodbye, and one of the best full-backs in the world," said Ancelotti.— AFP

Sports

# City aim to end Liverpool's quadruple bid in EPL climax

## Guardiola's men eye 4th English title in five years

**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City have the destiny of the English Premier League (EPL) title in their hands heading into Sunday's final day showdown, with the defending champions holding a slender one-point lead over quadruple-chasing Liverpool. Pep Guardiola's men will claim a fourth English title in five years of a dominant era for Abu Dhabi-backed City with victory over Aston Villa. "It's difficult to control your emotions when you know what you are playing for," said City manager Guardiola. "The players are human beings but it's football, when you think that it is over it is not over."

City know that to their cost having been minutes away from the Champions League final only to blow a two-goal lead in their semi-final, second leg against Real Madrid earlier this month. "The importance is unnecessary to tell them," added Guardiola. "They know it, they feel it." Liverpool will instead face Real in next weekend's battle to be crowned champions of Europe in Paris as they

remain in contention for an unprecedented haul of four major trophies in the one season.

Jürgen Klopp's men have already lifted the League Cup and FA Cup. "Imagine somebody tells you before the season you're going to be in all three cup finals and want to fight for the league," said Liverpool manager Klopp. "The boys did it - fed by the people here in the building, by our supporters, by all these kind of things. "It's a fantastic time for a Liverpool supporter and now we have to make sure we enjoy the last two games as well," the German added.

The presence of Liverpool great and now Villa manager Steven Gerrard on the opposition bench at the Etihad adds extra intrigue to the decisive day in the title race. Gerrard famously never won a league title in his 17-year career at Anfield, but could deliver one on a plate to his old club. Anything other than a City win will allow Liverpool to take the title with victory at home to Wolves. "We'll go out at the weekend and give it everything

we've got to try and get points for Aston Villa and our supporters," said Gerrard. "If that inevitably helps Liverpool, fantastic, but my priority is to try and get points for Aston Villa."

### European places at stake

Chelsea will join City and Liverpool in next season's Champions League, with north London rivals Tottenham and Arsenal still battling for fourth spot. Spurs are in the driving seat as they just need a draw away to already-relegated Norwich to secure a return to the Champions League. Back-to-back defeats have seen Arsenal throw away a golden chance to get back to European football's top table.

The Gunners have to win at home to an Everton side fresh from sealing their Premier League status and hope Spurs stumble at Carrow Road. Manchester United and West Ham are guaranteed European football next season but their battle to be in the Europa League rather than the Conference League has also gone to the final day. Incoming

United manager Erik Ten Hag is expected to be in attendance for their trip to Crystal Palace. Should United fail to win, the Hammers can finish sixth with victory at Brighton.

### Pitch invasion fears

At the bottom of the table, one of Burnley and Leeds will be relegated. Burnley have the advantage of just having to match Leeds's result thanks to their superior goal difference. The Clarets host Newcastle at Turf Moor, while Leeds travel to Brentford. Everton's celebration at avoiding the drop when they beat Crystal Palace in dramatic fashion on Thursday was marred by a pitch invasion at Goodison Park. Police are investigating an incident where Palace manager Patrick Vieira kicked out after being taunted by a fan. Newcastle manager Eddie Howe is keen to avoid similar scenes should Burnley stay up. "I think we're going into dangerous territory where something could happen in a game that has terrible consequences," he said. —AFP

## Kuwait tops 3rd Gulf Games medals table with 21 gold

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The opening ceremony of Third Gulf Games will take place on Sunday (7:30 pm) at Rafa Nadal Academy at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah International Tennis Complex. The ceremony will be attended by high ranking dignitaries - both local and international. President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser said he was very pleased with Kuwait's hosting of the Games. He said the events represent the core of the youth and sports movement in the Gulf region due to its contribution in improving athletes' technical levels in various sports.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser said the Gulf teams will benefit from the Games. "There was strong competition in various games as more than 1,700 athletes represent the six GCC countries," he said. Al-Nasser lauded the organization's aspect of the games which is excellent.

### Kuwait tops the list

On Sunday, three new sports competitions (tennis, table tennis and women eSports) will begin. Meanwhile, Kuwait replaced Bahrain on top of the medals list with 21 gold, 17 silver and 18 bronze medals while Bahrain grabbed 17 gold, 16 silver and 10 bronze medals. Qatar took the third position with



12 gold, 15 silver and 12 bronze medals. Oman (fourth) grabbed 11 gold, 5 silver and 9 bronze. Saudi Arabia (fifth) secured 7 gold, 9 silver and 17 bronze while UAE (sixth) took 5 gold, 8 silver and 7 bronze medals.

### Women eSports

The women eSports will be held at Jumaira hotel starting from 4:00 pm with players from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman. The players will compete in the "FIFA 22" game. The finals of the games will be played at 9:00 pm.

### 10 medals for shooting

The shooting competitions concluded on Friday as Kuwait shooting team were able to win 10 medals. President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah congratulated Kuwait shooters for their achievements adding that shooting sport is accustomed to winning and raising Kuwait flag in the most important arenas around the world.



## Berkane sink Pirates, maintain Moroccan dominance

**UYO, Nigeria:** Moroccan dominance of the CAF Confederation Cup continued in Uyo, Nigeria, on Friday as Renaissance Berkane beat South Africans Orlando Pirates 5-4 on penalties after a 1-1 draw following extra time. Youssef el Fahli scored his sixth goal of the second-tier African competition for Berkane seven minutes into extra time from a penalty awarded after the referee reviewed a foul on a VAR monitor.

Pirates levelled on 117 minutes when a tame shot from Theminkosi Lorch evaded everyone in a crowded goalmouth to draw the clubs level. Berkane scored from all five penalties in the shootout with the decisive fifth converted by substitute Brahim el Bahraoui. Moroccan clubs have won a record seven of the 19

editions, including four of the last five with Raja Casablanca and Berkane claiming two titles each.

Pirates squandered several chances to become the first South African winners of the Confederation Cup in regular time with Deon Hotto the chief culprit. Pirates' co-coaches Fadlu Davids and Mandla Ncikazi made one change from the side that began a shock 1-0 home loss to Al Ahly Tripoli last Sunday in the second leg of a semi-final they won 2-1 on aggregate. Out went right-back Abel Mabaso with Bandile Shandu dropping back from midfield to take his place and Kabelo Dlamini coming in to inject more attacking pace.

Berkane showed two changes from the team that triumphed 4-1 at home against TP Mazembe from the Democratic Republic of Congo to wipe out a 1-0 first-leg deficit in the other semi-final. DR Congo-born coach Florent Ibenge preferred Mehdi Oubila to Hamza Regragui in midfield and chose Charki el Bahri ahead of Brahim el Bahraoui to lead a three-man forward line. Both teams donned their traditional colors with Pirates in an all-black outfit and Berkane wearing orange shirts with black collars and white shorts. —AFP



## Tennis Federation concludes season

**KUWAIT:** Under the patronage and in the presence of President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations, the Tennis Federation concluded its 2021-2022 season in which Yarmouk Club won and had control of the singles matches. Bader Antar defeated Hussein Al-Shatti 6-2-6-1. Kuwait Club doubles players Hussein Al-Ghareeb and Abdallah Al-Mukaimi won the tournament.

New referees who passed the officiating courses successfully received their certificates during the awarding ceremonies. In the Cup of Excellence Tournament, Yarmouk took first with 38 points; Khaitan won second with 33 points while Kuwait took third with 14 points. KTF Deputy Chairman Abdelsamad Al-Aryan and Secretary General Faleh Al-Otaibi and treasurer Ali Al-Daihani attended the ceremony.



## Malaysia sounds alarm over lowest SEA Games ranking

**HANOI:** A government minister says that "all Malaysians are disappointed" with what is threatening to be the country's lowest placing at the SEA Games in nearly 40 years. Traditionally a regional power, sports minister Ahmad Faizal Azumu sounded the alarm despite Malaysian athletes on Friday reaching the country's target of 36 golds with two days of competition to go. But Malaysia languished sixth in the medals table as of Saturday morning, with hosts Vietnam way out in front with 167 golds, followed by Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Philippines.

"All Malaysians are disappointed because we are not at a higher position," Ahmad said at the Games on Friday, according to state news agency Bernama. "We should not be contented with our sixth position at the Games." Malaysia is usually in the regional top five and the last time it settled for sixth was in 1983, when only eight nations took part, compared to the current 11.

It comes with Malaysia set to compete at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, England in July-August, while the Asian Games later this year in China have been indefinitely postponed. "The exposure gained at the SEA Games is crucial for us

to achieve more success in other multi-sport Games like the Commonwealth Games and Asiad," said Ahmad. The Malaysian government slashed sports spending last year to 289 million ringgit (\$67 million) from 940 million ringgit the year before.

It also cut down its full-time number of athletes from 432 to 288, months after a poor Tokyo Olympics showing of one silver and one bronze. Malaysia made a strong start at the SEA Games, winning all eight golds in diving, with the rest of the medals scattered across other sports. The country's last possible hope for more medals may rest in badminton, one of the few sports it does well in internationally, with semi-finals and finals over the next two days.

Meanwhile, Filipino pool legend Efren Reyes suffered a second loss in two days at the SEA Games but that did not diminish him in the eyes of hundreds of fans who chased him as he left Thursday's defeat out a back door. The 67-year-old, regarded as one of the world's finest players in his heyday, faced off against local hope Tran Quyet Chien in a three-cushion billiards quarter-final in Hanoi.

Thousands of people packed Ha Dong Gymnasium in the Vietnamese capital with many there to catch a glimpse of Reyes take on an opponent 29 years his junior. Cheers erupted from the mostly Vietnamese crowd as Chien quickly took an initial 12-point lead over Reyes, who is nicknamed "The Magician" for his skill at the table in his glory days. But there were also loud hurrahs as Reyes threatened to conjure up a comeback, before Chien pulled away for an easy victory. —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

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

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	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
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DOHA: Photo shows an exterior view of the Al Janoub Stadium in Doha, which will host matches of the FIFA football World Cup 2022. —AFP photos

## Qatar's 'Dr Cool' keeps stadiums chilly

### Solar-powered cooling system to keep players and turf healthy

DOHA: Qatar has become almost a byword for scorching heat, but some fans will still take a sweater to World Cup stadiums because of state-of-the-art air conditioning that its mastermind says will become the norm for mega sports events. Saud Abdulaziz Abdul Ghani, nicknamed "Dr Cool", worked for 13 years on the solar-powered cooling system that he says will keep the players and turf healthy and even eliminate body odor in a packed stadium. The mercury can hit 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) during the Gulf state's blistering summers, which is why this year's World Cup was moved to the winter.

But even with maximum temperatures down to around 25 Celsius (77 Fahrenheit) for the tournament in November and December, cool air will still be pumped out onto the players and watching fans. Stadium cooling is nothing new. The Superdome, home of the New Orleans Saints American football team, has 9,000 tons of air conditioning equipment. "Dr Cool", a professor of engineering at Qatar University who also helped develop cooling for the Ford Mondeo car, has however developed a system that World Cup organizers say is 40 percent more "sustainable" than existing techniques.

Seven of the eight stadiums are air-conditioned at a World Cup that organizers insist will be carbon-neutral. At the 40,000-capacity Al Janoub Stadium, which will hold seven games including holders France's first match, Saud said a two-metre-high "completely isolated bubble" of cool air will envelop the pitch and stands. Inside the bubble, players and fans will be kept at 21 Celsius (70 Fahrenheit) by jets blasting air at the pitchside and

under spectators' seats.

Sensors around the stadium keep the temperature constant and even adjust air flows for seats in the shade or sun. The rising air is sucked back into the stadium cooling system, cleaned by water kept at a brisk 7 degrees Celsius (44 Fahrenheit) and pumped out again by the jets. "The players will have the best experience of their lives," said Saud, highlighting how the chilled air would prevent injuries and illness suffered in extreme heat.

#### Giant solar farm

The power for the system comes from a giant solar farm in the desert outside the capital Doha, he added. The same technology is being used in greenhouses where Qatar grows increasing amounts of its own food. "We have the best thermal insulation on our machines, the best sensory systems around the stadium," said Saud. And the air conditioning will still be needed in December, despite the cooler temperatures.

Each human generates the heat of two laptops and gives off 70 grams (2.5 ounces) of sweat per hour, according to Saud. He gave the example of the Lusail Stadium where 80,000 people will gather for the World Cup final on December 18. "They are there for four hours, so that is a lot of water. And I also have the heat of 160,000 laptops in that space. So that heat must be offset irrespective of whether it is winter, summer, autumn or spring." The use of air conditioning in stadiums remains controversial, however.

Russell Seymour, chief executive of the British Association for Sustainable Sport, said that while



DOHA: A digital thermometer measures the temperature at the Al Janoub Stadium in Doha, which will host matches of the FIFA football World Cup 2022.

the technology and renewable energy in Qatar may work he had concerns about the wider message given by air conditioning an open space. At a time when people are being urged to save energy "quite often people in an office will open the windows, they want fresh air but they've also got air conditioning on and then things compete, and that's when the issues come".

Saud said he is happy for any expert to inspect the system and check his sustainability claims. The

technology has been made free of patent restrictions for anyone to copy. He is also certain that future World Cups—particularly in 2026 in the United States, Mexico and Canada—will follow suit. "In the future, for the safety of players, air-conditioned stadiums will be more of the norm," he said. As global temperatures rise due to climate change, "if you want players to complete the game without water breaks, without any interruptions then air conditioning will be a necessity". —AFP



DOHA: Saud Abdulaziz Abdul Ghani poses for a picture on the pitch at the Al Janoub Stadium on April 20.



DOHA: A picture shows parts of the cooling system at the Al Janoub Stadium.

## Qatar World Cup marks 'last dance' for Messi, Ronaldo

PARIS: As the football world prepares to head to Qatar in six months' time, this World Cup is set to bookend the era in which Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo have been the sport's two pre-eminent players. At the time, it felt like the 2018 tournament in Russia marked a turning point as a teenage Kylian Mbappe became a global superstar by helping France become world champions. Mbappe consoling Messi after starring as France beat Argentina in the last 16 was an iconic image of that World Cup. Fast forward to the present and Mbappe and Messi are team-mates at Paris Saint-Germain.

Still just 23, the future certainly belongs to Mbappe, who has eclipsed the Argentine at his club this season and has PSG, Real Madrid and football fans the world over on tenterhooks awaiting an announcement on where he will play next season.

Meanwhile, even if they are now on the wane, Messi and Ronaldo will go to Qatar hoping to seize surely their last chance to lift a World Cup, the one glaring omission from the CV of each.

These are the players who have between them won 12 of the last 13 editions of the Ballon d'Or—Messi won his seventh last year. Both have won a continental title with their national team, but neither has quite lit up a World Cup in the way they would have hoped. This will be Messi's fifth World Cup. He was 18 when he scored on his tournament debut in 2006. He inspired Argentina to the 2014 final, which they lost to Germany.

Yet, incredibly, he has never scored in a World Cup knockout match. All of his six goals have come in the group stage. He will be 35 by the time Argentina play Saudi Arabia in their opening game on November 22. "I am going to have to reassess a lot of things after the World Cup, whether it goes well for us or not," Messi admitted in March. "I hope it goes well, but a lot of things are definitely going to change."

#### 'I will decide'

Ronaldo has also played at four World Cups and last year broke the international scoring record held

by Iran's Ali Daei, but he has never managed a goal in the knockout rounds either. The Portugal captain will be nearly 38 at the end of this year, yet he remains in impressive physical shape and still scored 24 goals for Manchester United this season. "I will be the one to decide, nobody else," he insisted in March when asked if this could be his last World Cup. Improved diets and advances in sports science mean more players now are extending their careers at the very top well into their 30s.

Karim Benzema, who turns 35 the day after the final at the Lusail Iconic Stadium, is playing the best football of his career for Real Madrid, the top scorer in La Liga now perhaps the favorite to succeed Messi as Ballon d'Or winner. So far, Benzema has played at just one World Cup in 2014 before being exiled from the national team for five years over his involvement in a sex-tape blackmail affair. "There is a World Cup coming and I have to try to do something great. We will see after that if I go down in history," Benzema told L'Equipe recently.

#### The new wave

The best player at the last World Cup, Luka Modric has continued to mesmerize in flashes this

season alongside Benzema for Real Madrid. The 2018 Ballon d'Or winner will, though, be 37 come Qatar. A repeat of his heroic physical efforts four years ago—when he dragged Croatia through extra time in three knockout ties en route to the final—is highly unlikely.

Robert Lewandowski may be the greatest pure goal-getter in European football in recent years, but he has only played three World Cup games for Poland and never scored. Soon to turn 34, this is again his last chance at the tournament, and the same can be said of Uruguayan veterans Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani. Even Neymar, still comparatively young at 30, has said he might not feature at a World Cup again, such is the strain on his body and mind.

"I will play it like it is the last because I don't know if I will still have the mental strength to put up with even more football," the Brazilian said last year. Yet Qatar may see one of the game's emerging young stars really make their mark, like Mbappe four years ago. Norway's failure to qualify means no Erling Haaland, but Spain's Pedri, Dusan Vlahovic of Serbia and Vinicius Junior of Brazil are among the new generation of superstars. If only they can outshine the old boys. —AFP