



**7** Marcos Jr proclaimed as next Philippine president



**8** 'Best Telco Operator' award for Zain, 'Best Digital Service' for ZainTech



**13** Egypt drummers beat away bad rap of tabla tunes



**15** In Sierra Leone, football offers hope to amputees



# 'Nightmare' as gunman kills 19 children, 2 teachers in US

Kuwait stands in solidarity with US • Amir sends condolences to Biden

## Amir returns home from private leave



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrived home on Wednesday evening after spending a private leave overseas. He was welcomed at the airport by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan

UVALDE, Texas: A tight-knit Latino community in Texas was wracked with grief Wednesday after a teen in body armor marched into an elementary school and killed 19 small children and two teachers, in the latest spasm of deadly gun violence in America. Details of the atrocity, the victims and the 18-year-old suspect - who was killed by police - emerged as America grappled with its deadliest school shooting since the Sandy Hook tragedy in Connecticut a decade ago.

"This town is heartbroken, devastated," said Adolfo Hernandez, whose nephew was at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, a small community about an hour from the Mexican border, during the Tuesday shooting. "We feel like there's a black cloud above this town," he told AFP. "You just want to pinch yourself and wake up from that horrible nightmare."

Grief-stricken and angry, President Joe Biden addressed the nation in the hours after the attack, with a call on lawmakers to take on America's powerful gun lobby and enact tougher laws to curb gun violence. "When in God's name will we do what we all know in our gut needs to be done?" Biden asked, his voice slow and heavy with emotion.

HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable of condolences to Biden over the shooting. HH the Amir wished solace to the families of the victims, and hoped for the swift recovery of those injured in the horrendous shooting.



UVALDE, Texas: A girl cries outside the Willie de Leon Civic Center where grief counseling will be offered on May 24, 2022, after a teenage gunman killed 19 young children at Robb Elementary School. — AFP

HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

The foreign ministry said on Tuesday Kuwait expresses sympathy and solidarity with the US over the killings. Kuwait offers its sincere condolences and sympathy to the American leadership, government and people, as well as to the families of the victims, read a ministry statement.

Continued on Page 6

## Assembly panel to vote on changes to residency law

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's interior and defense committee is scheduled to vote on Thursday on key changes to the country's residency law, which includes giving investors a 15-year residency for the first time. The amendments also call to allow Kuwaiti women to sponsor their children and foreign husbands for a 10-year residency, provided the women are not naturalized citizens.

The new amendments also allow foreign widows and divorcees of Kuwaiti husbands who have children to obtain regular residency for

Continued on Page 6

## Ousted Khan marches on Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan on Wednesday led a convoy of thousands of supporters towards the capital Islamabad in a show of force the new government has attempted to shut down, with clashes breaking out between police and protesters. Since being removed from power through a no-confidence vote last month, the cricket star turned politician has heaped pressure on the country's fragile new coalition rulers by

staging mass rallies, touting a claim he was turned out from office in a "foreign conspiracy".

In a centerpiece showdown with his rivals, Khan had called for supporters of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to gather in Islamabad and stage a sit-in until fresh elections are called. "No obstacle can stop us, we will cross all the barriers and will reach... Islamabad," Khan declared, flanked by more than 20,000 supporters.

The government headed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has pledged to stop the convoy from entering the city, calling the rally an attempt to "divide the nation and promote chaos". All major roads surrounding Islamabad, where a heavy security

Continued on Page 6



SWABI, Pakistan: Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan, along with supporters, takes part in a protest rally on May 25, 2022. — AFP

## Turkey: Zionist ties to help Palestinians

JERUSALEM: Turkey's diplomatic thaw with the Zionist entity will help the Palestinians, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday during the first trip to the Zionist entity by Ankara's top diplomat in 15 years. Cavusoglu, who met Palestinian officials in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday, was in Jerusalem as Turkey and the Zionist entity seek to mend ties which began to fray following a Zionist military operation in the Gaza Strip in 2008.

Ties fully collapsed in 2010 when Zionist forces stormed a Turkish aid ship bound for the blockaded Gaza Strip, in a botched operation that claimed the lives of 10 Turks. Cavusoglu and his Zionist counterpart Yair Lapid stressed economic ties had continued to grow, despite years of acrimony between the two countries. "We won't pretend that our relationship has not seen its ups and downs," Lapid said. "Even in times of political tension, economic cooperation between our countries has been constantly on the rise."

Addressing the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, Cavusoglu voiced hope Turkey and the Zionist entity could "address our disagreements in a more constructive manner".

Continued on Page 6



JERUSALEM: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu is pictured in front of the Dome of the Rock Mosque during his visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on May 25, 2022. —AFP

## News in brief

### Outdoor work ban from June

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower has started implementing administrative decision number 535/2015 to prohibit laborers from working in open areas from 11:00 am till 4:00 pm from June 1 to Aug 31. PAM teams will carry out sudden inspection tours to spot any violations, Director General Ahmad Al-Mousa said. Any violations will result in fines ranging between KD 100 to KD 200 per worker, paid by the business owners. — KUNA

### Food supplies at highest levels

KUWAIT: Kuwait's basic food supplies are reassuring and are at their highest levels, the ministry of commerce and industry said on Wednesday. All of the country's authorities are working to guarantee the availability of products to avoid any shortages, it added. Stockpiling these items will lead to spoilage, and consumers should only purchase what they need without any unnecessary panic, it affirmed. — KUNA

## Seeking new start, Russians move to Dubai

DUBAI: As the Ukraine war drags on, more and more Russian professionals are moving to Dubai,

the business-friendly Gulf emirate that offers an escape from the impact of Western sanctions. Entrepreneurs, lawyers and art dealers are among those flocking to the financial hub in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, which frustrated Washington and other Western allies by refusing to join a UN Security Council vote condemning Russia's war.

The UAE, which has diplomatic and economic ties with both the United States and Russia, has long welcomed Russians whether they are middle-

class or millionaires - especially in Dubai, known as a playground of the rich. The number of Russian entrepreneurs and start-ups has increased "tenfold" compared to last year in the International Free Zone Authority (IFZA), said Jochen Knecht, CEO of IFZA, one of Dubai's many free trade areas established to attract foreign investment.

"It actually started with IT companies, software companies, but now we see all types of

Continued on Page 6

## Local

# Australian University hosts forum on 'education for sustainable future'

## Coronavirus reshaped global education: World Bank representative

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The Australian University (AU) hosted a forum titled "Rethinking Education for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future" in collaboration with the World Bank Group in Kuwait. The forum discussed the worldwide situation of higher education that needs to be developed with an awareness of both risks and opportunities to promote an educational system for a sustainable future.

In his opening speech, Omar Al-Kandari, Secretary-General of the Private Universities Council, said: "Kuwait and the world have witnessed a qualitative change in the education sector, and accordingly, the private education council works to pay attention to educational institutions to ensure the quality of education, while giving them the space to develop their performance in light of competition to provide advanced educational materials that meet the needs of the local, regional and international labor market."

"To achieve the desired results and ensure the quality of its outputs with the requirements of the local community and economic needs, today's forum will serve the students to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for the teaching and learning process, especially in light of the challenges caused by the pandemic. It empowered youth to find advanced solutions to challenges and build innovative capabilities to participate in achieving the development plan of Kuwait's 2035 vision," Kandari added.

### Graduate attributes

Isam Zabalawi, President of Australian University, discussed graduate attributes (GAs) and employability and how they help AU and students prepare for the changing landscape, noting that graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings that students should develop during their time with the institution. "They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good and to be a good contributor to the society," he said.

Zabalawi added that AU is preparing its students to meet the needed qualities employers look for, such as communication skills, honesty, loyalty, dependability, teamwork, flexibility, self-reliance, eagerness to learn, confidence, work ethic, determination, problem-solving skills, positivity and ambition.

Zabalawi revealed that AU looks at the student as an asset to the nation and subsequently to the world. "The student can bring pride and hope to their family and acquaintances, and can be a good leader, politician and entrepreneur, which can ultimately help the nation and its citizens. Therefore, AU must equip them with appropriate attributes and abilities," he said.

On employability and graduate attributes in the context of career development, he said: "For graduates to stand the best chance of securing occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful, they must receive some education in career development. Part of the role of the university is to provide socially responsible citizens and be prepared for a largely unknown future. The government has expectations that universities will become more cost-effective by focusing on outputs. Students are prepared to compete to have better job opportunities, and the university has proper quality assurance standards and is accredited."

### Education reshaped

Talking about education, youth and the future of work, Ghassan Al-Khoja, Resident Representative of World Bank in Kuwait, said: "There are some positives due to the pandemic; it made us move away from our traditional teaching practicing. Coronavirus has reshaped and reframed global education and made educational technology improvements."

"Will technology replace labor," he asked, noting that World Bank's World Development Report in 2019 was on "The Changing Nature of Work" - how the nature of work is changing as a result of advances in technology today, showing that fears



**KUWAIT:** Isam Zabalawi, President of Australian University, speaks during the forum. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



**Omar Al-Kandari, Secretary-General for the Private Universities Council, delivers his speech via videoconference.**



### In collaboration with the World Bank Group



**A view of the audience.**

that robots will replace people to be unfounded.

The report revealed that work is constantly reshaped by technological progress, where firms adopt new ways of production, markets expand and societies evolve. Overall, technology brings opportunity, paving the way to create new jobs, increase productivity and deliver effective public services. The rise of the digital platform means that technological effects reach more people faster

than ever before.

The forum attracted a local and international audience from various teaching backgrounds, where they discussed needed skills and future of work, the main priorities of Kuwait's 2035 vision concerning education in a knowledge economy era, developing strategy for the labor market in Kuwait, digital transformation and post-COVID psychological well-being of teachers and students.



**KUWAIT:** Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to Kuwait Michael Mavros visited Kuwait Times on Wednesday and met with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## CAN trains 2,170 nurses by end of Feb

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said four new training courses for health ministry nurses will be held from May 24 to June 14 in cooperation with the nursing services department. Saleh pointed to the importance of the role of nursing teams in providing health services. They carry out doctors' prescribed treatments, so they are the pillars of presenting medicine. Therefore, it is a must to boost their knowledge with regards to cancer.

Dr Saleh said 2,170 nurses of both genders were trained by the end of

February, adding that these courses are within CAN's strategy to promote awareness about cancer, which includes organizing specialized courses for nurses. He said the campaign seeks the help of experienced specialists in this field in its training program, adding CAN trains nurses on communications skills with patients and family members, especially cancer patients.

He said a comprehensive program was prepared for trainees that includes definition of cancer, its stages and its prevalence in Kuwait and around the world, in addition to diagnosis, treatment, prevention, early detection and recovery. Saleh said taking interest in training nurses is due to their proximity to the patient, family and doctors, so training them with correct information about cancer prepares them to answer any question scientifically.



**KUWAIT:** Dr Khalid Al-Saleh speaks during a training course for nurses.

## CPA Chairman, Omani Minister discuss ties

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of Kuwait's Competition Protection Agency (CPA) Dr. Rashed Al-Ajmi discussed with Omani Minister of Commerce and Industry Qais Al-Yousef the sturdy relations between their two countries and ways of promoting such relations in the field of competition protection. This came during a meeting between the Kuwaiti delegation to the Third Arab Competition Forum and the

Omani minister on Wednesday. Both sides reviewed the exchange of expertise and information, in addition to hosting training courses, symposiums and workshops.

The Kuwaiti initiative that included a Memorandum of Understanding between Kuwait and Oman regarding competition protection was also discussed, as the two stated that they are looking forward to the signing of the MoU. Member of the CPA board of directors and member of delegation Ahmad Al-Mutairan stated to the press that this exchange of knowledge is key towards cementing relations and furthering culture of economics in Arab countries, expressing gratitude to the Omani Sultanate for hosting such an event. He added that the forum handled defining the

## Kuwait customs keen on participating in security exhibitions

**DOHA:** Kuwait Customs is keen on participating in regional and international security exhibitions to gain experience and develop staff abilities, said a top Kuwait customs official on Wednesday. Speaking on the sidelines of the 14th security and safety exhibition (Milipol Qatar), Director General of Kuwait Customs Suleiman Al-Fahad said that such events provided experi-

ence for Kuwaiti customs staff, exposing them to the latest in security procedures and tools. He commended Qatar's organizing prowess of the event, saying that this year's edition had many useful functions. Milipol Qatar, which began on Tuesday, will continue for three days with the participation of 200 exhibitors from 22 countries. —KUNA



**Graphic Design student Rahaf Hussain Al-Khalaf**

of Rahaf's pieces can be seen as features of large-scale art installations which adorn the many student spaces around the campus. "My experience at AIU was inspirational. The professional instructors who mentored me along my journey and the motivating, lifelong friends I have made here made my experience at AIU unforgettable."

As AIU gears up for its first graduation, excitement and anticipation are widespread on campus. Many of our graduates will go on for further studies, and some may begin their careers. Through AIU, students will become the standard of art and learning, making them recognizable anywhere in the region.



**DOHA:** Director-General of Kuwait Customs Suleiman Al-Fahad participates at the 14th security and safety exhibition (Milipol Qatar). —KUNA

Local

# African ambassadors woo investors, promote peace

## African Union to celebrate Africa Day, declares 2022 'Year of Nutrition'

By Chidi Emmanuel

**KUWAIT:** As part of their efforts to promote peace, investment and tourism, African ambassadors in Kuwait on Wednesday highlighted the key programs lined up to make Africa one of the greatest economies. At a press briefing held at Crowne Plaza hotel ahead of the African Day celebration, the envoys urged Kuwaitis and foreigners to explore the vast investment opportunities in Africa.

Sierra Leonean Ambassador to Kuwait Haja Ishata Thomas highlighted the key programs lined up to make Africa an investment magnet and one of the greatest economies in Africa. She hailed Africa-Kuwait bilateral relations and urged Kuwaiti investors to turn to Africa for fruitful investments in education and agriculture. "Africa is beautiful and business-friendly. It has a lot of untapped resources as it is opening up some business ventures, including the transport, tourism, educational and agricultural sectors," she said.

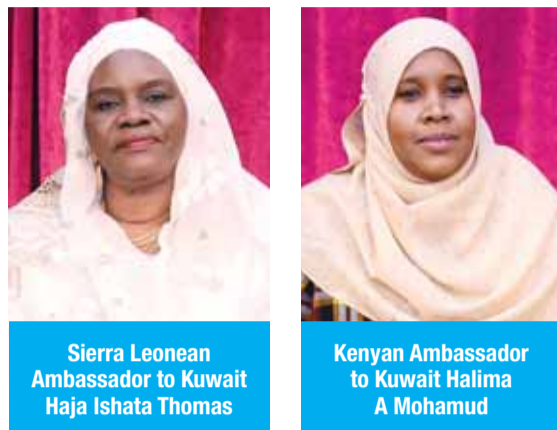
On Africa-Kuwait ties, Kenyan Ambassador to Kuwait Halima A Mohamad said African countries have enjoyed cordial bilateral relations for decades. She lauded the efforts of Kuwaiti leaders in maintaining peace and tranquility in this region. "There are over 30 African embassies in Kuwait, which is a great testimony to the cordial relationship Africa and Kuwait enjoy," she noted.

Responding to questions on reforms and problems Africans face in Kuwait, Senegalese Ambassador Ibrahim Al Khalil Seck pointed out one of the steps they are taking in tackling these issues. He urged investors to experience Africa's ecofriendly and market-friendly environment. The ambassador in his goodwill message reaffirmed the embassy's commitment to Kuwait media. In his remarks, the Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Osama Shalout pointed out some of the major reforms that have been made, which include a 'total war' against terrorism and other financial crimes.

### Africa Day

Africa Day will be marked on Wednesday, June 8, 2022. Africa Day is a day celebrated by African people around the world. It is an annual celebration marking the historic anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity on May 25, 1963, now known as the African Union, which was established in 2002 to be the organization's successor.

Since its first day, the organization has aimed to



Sierra Leonean Ambassador to Kuwait Haja Ishata Thomas

Kenyan Ambassador to Kuwait Halima A Mohamad

strengthen the continent's joint work to achieve stability, progress and prosperity, and has always been a symbol of the determination and will of African people that freed themselves from the shackles of the colonial powers and their domination at the time.

The heads of states and governments of the African Union declared 2022 the 'Year of Nutrition', under the theme 'Building resilience in nutrition on the African continent: Accelerate the human capital, social and economic development'. The year will witness important nutrition-related events.

The ambassadors of the African diplomatic corps expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to the support of HHH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HHH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the development efforts of the African Union.

"Africa-Kuwait relations are historic and highlight the importance of the African continent and its diverse potential and capabilities in all areas. It is a continent with resources and opportunities, especially in the fields of agriculture, telecommunications, financial sector, infrastructure and tourism, despite its daunting challenges," Togolese Ambassador Mohamed Sad Ouro-Sama said.

"This year's celebration is very special, as it is happening after a two-year pause due to the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic that overshadowed all significant events and celebrations. Kuwait has spared no effort to bolster cooperation with Africa through loans, grants and technical assistance from relevant Kuwait authorities - particularly the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development to finance the projects and programs of the African continent," he added.



KUWAIT: African ambassadors are pictured in this group photo during a press briefing at the Crowne Plaza Hotel ahead of the African Day celebration. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Kuwait Foreign Minister joins WEF talks on Mideast security policy

**DAVOS:** Representative of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, attended on Tuesday a World Economic Forum (WEF) session on a new "security architecture" in Middle East region. The talks in the Swiss mountain resort of Davos examined how regional actors establish a "more stable and sustainable equilibrium in the Middle East," according to the WEF's official agenda. The session grouped the Kuwaiti top diplomat



DAVOS: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah attends the session. —KUNA

with his counterparts in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, in addition to the leader of Iraq's semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan. —KUNA

## Arab Group at UN welcomes ammunition working group formation

**NEW YORK:** The Arab Group at the United Nations on Tuesday welcomed the establishment of the Open-ended Working Group on conventional ammunition with an aim to establish a comprehensive framework on dealing with the matter. This endeavor would support safe and sustainable management of these weapons domestically, regionally and globally, transparency and confidence-building between countries, especially in light of tensions worldwide and the emergence of a global arms race, Counselor at Kuwait's permanent UN mission Abdulaziz Al-Ajmi said, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group during UN talks. The diplomat urged the necessity of addressing all aspects of the issue independently within the framework of the current working group.

The need for a flexible global framework, which takes into account the specificity of each country, its geographical region and national capabilities was also maintained. Also, the need to ensure the eligibility of countries to use these weapons for security purposes, namely to protect borders and national security, and to prevent these weapons from falling into the wrong hands, specifically



NEW YORK: Counselor at Kuwait's permanent UN mission Abdulaziz Al-Ajmi speaks at the UN. —KUNA

criminal gangs and terrorists. The safe disposal of unexploded ordnance after the assessment of its technical condition was also highlighted by the Arab Group, which called to secure the remnants of war through unconditional international cooperation between member states. This would contribute to the development of a comprehensive plan aimed at building the capacities of developing countries to deal with these related developments, the Arab Group underlined. The regional group went to stress the need to steer clear of vague terms and concepts in relation to the issue, and to avoid punitive measures against certain countries without setting a clear standard and specifying the party in question throughout each individual case. —KUNA

bration, said Hajraf, coincided with GCC states' individual plans for overall and sustainable development, which in turn would contribute to the welfare of the whole region.

Despite numerous economic, political, and security challenges, the GCC will continue to strive for a better future for its citizens and people, he added. Hajraf took the chance to remember late GCC leaders who built the foundation of the GCC, as a body focusing on achieving the welfare, security, and aspiration of the Gulf citizens. The GCC was founded on May 25, 1981 in Abu Dhabi and consists of six nations, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. —KUNA

## GCC to continue road of success, aspiration: Hajraf

**RIYADH:** The GCC, as an entity, will continue its road to achieve success and development to reach the aspiration of people in the region, said the organization's Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf on Wednesday. The statement came to commemorate the 41st anniversary of the establishment of the GCC, which is celebrated on May 25 each year. This year's cele-

## Firemen rescue man trapped in elevator

**KUWAIT:** Hawally firemen rescued a person who was trapped in an elevator in a building in the area. The person had difficulty breathing due to low oxygen levels and was given necessary medical attention, Kuwait Fire Force said.



## On the occasion of the



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## Local

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## News in brief

Court adjourns Netflix  
ban case to June 8

**KUWAIT:** The Administrative Court adjourned the case calling for the government to ban Netflix in Kuwait to June 8. The claimant argued that the subscription service offers content corruptive to the Kuwaiti society and its customs and traditions. The government's defense called for rejecting the case. Attorney Abdulaziz Al-Subaie had filed the case demanding banning Netflix in Kuwait over broadcasting the Arabic version of the 'Perfect Strangers' movie, which stirred a wave of criticism in the country over its controversial content.

Kuwait oil price  
down to \$117.23 pb

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$1.75 to \$117.23 per barrel on Tuesday as opposed to \$118.89 pb on Monday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Wednesday. The prices of the Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate saw the first going up by 14 cents to reach \$113.56 per barrel, while the latter went down by 52 cents to \$109.77 pb.

KFH continues  
banking awareness  
campaign for customers  
with special needs

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues its efforts in highlighting the banking services and rights of customers with special needs. This comes as part of the bank's efforts to support the banking awareness campaign "Be Aware".

KFH offers all services to this segment of customers to ensure that they obtain banking services without incurring any additional fees or costs. This includes allocating a special branch for them in each governorate, with adequate car parks, wheelchairs, and other means necessary for customers with special needs.

Banks also allow at least one ATM machine in the branch that provides banking services for people with special needs, which can be easily accessed. It provides complete privacy to the customer through a glass room that opens with the card and enables the usage of headphones.

Additionally, KFH provides safe-deposit box services, staff trained in sign language to communicate with this segment of customers, and forms for account opening and other contracts and financial transactions printed in the Braille system. In addition, KFH provides voice service on the bank's website, which makes it easier for the customer to obtain banking services through the Internet.

KFH is keen on providing its services to people with special needs in an optimal manner. This supports its strategy in serving all customer segments, while facilitating their access to banking services easily and as per the highest quality and safety standards.

KFH supports the "Be Aware" campaign activities with the aim of spreading financial education in society and raising awareness among the public about their rights regarding dealing with banks, so that they are aware of financial and banking transactions. This is through publishing videos, educational materials and awareness messages through the bank's social media channels, website, ATM screens, display screens in branches, in addition to newspapers and other media outlets.

The "Be Aware" campaign addresses several topics, such as the consumer and housing finance process, banking cards, awareness of the rights of customers with special needs, advice related to cybersecurity and the protection of bank accounts, clarifying the mechanisms for submitting a complaint and protecting the rights of customers, as well as introducing the functions of the banking sector and its role in stimulating and developing the economy.

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** This file photo shows a view of Salmiya's skyline from the Salmiya beach. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

DHAMAN supports continued  
education for KMA members

**KUWAIT:** Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced sponsorship of Kuwait Medical Association (KMA) to support continuous learning for all doctors working in the healthcare fields in both public and private sectors, within the Company's national responsibility as one of the strategic projects in the development plan and the New Kuwait 2035 Vision.

This initiative between DHAMAN and KMA includes enabling doctors to subscribe to UpToDate website for a small fee, as this platform is considered a source to support evidence-based medical recommendations and decisions. The site is managed by more than 7 thousand specialized researcher and doctors from around the world is trusted by doctors as a reference in making the right healthcare decisions.

DHAMAN CEO, Thamer Arab, said that the Company seeks to develop the healthcare system in Kuwait in general, and provide the best solutions to enhance quality and employ the latest approved medical practices in the world, and at the same time provide the best types of care for patients, and this platform contributes to achieving these objectives, and works to transfer documented and evidence-based knowledge to caregivers, thus providing the best medical services in healthcare facilities.

Arab added that DHAMAN offers cooperation initiatives with all healthcare institutions in Kuwait to contribute to raising the level of healthcare indicators and achieving a paradigm shift in all medical sector institutions and facilities in Kuwait, pointing to the importance of this partnership with the KMA, which plays a



tangible role in developing aspects of the healthcare sector, for the benefit of all beneficiaries, both citizens and residents.

KMA Chairman, Dr Ibrahim Al-Tawala, confirmed that the Association is always working to provide various resources necessary to develop and strengthen the medical system, and therefore KMA, in cooperation with DHAMAN, facilitated participation in this platform for a minimal fee, expressing thanks and appreciation to DHAMAN for this initiative to develop medical practice in Kuwait.

Tawala added that the UpToDate platform provides the latest evidence-based medical information and research to its subscribers, while providing a guide that provides docu-

mented solutions and answers to clinical cases and accidents and the best care for patients. It also contributes to the professional development of the medical staff by providing them with the latest developments in terms of information and instructions. In addition, this platform is considered an official reference for promotions and career and professional development in government and private healthcare institutions and facilities.

The agreement between DHAMAN and KMA includes providing support to reduce the platform's subscription fee by more than 80 percent for the members of the association, so that registration and subscription are accessible to everyone.

NBK embraces  
eco-friendly practices  
across its branches

**KUWAIT:** In line with its leading role and key contributions towards the effective transition to a sustainable and low-carbon economy, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced that it is ramping up its efforts aimed at transforming its network of branches to be environmentally friendly. NBK is targeting lower energy consumption levels as well as more dependency on renewable energy sources to reduce carbon emissions and support Kuwait's vision to achieve sustainable growth enshrined in New Kuwait Vision 2035 and the National Development Plan.

As part of NBK's sustainability strategy aimed at reducing net emissions and increasing renewable and clean energy dependency, the Bank has embarked on a project to install solar panels as a supplemental source of energy in its local branches, which was initially implemented in Kaifan branch as a pilot and will be rolled out in other branches. This initiative will immensely contribute to our efforts to effectively reduce carbon emissions. Along the same efforts focused on power consumption, the

Bank is also using 100 percent energy efficient LED technology in all its branches.

NBK's strategy also aims at implementing key steps to reduce operational emissions going forward, including the installation of Building Energy Management System "BEMS", a system which allows the Bank to monitor, analyze, and most importantly, control energy consumption to improve its efficiency across NBK network of branches. The automated system, installed in the Head Quarters, has the ability to remotely monitor and control energy and water consumption throughout NBK branches using its centralized system and the main control Unit.

"We remain deeply committed to doing our best efforts to fulfill our Sustainability commitment and fully support the global movement to transition to a low carbon economy and mitigate climate change risks, as we believe there is a hard road ahead," Mohammed Al-Othman, GM - Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said. Othman indicated that NBK had set specific goals for sustainable business and devised standards to ensure that climate protection would have an important role in its future business model. He highlighted that climate change is becoming one of the biggest challenges of our times, therefore, we at NBK, continually strive to lower our carbon footprint, as we aim to reduce operational emissions by 25 percent by 2025. Moreover, the bank is currently reviewing all available technologies and development opportunities to expand its future reliance on renewable energy to achieve operational net zero by 2035.

Othman stressed that NBK is witnessing an irreversible shift to further support climate change initiatives and the adoption of sustainability across the bank. All NBK employees are fully committed to supporting this transformation and are putting in their best efforts to achieve the Group's vision of reaching net-zero operational emissions by 2035.

To reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, NBK has embarked on several initiatives to optimize energy and water efficiency through automatic controls, automated heating and cooling sensors, and LED lights, in addition to launching an annual campaign to rationalize energy and water consumption.

NBK continues to maintain its leadership commitment to sustainability and supports responsible business practices that contribute to the sustainable development of Kuwait national economy. Most recently, the bank launched its Sustainable Financing Framework, which is aligned with the International Capital Market Association (ICMA) and Loan Market Association (LMA) principles.

It is worth noting that NBK has recently made great strides in terms of sustainability, including the new Headquarters' LEED Gold certification, reflecting the bank's commitment to adopt the highest sustainability standards, and improving all environmental factors that are collected, measured, and reported, including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and paper and plastic recycling. Moreover, NBK's efforts were recognized by its inclusion in the Refinitiv AFE Low Carbon Select Index in MENA, in which NBK ranked first among regionals banks and Kuwaiti companies in terms of the index's weight.



Mohammed Al-Othman



Marcos Jr proclaimed Philippine president after landslide win

Tedros, from 'child of war' to two-term WHO chief

Page 6

Page 7

## Boris urged to quit over 'Partygate' culture

'I take full responsibility for everything that took place on my watch'

**LONDON:** UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson rejected calls to resign after an inquiry Wednesday found that he presided over a culture of lockdown-breaking parties that featured drunken fighting among staff. Johnson is among dozens of people in Downing Street who have received police fines for breaching COVID regulations since 2020 — making Number 10 the most penalised address in the entire country.

"I take full responsibility for everything that took place on my watch," he told MPs in response to the long-awaited report by senior civil servant Sue Gray, insisting: "I am humbled, and I have learned." But Johnson said he was absent from most of the events, and denied ever lying to parliament, or urging Gray privately to bury her 37-page report.

He expressed hope that with the investigation now over, "we will be able to move on" in addressing priorities including the war in Ukraine and a spiralling cost-of-living crisis in Britain. Gray published photographs of Johnson toasting staff with wine and described revelling that sometimes stretched into the early hours to music from a karaoke machine.

"Many of these events should not have been allowed to happen," Gray wrote, revealing that Downing Street security and cleaning staff were mocked when they tried to protest at the staff conduct. Junior staffers who ended up fined by London's Metropolitan police—most of them women—had been told to attend events by their bosses, the report found.

"The senior leadership at the centre, both political and official, must bear responsibility for this culture," Gray added, noting the painful sacrifices made by the UK public to respect the rules set by Johnson's government.

### 'Pack your bags'

The report came out as a different photograph published by the Daily Mirror newspaper showed a Downing Street table laden with wine bottles and doughnuts. It said an accompanying WhatsApp message told staff: "Time to open the COVID



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson during the weekly session of Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) at the House of Commons, in London, on May 25, 2022. —AFP

secure bar." The prime minister defied calls to resign after he received the police fine in April. The main opposition Labour party said the "catalogue of criminality" revealed by Gray's report vindicated its demands for Johnson to quit.

"You cannot be a lawmaker and a law-breaker," Labour leader Keir Starmer told Johnson in the House of Commons. "It's time to pack his bags,"

added Starmer, who has vowed to quit himself if fined by police in northeast England for an alleged breach of the COVID regulations during an election campaign meeting.

With opinion polls showing deep public disapproval of "Partygate", Conservative MPs must calculate whether Johnson remains an electoral asset or is now a liability heading into two important by-

elections next month.

Last month, the Conservatives lost hundreds of council seats in local elections, although anger at the eye-watering rise in the cost of living was seen as the main issue at the ballot box. Johnson was due later to hold a news conference, before attending a meeting of backbench Tories, some of whom have written to demand a no-confidence vote. —AFP

## India jails Kashmir leader for life

**SRINAGAR:** A former militant and campaigner for Kashmir independence was sentenced to life imprisonment on terrorism charges Wednesday by an Indian court. Mohammad Yasin Malik renounced violence in 1994 to campaign peacefully for the "liberation" of Kashmir, which has been split between India and Pakistan since 1947 and which both claim in full.

Last week an Indian court convicted the 56-year-old, who has spent years in prison and has been in custody since 2019, of terrorism and funding acts of terror. The National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's top anti-terrorism investigation body, had asked that Malik be given the death sentence, but the court instead sentenced him to life.

"We are holding a meeting today in which we will take a decision on what strategy we have to adopt following the life imprisonment of our leader," Khawaja Saif Din, vice-chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which Malik heads, told AFP by phone.

"Our group was holding negotiations with the Indian government for the solution of the Kashmir issue. But today India has compelled Kashmiris to again take up arms against it, by using an undemocratic process to award life imprisonment to Yasin Malik." Crowds of several hundred gathered in Pakistan-administered Kashmir before the sentencing was even announced, to call for Malik's release.

Large parts of Srinagar in the Indian-con-



NEW DELHI: Police and security personnel escort pro-independence party Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front chairman Yasin Malik (C) to holding area after a sentencing hearing at Patiala house court in New Delhi on May 25, 2022. —AFP

trolled part of the disputed region were deserted following a shutdown call by the JKLF. Authorities severed internet connections in the city and police fired tear gas near Malik's home to disperse scattered groups of protesters, who shouted slogans demanding his freedom. Kashmir has long been a source of tension between the nuclear-armed neighbours and has been the spark for two of their three wars. In the part of Kashmir controlled by India, militants — wanting either to be part of Pakistan or independence — have fought the Indian military for three decades. —AFP

managed tour. But Xi defended his country's human rights progress during the video call, according to a readout from state broadcaster CCTV, which did not say whether Xinjiang was mentioned by either side.

"Human rights issues should also not be politicised, instrumentalised, or treated with double standards," Xi said according to CCTV, adding that China had "a human rights development path that... suits its national conditions". CCTV reported Xi as telling Bachelet there was no "ideal nation" on human rights and that there was "no need for a 'teacher' who is bossy towards other countries"—an apparent reference to recent criticisms of the trip by US and British officials.

According to the CCTV readout, Bachelet said the UN Human Rights Office was "willing to strengthen cooperation with the Chinese side". She was also reported to have said: "I admire China's efforts and achievements in eradicating poverty, protecting human rights, and realising economic and social development." Bachelet's spokesperson did not confirm the state media comments to AFP, but said the high commissioner told Xi she hoped her office could "accompany efforts to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights, justice and the rule of law for all without exception".

Bachelet later tweeted that the meetings with Xi and officials "have been valuable to discuss directly human rights issues & concerns in China & global". Raphael Viana David from the International Service for Human Rights said it was extremely important that Bachelet "reports publicly on her findings and discussions". —AFP

## Xi speaks with UN rights chief as Xinjiang row rages

**BEIJING:** Chinese President Xi Jinping held a video call with UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet on Wednesday, as she visits Xinjiang during a mission overshadowed by fresh allegations of Uyghur abuses and fears she is being used as a public relations tool. China's Communist Party is accused of detaining over one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the far-western region as part of a years-long crackdown the United States and lawmakers in other Western countries have labelled a "genocide".

Bachelet is expected to visit the cities Urumqi and Kashgar on a six-day tour that has been dogged by concerns from Western officials, diplomats and rights groups that the Communist Party will attempt to use it to whitewash abuses.

China vehemently denies the abuse allegations, calling them the "lie of the century". The United States has reiterated its view that Bachelet's visit was a mistake after the release of thousands of leaked documents and photographs from inside the system of mass incarceration this week. And activists have voiced concern that Beijing will prevent Bachelet from conducting a thorough probe into alleged rights abuses and instead give her a stage-

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## International

# Tedros, from humble upbringing as 'child of war' to two-term WHO chief

## Re-election announced to thundering applause during WHO's main annual assembly

GENEVA: Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the first African to head the WHO, was re-elected on Tuesday, tearfully accepting a second term as he recalled his humble upbringing as "a child of war" and pleading for peace. His re-election was announced to thundering applause during the World Health Organization's main annual assembly, after receiving more than two-thirds of secret-ballot votes cast, as needed to be appointed.

The UN health agency did not provide a breakdown, but sources in the room said he had received 155 of the 160 votes cast. "I am really, really overwhelmed by the support," Tedros told the assembly. "I am really proud to be WHO."

The Ethiopian former minister of health and of foreign affairs has become a familiar face worldwide as he spearheads the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 57-year-old malaria expert has also increasingly been sounding the alarm over the heavy toll that conflicts like the war in Ukraine are taking on global health.

### 'Hope peace will come'

After accepting his re-election, Tedros made an impassioned and personal plea for peace. With a trembling voice, he pointed out that he himself was "a child of war... from a poor family". He recalled experiencing conflict at a very young age, and also losing his younger brother to disease due to a lack of access to medicine. "That I was spared was just pure luck. It could have been me, I could have died more than 50 years ago," he said, describing how the strong emotions from that time rushed back during a recent visit to Ukraine. "When I saw the kids, it was the image from more than 50 years ago that came to my mind, so visible, so haunting, the smell of war, the sound of war, the image of war," he told the World Health Assembly. "That's what I don't want to happen to anyone. So I hope peace will come."

Tedros, who has also voiced growing anguish at the conflict raging in his home region of Tigray since late 2020, has cautioned a divided world cannot properly address the mountain of health emergencies and challenges before it, including the pandemic.

Peace "is a prerequisite for health", he said. That is a message he is eager to push as he prepares to take on a second five-year term from mid-August.

### Turbulent

His first term in office was turbulent, as he grappled with the global response to the pandemic and a long line of other crises, including a sexual abuse scandal involving WHO staff in the Democratic Republic of Congo. While Tedros has faced his share of criticism, he has received broad backing. African nations especially have been pleased at the attention paid to the continent and at his relentless campaign for poorer nations to receive a fair share of Covid vaccines.

Since US President Joe Biden's arrival in the White House, Tedros has also enjoyed support in



### Overwhelmed by the support

Washington. State Department spokesman Ned Price congratulated Tedros and voiced appreciation for steps he has taken, saying the United States would work with him "to improve the organisation's agility, its transparency and its accountability".

That marked a major about-face from the start of the pandemic, when Biden's predecessor Donald Trump began pulling the United States out of the WHO, accusing it of being Beijing's puppet and helping cover up the initial COVID outbreak.

Ironically, the main source of opposition has come from Tedros's own country. Angered by his comments about the dire humanitarian situation in Tigray, Ethiopia's government accused him of having "abused

his office" to advance propaganda.

On Tuesday, the representatives of Ethiopia and Eritrea, whose troops have reportedly been fighting alongside Ethiopian government forces in Tigray, loudly voiced objections as Botswana tried to congratulate Tedros on behalf of African countries.

But they appeared to be on their own, with all regions and a long line of countries, including the United States and Russia, warmly congratulating him on his re-election. There is no shortage of challenges ahead, with the Covid-19 pandemic still raging and demands for dramatic reforms of the entire global health system to help avert similar threats going forward. In her congratulatory statement, US Assistant Health Secretary Loyce Pace hinted at the challenges ahead. "The truth is, there is still much more work to do to modernise the WHO so that it is more effective and agile," she said, vowing support at a time when "the entire global health ecosystem is under pressure." — AFP

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GENEVA: World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus delivers a speech on the opening day of 75th World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva on May 22, 2022. — AFP

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## Over 70 migrants missing after boat sinks off Tunisia

TUNIS: More than 70 people are missing in the Mediterranean after a boat crowded with migrants headed for Europe from Libya sank off neighbouring Tunisia, the coastguard said Wednesday. The boat, which was carrying around 100 people when it put to sea, capsized off the Tunisian port of Sfax, with coastguard and navy units able to pull 24 people out of the water, National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli said.

"According to preliminary results of the investigation, an inflatable boat left the coast of Zawara in Libya on Sunday night with around 100 people on board," he said, adding that so far one body had been recovered.

They were "of various African and Asian nationalities", he added. Libya has become a major launchpad for migrants seeking to reach Europe on what has become the world's deadliest migration route. Many end up in Italy, some 300 kilometres (180 miles) away, but many others die at sea when their often unseaworthy boats capsize or break down.

Improving weather in recent weeks has prompted a spike in departures. Since the start of the year, 6,340 migrants have been intercepted and returned to Libya, according to figures published by International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Monday. Human rights groups say those returned often face horrific abuses.

At least 129 people have died attempting the crossing and 459 have gone missing, the IOM said. Tunisia's Sfax region is itself a busy departure point for attempts to reach Europe, some of them by its own citizens. — AFP

## US warns Turkey against new Syria offensive

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday warned Turkey against launching a new military operation in northern Syria, saying the uneasy NATO ally would be putting US troops at risk. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday that Turkey would soon launch a new military operation into northern Syria to create a 30-kilometer (19-mile) "security zone" along the border.

"We are deeply concerned about reports and discussions of potential increased military activity in northern Syria and, in particular, its impact on the civilian population," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"We condemn any escalation. We support maintenance of the current cease-fire lines," he said. At the United Nations, spokesman Stephane Dujarric

said that the priority for war-battered Syria should be a political solution and humanitarian assistance.

"We stand for the territorial integrity of Syria, and what Syria needs is not more military operations from any quarter," Dujarric told reporters. Turkey has launched three offensives into Syria since 2016 aimed at crushing Syrian Kurdish fighters who assisted the US-led campaign against the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS.

The so-called People's Protection Units (YPG) are considered "terrorists" by Turkey, which sees them as part of the banned PKK separatist movement at home. Turkey ordered the last incursion in October 2019 when then US president Donald Trump, following talks with Erdogan, said that US troops had accomplished their mission in Syria and would withdraw.

Amid a backlash even from some of Trump's allies, then US vice president Mike Pence flew to Turkey and reached an agreement with Erdogan that called for a pause in fighting. "We expect Turkey to live up to the October 2019 joint statement, including to halt offensive operations in northeast Syria," Price said. "We recognize Turkey's legitimate securi-

ty concerns on Turkey's southern border. But any new offensive would further undermine regional stability and put at risk US forces in the coalition's campaign against ISIS," Price said.

Erdogan's talk of an offensive comes as he threatens to block the NATO membership of Finland and Sweden, which have sought to join the Western alliance out of alarm at Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Erdogan has alleged support for the PKK in the two Nordic states, which are planning high-level talks with Turkey to ease its concerns.

After Trump's abrupt pullout decision in 2019, the YPG sought protection from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russia, the regime's main supporter, which saw a prime opportunity to replace the United States as the key player.

Russia and Turkey then negotiated a ceasefire which has mostly held. Trump soon reversed course on the withdrawal and has some 900 US troops still officially in Syria as part of the fight against the Islamic State movement. President Joe Biden has shown no eagerness to pull out the troops despite his exit from the 20-year war in Afghanistan last year. — AFP

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## 'Nightmare' as gunman kills...

Continued from Page 1

In Uvalde, police had blocked off the area around the school on Wednesday and there was little traffic or pedestrian movement. The neighborhood is one of modest single-storey homes, with a small yard and often a swing set and an outdoor grill for barbecues. Identified as Salvador Ramos, the teen gunman was a resident of the town and a US citizen. According to Texas Department of Public Safety officials, Ramos shot his grandmother before heading to Robb Elementary School around noon where he abandoned his vehicle and entered with a handgun and a rifle, wearing body armor.

Details have emerged of the suspect as a deeply troubled teen - he was repeatedly bullied over a speech impediment that included a stutter and a lisp and once cut up his own face "just for fun", a former friend of Ramos, Santos Valdez, told The Washington Post. Valdez said he used to be close to Ramos but not since the latter had begun to "deteriorate". Ramos killed all 21 people in one classroom, CNN and other news outlets reported.

As shattered families shared the news on social media, the names of the murdered children, most of them of Latino heritage, began coming out: Ellie Garcia, Jayce Carmelo Luevanos, Uziyah Garcia... "My little love is now flying high with the angels above," Angel Garza, whose daughter Amerie Jo Garza had just celebrated her 10th birthday, posted on Facebook. "I love you Amerie jo," he wrote. "I will never be happy or complete again."

More than a dozen children were also wounded in

the attack at the school, which teaches more than 500 students aged around seven to 10 years old, mostly Hispanic and economically disadvantaged. The gunman was killed by responding officers, the officials said, adding later two teachers also died in the attack. Fourth-grade teacher Eva Mireles was shot and killed while trying to protect her students, her aunt Lydia Martinez Delgado told the New York Times. She said Mireles was proud of teaching kids of Latino heritage.

A cousin of Mireles, Amber Ybarra, called her a hero. "Her cooking was amazing. Her laughter was contagious, and she's going to be missed," Ybarra told NBC's "Today" show. "She put her heart into everything that she did." There have been more mass shootings - in which four or more people were wounded or killed - in 2022 than days so far this year, according to the non-profit Gun Violence Archive which recorded 213 such incidents. The Uvalde shooting was the deadliest such incident since the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting in Connecticut, in which 20 elementary school children and six staff were killed.

Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, where the Sandy Hook shooting took place, made an impassioned appeal for concrete action to prevent further violence. "This isn't inevitable, these kids weren't unlucky. This only happens in this country and nowhere else," Murphy said on the Senate floor in Washington.

The deadly assault in Texas follows a series of deadly mass shootings in the United States this month: Most recently on May 14 when an 18-year-old self-declared white supremacist shot 10 people dead at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York. Despite recurring mass-casualty shootings, multiple initiatives to reform gun regulations have failed in the US Congress, leaving states and local councils to strengthen - or weaken - their own restrictions. — Agencies

years. Foreign employees in the government are not allowed to obtain a residence permit in the private sector unless their previous government employers approve the transfer, according to the amendments.

According to the amendments, which are sponsored by the government, the interior minister has the right to deport expats with legal residence permits for security reasons or public interest, or if they don't have a legitimate source of income. Their family members under their sponsorship can be deported too.

## Assembly panel to vote on changes...

Continued from Page 1

themselves without the need for a sponsor. Children of Kuwaiti women and foreigners who own real estate in the country can be granted residency for up to 10

## Seeking new start, Russians...

Continued from Page 1

companies - art galleries, resale, and trade of spare parts," he said. "They are coming with employees, requiring office space and warehouses." Knecht said Russian investors were "very welcome" in the UAE, where foreigners make up the majority of the approximately 10-million-strong population.

They are attracted by the ease of setting up a

business, and the prospect of better opportunities as sanctions bite at home - and a more welcoming environment as attitudes harden to Russians elsewhere. Dubai is one of seven emirates in the UAE, whose advantageous tax system and strategic location between Europe and the rest of Asia have long made it attractive to business.

The city, with its luxury hotels and tourist facilities, is well known to Russians as a high-end destination for the wealthy, particularly those interested in real estate. Among them are oligarchs, including Chelsea football club's former owner Roman Abramovich, who was house-hunting in Dubai in March, according to news agency Bloomberg. — AFP

## Ousted Khan marches on...

Continued from Page 1

presence is in place, were blocked off with shipping containers while entry and exit points of major nearby cities were also cut off.

Sporadic clashes broke out between police and protesters who have tried to clear the roads, with tear gas fired in several cities. Khan joined the march in dramatic fashion, arriving in a helicopter that touched down on a motorway clogged with supporters outside the city of Mardan, 100 km northwest of Islamabad.

## Turkey: Zionist ties to help...

Continued from Page 1

"Turkey is ready to take responsibility to continue the efforts towards (Zionist-Palestinian) dialogue," he said. After meeting Lapid, Cavusoglu visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest site and the scene of repeated clashes between Palestinians and Zionist police during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

More than 200 people, mostly Palestinians,

The convoy later crossed a bridge that straddles PTI-run Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and government-run Punjab province, where shipping containers blocking the route were pushed to the side of the road by protesters. "When we reached here, we had a tough clash with the police. But they fled and we were able to clear the bridge for Imran Khan," said Zulfiqar Khan, a 42-year-old laborer, in Attock.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday held an emergency session, ordering the government and PTI leaders to hold urgent negotiations. It also ordered the release of supporters detained by police. More than 1,700 people have been arrested since police began raiding the homes of PTI supporters on Monday night, said the interior minister Rana Sanaullah, who has previously accused protesters of planning to carry weapons at the march. — AFP

have been wounded at the site in the past few weeks. One man died this month from injuries suffered as he was caught up in unrest at Al-Aqsa. Cavusoglu's visit, which passed without incident, saw him pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and meet with Azzam Al-Khatib, head of Jerusalem's Waqf Islamic affairs council, which administers the site.

Cavusoglu had earlier said dialogue between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Zionist counterpart Isaac Herzog helped "maintain calm" during Ramadan. Last month, Erdogan called his Zionist counterpart amid clashes at Al-Aqsa. The massive deployment of police as well as increasing presence of Jews at the site have been widely perceived as a "provocation" by Palestinians and several Muslim countries. — AFP

## International

# Ferdinand Marcos Jr proclaimed next Philippine president after landslide win

## First presidential candidate to win an outright majority

MANILA: Ferdinand Marcos Jr was Wednesday proclaimed the next Philippine president after a landslide win that rights groups and religious leaders fear could weaken the corruption-prone country's democracy. Marcos, who formally takes office next month, secured more than 31.6 million votes, or 58.8 percent of the total, according to a final tally released by parliament.

He was the first presidential candidate to win an outright majority since his dictator father, who presided over widespread graft and human rights abuses, was ousted by a popular revolt in 1986. In the Philippines, the winner only has to get more votes than anyone else.



**Marcos Jr will be inaugurated on June 30**

A joint session of the House of Representatives and Senate formally ratified the results and proclaimed Marcos the Philippines' 17th president. He will be inaugurated on June 30. Speaking after the proclamation ceremony, Marcos said he was "humbled" by his success at the ballot box and vowed to "always strive to perfection".

"I want to do well because when a president does well the country does well and I want to do well for this country," the 64-year-old told reporters. Marcos's victory followed relentless online whitewashing of his family's past, and alliances with rival political dynasties that have the means to influence voters in their regions.

His liberal rival Leni Robredo finished well behind in

second place with just over 15 million votes. Marcos's running mate Sara Duterte, the daughter of the outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, was proclaimed winner of the vice presidential race. Wearing a traditional formal shirt, Marcos greeted Sara Duterte with a hug as she arrived at a holding room inside the parliament building.

Former first lady Imelda Marcos, 92, who has been the driving force behind the family's comeback from exile to the peak of power, was pushed in a wheelchair into the chamber where she held a seat as recently as 2019. Joining her was the new first lady, Louise Araneta-Marcos, along with other relatives and supporters.

### 'Prelude of things to come?'

Hours earlier and several kilometres away, hundreds of riot police and protesters opposing the proclamations clashed outside the Commission on Human Rights. Water cannon was sprayed on the crowd of activists. Leftist groups reported at least 10 people wounded. "Is the violent dispersal today a prelude of things to come under a Marcos-Duterte administration—where exercising our basic rights and freedoms are met with brazen State violence?" Cristina Palabay, secretary general of Karapatan human rights group, asked in a statement.

After six years of President Duterte's authoritarian rule, activists and many religious leaders wanted Robredo for the top job, fearing a Marcos administration would lead to further erosion of human rights and democratic checks and balances. Marcos has so far given few clues about how he will govern the poverty-plagued country of 110 million people.

On the campaign trail, Marcos embraced some of the elder Duterte's key policies, though he avoided scrutiny of his positions by shunning televised debates with rivals and largely avoiding media interviews.



QUEZON CITY: Philippine president-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (C) waves to supporters as he arrives for his proclamation as the country's president at the House of Representatives in Quezon City suburban Manila on May 25, 2022. — AFP

Marcos's admiration for his father, whose time in office he has portrayed as a golden era for the Philippines, has raised concerns that he may seek a similar regime. He looks set to have a commanding majority in the House of Representatives where his cousin Martin Romualdez is the frontrunner for the powerful speaker's job.

Most of the 24 senators—including his sister Imee—are aligned with outgoing President Duterte or Marcos Jr. Analysts say that could enable him to push through changes to the constitution that have eluded

his predecessors.

Marcos Jr will face a range of challenges when he takes power, from reviving the pandemic-battered economy and creating jobs, to dealing with an increasingly assertive Beijing in the South China Sea and the impacts of climate change.

He has announced several cabinet appointments in recent days, including respected economist Arsenio Balisacan to the head of the National Economic and Development Authority. Sara Duterte will serve as education secretary. — AFP

Solomon Islands' journalists are threatening to boycott coverage of the trip after a "joint press conference" planned for Thursday evening was to feature only questions from state media.

### Game changer

Wang's regional visit comes after Beijing last month inked a secretive security agreement with Sogavare. The deal deepened US and Australian fears that President Xi Jinping intends to establish a military foothold in the South Pacific. A leaked draft of the agreement contained a provision allowing Chinese naval deployments to the island nation, which lies less than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) from Australia. It also prohibited the Solomon Islands from speaking publicly about the deal's contents without China's permission.

News of the agreement sparked a diplomatic firestorm, with high-level Australian and American delegations flying to Honiara to warn about the risks to regional security. Sogavare has said the concerns are overblown. New Zealand's foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta said he had received assurances on Wednesday "that the agreement will not lead to a Chinese military base". After speaking with her Honiara counterpart Jeremiah Manele, Mahuta also announced a one-year extension of a New Zealand military deployment to the Solomon Islands. Australia's new government has put deeper ties with the Pacific at the top of its agenda. Foreign Minister Wong has admitted Australia is playing catch up, but said a trip in her first week on the job "demonstrates the importance we place on our relationship with Fiji and on our Pacific engagement." —AFP

## China, Australia launch dueling South Pacific charm offensives

HONIARA, Solomon Islands: Chinese and Australian foreign ministers will launch duelling charm offensives in the South Pacific Thursday, as Beijing and the West jostle for influence in the strategically significant region. Top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi is expected to arrive in Solomon Island's capital Honiara, kicking off a lengthy, eight-nation regional tour. Australia's recently sworn-in Foreign Minister Penny Wong will meanwhile touch down in Fiji on Thursday as she embarks on her first solo overseas mission. The diplomatic tours come as China seeks to deepen its foothold in the South Pacific, which has traditionally looked to the United States, Australia and New Zealand for security.

Travelling from Thursday until June 4, Wang will also stop in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa, as well as hold video calls with Micronesia and the Cook Islands—a self-governing part of New Zealand. The trip will be "beneficial to the peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region", Chinese officials said.

Wang is expected to push for deeper relations and formal agreements with several countries. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare said the Chinese foreign minister's visit would be a "milestone". But the trip has already stirred local controversy.



SOUTH KOREA: Handout photo shows a US Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) firing a missile from an undisclosed location on South Korea's east coast during a live-fire exercise aimed to counter North Korea's missile test. — AFP

## North Korea fires ICBM hours after Biden leaves Asia

SEOUL: North Korea fired a volley of missiles Wednesday, including possibly its largest intercontinental ballistic missile, just hours after US President Joe Biden left Asia after a trip overshadowed by Pyongyang's sabre-rattling. North Korea has also been conducting "operational tests" of a nuclear detonation device, Kim Tae-hyo, Seoul's first deputy director of the National Security Office, said, adding a test could come "imminently".

His warning adds to the drumbeat of predictions from US and South Korean officials, who have been saying for weeks that Kim Jong Un's regime is close to conducting its seventh nuclear test. Three missiles, including one ICBM, were fired from the Sunan area in Pyongyang, Seoul said—one of nearly 20 weapons tests by North Korea so far this year—prompting joint US-South Korea live fire missile drills in response.

Pyongyang's missile launches are "an illegal act in direct violation of UN Security Council resolutions," Seoul's government said after a National Security Council meeting chaired by President Yoon Suk-yeol. The United States called for Pyongyang to "engage in sustained and substantive dialogue," a state department spokesman said. The three early morning ballistic missile launches came within an hour of each other, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. "The first ballistic missile (suspected ICBM) had a range of around 360 kilometres (225 miles) and an altitude of around 540km," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. This could have been North Korea's largest ICBM, the Hwasong-17, Kim Tae-hyo said later. The second ballistic missile "disappeared at an altitude of 20km" and the third—a suspected short-range ballistic missile—travelled around 760km at an altitude of around 60km.

### Response to Biden

The Wednesday launches are the latest in a blitz of sanctions-busting weapons tests by Pyongyang this year, including test-firing intercontinental ballistic missiles at full range for the first time since 2017. The latest apparent test came just days after Biden left South Korea Sunday.

The tests were "clearly timed for President Biden's return after his visit to South Korea and Japan," Park Won-gon, a professor at Ewha University said, adding that Biden hadn't even touched down in the US. During Biden's visit, South Korea and the US announced they would look at ramping up joint military exercises,

which had been scaled back for COVID and during a bout of failed diplomacy with the North. They also discussed deploying more US tactical assets to the peninsula—measures that would likely enrage Pyongyang, which views the drills as rehearsals for invasion. "North Korea's objections against these announcements was expressed through the missile launches," Park said. On his last day in Seoul, Biden told reporters he had only a short message for Kim: "Hello, Period."

"Pyongyang appears to have launched different types of missiles, probably in the process of improving related military capabilities," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "But this also looks like a statement that the Kim regime has many different ways of striking an adversary." —AFP

## Suu Kyi's family file complaint at UN against detention

GENEVA: Relatives of Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Wednesday filed a complaint before a UN watchdog against her detention following a military coup last year, their lawyers said. Since a coup ousted her government in February 2021, plunging Myanmar into upheaval, the 76-year-old Nobel peace prize laureate has been in military custody and faces a raft of charges that could jail her for more than 150 years. Describing the situation as a "judicial kidnapping", human rights lawyers Francois Zimeray and Jessica Finelle said they had filed a complaint on behalf of her relatives with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

"Her arrest was illegal, her detention is devoid of any legal basis, and her different trials violate the basic rules governing any legal procedure," reads the complaint, seen by AFP. "This is a kidnapping disguised as a trial, she is held incommunicado in defiance of all justice and resists with strength an unacceptable psychological torture. "This is a tragic regression for Myanmar. Through the figure of Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the entire Burmese people is silenced, and its democratic aspirations are crushed." After facing a string of "farical charges", Suu Kyi has so far been sentenced to a total of 11 years in prison, but faces the prospect of more than 100 more years on 17 different charges, the lawyers said. —AFP



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (R) swears-in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (L) as the new Finance Minister, in Colombo. — AFP

## S Lanka appoints premier to helm finance ministry

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was on Wednesday given the additional responsibility of running the finance ministry as the island nation grapples with its worst-ever economic crisis. The South Asian island nation has suffered months of dire shortages and anti-government protests, with importers unable to finance vital food, fuel and medicines. Wickremesinghe, 73, was sworn in as finance minister after two weeks of wrangling among coalition partners for the crucial position ahead of bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund. His appointment was delayed by a dispute between Wickremesinghe and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa over who would take the post. "The president's party had wanted the finance portfolio, but the PM insisted he wanted it if he is to lead the country out of the economic chaos," a top politician involved in the negotiations told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

Wickremesinghe is expected to soon unveil a revised budget promising relief for poorer Sri Lankans suffering through record inflation and spiralling food prices. Staff-level talks with the IMF concluded on Tuesday,

but it is expected to take six more months for the Washington-based lender to agree on a bailout package, central bank officials said.

Sri Lanka has already defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt and appointed international consultants on Tuesday to help restructure its international sovereign bonds and other bilateral loans. The government has effectively ended subsidies on fuel by raising prices to a record high on Tuesday, and Wickremesinghe's administration is expected to hike electricity and water tariffs to raise much-needed revenue. Petrol and diesel both remain in short supply and motorists are forced to queue, sometimes for days, to fill up.

### Fresh loan

The government this week announced it was seeking a fresh \$500 million loan from India to purchase fuel, in addition to two credit lines worth \$700 million already provided by New Delhi. The census office reported Monday that the country's overall inflation last month was a staggering 33.8 percent year on year, with food inflation at an even higher 45.1 percent.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves shrank dramatically from 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic hit tourism and remittances from Sri Lankans abroad. The pandemic compounded liquidity problems triggered by huge tax cuts introduced in 2019 soon after President Rajapaksa took office. Protesters have demanded the president quit over government mismanagement of the crisis. His elder brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa stepped down as prime minister two weeks ago, clearing the way for Wickremesinghe's appointment. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, MAY 26, 2022

## Zain awarded 'Best Telco Operator'

### ZainTech wins 'Best Digital Service' at 2022 Telecom World Middle East Awards

DUBAI/KUWAIT: Zain Group, the leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced that it has been awarded the 'Best Telco Operator' accolade for 2022 at the prestigious Telecoms World Middle East Awards event held in Dubai, UAE on 24 May.

Impressively, ZainTech, Zain Group's one-stop digital and ICT solutions arm driving the transformation of enterprises and governments across the region, was recognized with the 'Best Digital Service' award. ZainTech provides a center of excellence and managed solutions across multiple ICT verticals including cloud, cybersecurity, big data, IoT, artificial intelligence, smart cities, drones, robotics, and emerging technologies.

These latest awards were bestowed on Zain by a panel of expert judges assembled by Terrapinn, the organizers of the prestigious annual Telecoms World Middle East Conference and Awards. The event recognizes outstanding performance in key telecom-related areas throughout the Middle East and shines a spotlight on leading players who have contributed to making the sector one of the most dynamic globally.

Zain's selection as this year's 'Best Telco Operator' is a result of a combination of factors related to the successful implementation of its value-creative '4Sight' strategy that among many advances, has resulted in the company's brand valuation by the Brand Finance Middle East reaching \$2.4 billion, an increase of 9.6 percent (over \$211 million) year-on-year in its AA+ brand rating.

Zain's value creation has been driven by tangible developments, including talent development incorporating its Diversity & Inclusion program; heavy investment in 4G, 5G and Fiber network upgrades; and digital innovation including the creation of ZainTech, Zain Global Connect, Dizlee API platform, Zain Esports, ZainCash, Tamam and Yaqoot (Saudi Arabia) and Oodi (Iraq). Notably, the company's corporate sustainability programs including climate initiatives, eye-catching marketing, and social media campaigns have continued to capture hearts and minds across the region.



**Bader Al-Kharafi:** Successful implementation of '4Sight' strategy creating value for all stakeholders and fulfilling our brand promise of unlocking opportunities for customers and communities we serve.



ZainTech CEO Andrew Hanna receives the award



Zain Group Chief Communications Officer Mohammad Abdal receives the award

Commenting on the 'Best Telco Operator' and 'Best Digital Service' recognition, Bader Al-Kharafi, Vice-Chairman and Zain Group CEO said, "The successful implementation of our '4Sight' strategy is creating value for all stakeholders and fulfilling our brand promise of unlocking opportunities for customers, enterprises, and the government entities we

serve. This recognition rewards the dedication and passion of every Zain employee who despite the challenges of the pandemic, have remained professional and focused on continuing to offer exemplary service throughout."

Al-Kharafi added, "It is a great honor for ZainTech to be recognized at such an early stage of

its regional expansion strategy. The ZainTech team has an explicit mission to support enterprises and government entities in their digital transformation and performance journeys, offering the best expertise, products, and services in the business."

Zain's successful '4Sight' strategy continues to gather momentum. It is centered on evolving the company's core telecom business to maximize value and build on its many strengths. The company is selectively investing in growth verticals beyond traditional mobile services to support Zain's vision of becoming a leading ICT and digital lifestyle provider.

ZainTech is a key pillar in the evolution of Zain Group's core telecom business, empowering Zain Business in key markets with a comprehensive range of quality enterprise offerings, expertise as well as wide partner relationships. ZainTech leverages Zain's global reach, unique regional footprint, and infrastructure across operations in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, and the UAE, as well as in other key markets in the Middle East. Group-wide, Zain's B2B offerings witnessed 19 percent year-on-year revenue growth during 2021.

As Zain evolves into a leading digital lifestyle provider to create lasting value for society, it remains committed to delivering positive results for shareholders and other stakeholders. The company is also consistently investing significantly in improving customer experience, providing more digital channels than ever before and allowing customers greater accessibility, simplicity, and freedom to manage their accounts, buy new services, pay bills, and more.

From a corporate sustainability perspective, Zain has transitioned the business to advance its agenda and set in place key performance indicators with the aim of developing a more structured and measured approach for all its markets. In January 2022, for example, Zain was upgraded to A- in the 'CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2021', becoming the highest ranked and only telecom operator in the Middle East and Africa to achieve this positive rating with respect to its efforts to address climate change.

## After wheat, India caps sugar exports

NEW DELHI: India said it has capped sugar exports to safeguard its own supplies and ease inflation, days after a ban on wheat shipments sent global prices soaring in the wake of the Ukraine war. The world's largest sugar producer and number two exporter after Brazil said on Tuesday that shipments would be limited to 10 million tons for the current marketing year to September.

The decision was taken "with a view to maintain the domestic availability and price stability during the sugar season," the food ministry said in a statement. Sugar exports are forecast to hit a record high this marketing year, with contracts signed for around nine million tons, and 7.8 million tons already shipped, it said. Citing inflation and its own food security needs, in mid-May India banned any new wheat exports without government approval after the hottest March on record-blamed on climate change-hit harvests.

Although India is a marginal player on the global market, the move sparked a further surge in already-soaring global food prices since Russia's February invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, which previously accounted for 12 percent of global exports. The decision also stoked



KOLKATA: Workers load sacks of sugar onto trucks in this file photo.

fears of growing protectionism in the wake of the conflict. The export ban also left hundreds of thousands of tons of wheat stranded at a major port in western India, with long lines of thousands of trucks waiting to unload. Authorities stressed that

government-to-government requests for wheat from other countries reeling from record high prices would be permitted. Elsewhere in Asia, Indonesia temporarily halted palm oil exports and Malaysia banned chicken exports. — AFP

## Billionaires promote CO2 removing schemes

PARIS: The boss of NetZero still can't believe his start-up has won a million-dollar prize from Elon Musk to improve ways of sucking climate-heating carbon dioxide (CO2) from the air. "That'll fund a year of R&D (research and development)... or two-thirds of a factory," Axel Reinaud told AFP.

The XPrize Carbon Removal competition, set up by the billionaire Tesla boss, is a response to the scary conclusion reached by the world's top climate scientists. However quickly the world slashes man-made greenhouse gas emissions, it will still need to extract CO2 from the air and oceans to avoid climate catastrophe, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in April.

Today, CO2 removal is a necessary weapon in the battle to stop global heating accelerating beyond a point of no return. Technology to do so exists but remains prohibitively expensive. It also needs to be ramped up significantly to make a dent in the 40 billion tons of CO2 the world emits each year.

So private-sector giants are stepping in to kick-start research, as they did with vaccines and the first aeroplanes. The \$100-million (93-million-euro) XPrize initiative is a bid to foster low-cost solutions for sucking up huge quantities of CO2 every year and stocking it forever.

The top prize will be announced in 2025. NetZero has already scooped up one of the 15 early-stage awards for an astute economic model. It burns farm waste, which contains CO2, and turns it into "biochar", a kind of "carbon dust" used to enrich the soil. The heat generated by burning is captured to generate renewable electricity, which is sold to the grid. In all, NetZero says it can remove a ton of CO2 for just a few dozen dollars.

In North America, companies like Alphabet, Meta, McKinsey, Shopify and Stripe have agreed to invest \$925 million in fostering carbon removal schemes between now and 2030.

The First Movers Coalition, an alliance of some 50 firms from sectors where emissions are hard to reduce such as aviation, shipping and cement, has also committed to financing carbon removal technology.

Today, research on removing carbon from the atmosphere is conspicuous by its near-absence.

The process is "extremely difficult to manage", French science historian Amy Dahan told AFP. "Musk's idea is to give this field of research a higher profile," she explained. This is a tried and tested method. —AFP

## British retailer Marks & Spencer exits Russia

LONDON: British clothing-to-food retailer Marks and Spencer on Wednesday announced a full exit from Russia following the country's invasion of Ukraine. After halting product shipments to Russia at the start of March, Marks and Spencer said it had decided "to fully exit" its Russian franchise run by Turkish conglomerate Fiba Group. The exit, plus disruption to M&S operations in Ukraine run also by franchisee Fiba, is costing the British company £31 million (\$39 million, €36 million).

"Unfortunately, our Ukrainian business has also been partially closed as a result of war impacts, and we are working with our partner to reopen as and when possible," the company added in a statement.

An M&S spokeswoman confirmed to AFP that the group's "brand will no longer be used in Russia". Its exit from Russia comes also after Marks and Spencer last year shut more than half its stores in France as Brexit affected supplies of fresh and chilled products. M&S on Wednesday said it had taken a charge of £10.3 million following the French shakeup.

It had blamed the move on "supply chain complexities" following Britain's formal exit from the



LONDON: A Marks and Spencer outlet in London.

European Union at the start of 2021. M&S on Wednesday added that the group swung back into profit during its last financial year, or 12 months to the start of April. It was heavily boosted by strong sales online in Britain and abroad.

Ahead, M&S pointed to "difficult and unpredictable headwinds" owing to ongoing fallout from the pandemic in addition to geopolitical and eco-

nomic uncertainties. The company said a cost-of-living crisis caused by soaring inflation would hit sales growth. The update also marked the end of Steve Rowe's time as chief executive.

The group had already announced that he would step down after six years, making way for a new joint CEO team of current M&S executives Stuart Machin and Katie Bickerstaffe. —AFP



## Business

# Pfizer offers to sell medicines at cost to poorest countries

## New initiative at World Economic Forum

DAVOS: US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer on Wednesday said it would sell its patented drugs on a not-for-profit basis to the world's poorest countries, as part of a new initiative announced at the World Economic Forum in Davos. "The time is now to begin closing this gap" between people with access to the latest treatments and those going without, chief executive Albert Bourla told attendees at the exclusive Swiss mountain resort gathering.

"An Accord for a Healthier World" focuses on five areas: infectious diseases, cancer, inflammation, rare diseases and women's health—where Pfizer currently holds 23 patents, including the likes of Comirnaty and Paxlovid, its COVID vaccine and oral treatment. "This transformational commitment will increase access to Pfizer-patented medicines and vaccines available in the United States and the European Union to nearly 1.2 billion people," Angela Hwang, group president of the Pfizer Biopharmaceuticals Group, told AFP.

Five countries: Rwanda, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda have committed to joining, with a further 40 countries — 27 low-income and 18 lower-middle-income-eligible to sign bilateral agreements to participate. "Pfizer's commitment sets a new standard, which we hope to see emulated by others," Rwanda's President Paul Kagame said. But he added that "additional investments and strengthening of Africa's health systems and pharmaceutical regulators" would also be needed.

### Seven years behind

Developing countries experience 70 percent of the world's disease burden but receive only 15 percent of



DAVOS: (From left) Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, Rwanda President Paul Kagame, Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera, Philanthropist and co-founder of Microsoft Bill Gates and Pfizer group president Angela Hwang pose after a press conference on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on May 25, 2022. — AFP

global health spending, leading to devastating outcomes. Across sub-Saharan Africa, one child in 13 dies before their fifth birthday, compared to one in 199 in high-income countries.

Cancer-related mortality rates are also far higher in low and middle-income countries—causing more fatalities in Africa every year than malaria. All this is set to a backdrop of limited access to the latest drugs.

Essential medicines and vaccines typically take four

to seven years longer to reach the poorest countries, and supply chain issues and poorly resourced health systems make it difficult for patients to receive them once approved. "The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the complexities of access to quality healthcare and the resulting inequities," said Hwang. "We know there are a number of hurdles that countries have to overcome to gain access to our medicines. That is why we have initially selected five pilot

countries to identify and come up with operational solutions and then share those learnings with the remaining countries."

### 'Very good model'

Specifically, the focus will be on overcoming regulatory and procurement challenges in the countries, while ensuring adequate levels of supply from Pfizer's side. The "not-for-profit" price tag takes into account the cost to manufacture and transport of each product to an agreed upon port of entry, with Pfizer charging only manufacturing and minimum distribution costs.

If a country already has access to a product at a lower price tier, for example vaccines supplied by GAVI, a public-private global partnership, that lower price will be maintained. Hwang acknowledged that even an at-cost approach could be challenging for the most cash-strapped countries, and "this is why we have reached out to financial institutions to brief them on the Accord and ask them to help support country level financing." Pfizer will also reach out to other stakeholders—including governments, multilateral organizations, NGOs and even other pharmaceuticals—to ask them to join the Accord. It is also using funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to advance work on a vaccine against Group B Streptococcus (GBS), the leading cause of stillbirth and newborn mortality in low-income countries.

"This type of accord is a very good model, it's going to help get medicines out," Gates told the Davos conference, adding that "partnerships with companies like Pfizer have been key to the progress we have made" on efforts like vaccines. — AFP



STOCKHOLM, Sweden: President of the European Council Charles Michel (left) and Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson (right) give a joint press conference in Stockholm, Sweden, on May 25, 2022. — AFP

## EU 'confident' of quick deal on Russia oil embargo

BRUSSELS: European Council chief Charles Michel expressed confidence Wednesday that the European Union would reach an agreement on a Russian oil embargo ahead of next week's European summit, despite opposition from Hungary. Michel said European leaders were working very hard to find a resolution, adding that he had had many contacts on the subject.

"I'm still confident that we can be able to resolve the topic before the European Council" meeting in Brussels on Monday and Tuesday, Michel said during a joint press conference in Stockholm with Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson. Hungary has yet to be convinced to back an EU embargo on Russian oil, and bringing it up at next week's European summit would be pointless, Prime Minister Viktor Orban told Michel earlier this week in a letter seen by AFP. "Looking at the gravity of the issues still open, it is very unlikely that a comprehensive solution could be found before the special meeting of the European Council on 30-31 May," Orban wrote in the letter, dated Monday. "I am convinced that discussing the sanctions package at the level of leaders in the absence of a consensus would be counterproductive," it said. Michel said Wednesday he was "realistic, I know that there are difficulties" but that he would "propose some possible solutions".

Some diplomatic sources have suggested EU leaders might take up the issue at the Brussels summit in order to come to a political agreement to unblock technical talks underway between Hungary and the European Commission. Orban, often the odd man out in EU decision-making, has rocked the bloc's unity on the war in Ukraine by opposing an oil embargo.

Landlocked Hungary relies on Russian oil from a single pipeline and Orban insists the proposed sixth package of EU sanctions against Moscow would have a devastating impact on his country's economy.

The EU on Wednesday proposed new rules that would make it harder for Russian oligarchs to evade sanctions, and open the way to confiscating their yachts and villas to help rebuild Ukraine. "While the Russian aggression on Ukraine is ongoing, it is paramount that EU restrictive measures are fully implemented and the violation of those measures must not be allowed to pay off," the European Commission said in a statement. "Today's proposals aim to ensure that the assets of individuals and entities that violate the restrictive measures can be effectively confiscated in the future."

Economic sanctions are enforced very differently among the bloc's 27 member states, in a regulatory "patchwork" that often enables those targeted to evade their bite. "The violation of EU sanctions is a serious crime and must come with serious consequences. We need EU-wide rules to establish that," said EU commission vice president Vera Jourova. The EU executive said sanctions were bound by 40 different legal regimes, varying widely from a serious crime to a mere administrative offence. "An inconsistent enforcement of restrictive measures undermines the Union's ability to speak with one voice," the European Commission statement said. To achieve that, the EU's executive arm proposed to add the violation of sanctions to the list of EU crimes, paving the way towards a common standard on their enforcement across the member states. Once that is agreed, the EU would then more carefully define what constitutes a breaking of sanctions, making it easier to

prosecute violators across all of Europe and for authorities to work together more effectively.

### Illegal seizures?

The EU has unleashed five waves of sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine and is currently negotiating the final touches on a sixth round that would include a ban on Russian oil imports.

In the most controversial aspect of the new proposals, the commission is hoping to win member state approval to allow for the sanctioned to have their assets stripped and not just frozen as is currently the case. The beefed-up powers would also apply to organized crime "and ensure that crime does not pay by depriving criminals of their ill-gotten gains", the Brussels-based commission said. Answering a call made initially by Kyiv, some member states want the proceeds of assets taken from Russians to help pay for the astronomical costs of rebuilding war-ravaged Ukraine.

This proposal would allow national authorities to sell seized businesses, villas or yachts and put the proceeds in a common fund to help Ukraine. But some in the EU, including Germany, have expressed fear that confiscation could violate international and national laws that limit the power of authorities to seize private property. "Germany is open for debate of using seized Russian sovereign assets but on the other hand there are guarantees for private assets in our constitution," German Finance Minister Christian Lindner said on Tuesday. The proposals by the European Commission are expected to be discussed by EU leaders at a summit devoted to the war in Ukraine on Monday in Brussels. — AFP

## N Zealand hikes rates to 6-year high to fight inflation

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's central bank on Wednesday raised its benchmark interest rate to the highest level in six years as it tries to control surging inflation that is rattling the global economy.

After hiking its official cash rate by a widely anticipated 50 basis points to two percent, Reserve Bank of New Zealand governor Adrian Orr warned that further rises would follow. The local dollar jumped more than half a US cent after the decision, though shares in Wellington were down in afternoon trade. The increase is the second in six weeks and comes as inflation sits at 6.9 percent, its highest level in more than 30 years. "A larger and earlier increase... reduces the risk of inflation becoming persistent," Orr said in a statement. "However, headwinds are strong. Heightened global economic uncertainty and higher inflation are dampening global and domestic consumer confidence."

The Reserve Bank is forecasting annual inflation to peak in the middle of this year at around seven percent before dropping to near half that figure by March 2023. The move comes as central banks around the world are forced to tighten monetary policy—raising worries about the global economy—to battle a surge in prices caused by a range of issues including the Ukraine war, China's lockdowns and rising wages. — AFP

## Australia urges China to drop trade tariffs

SYDNEY: Australia's economy minister called on China Wednesday to drop punishing trade tariffs if it wants to thaw frozen relations, after Beijing sent a message signaling it is ready to improve ties. China-Australia's biggest trading partner-imposed tariffs and disrupted more than a dozen key industries, including wine, barley and coal, as relations deteriorated sharply in the past two years.

Canberra had irked Beijing by calling for an independent probe into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic and by banning telecoms giant Huawei from building Australia's 5G network. Treasurer Jim Chalmers said Australia felt the pain of the Chinese trade squeeze, calling for the measures to be lifted "as soon as possible". "They are damaging our economy. They are making life harder for some of our employers and workers here in Australia," he told public broadcaster ABC. "Obviously, we would like to see those measures lifted. That would be a really great start, when it comes to how we manage what is a really complex relationship, a relationship that has become more complex over time."

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang sent a congratulatory note to newly elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese earlier this week, the most significant high-level contact between Beijing and Canberra in at least two years. Li's

letter said China was ready to work with Australia to "review the past, look into the future" and promote a "comprehensive strategic partnership", the state-run Xinhua news agency said Monday. The prime minister said Australia would respond "appropriately".

### 'Tough on China'

The Chinese message paves the way for dialogue but the outlook is hard to predict, said Elena Collinson, a researcher at the University of Technology Sydney's Australia-China Relations Institute.

"Certainly a reset is not in the offing," she said. While Australia is demanding an end to Chinese economic punishment, Canberra's "tough-on-China" stance may make it harder to agree to concessions Beijing is likely to request, Collinson said. Australia's treasurer said Canberra would deal in a "considered, sober, non-partisan way" with China's "more aggressive and more assertive" stance in the Pacific region.

"The stronger the region is, the more cohesive the region is, the safer it is, the more prosperous it is," he said. Australia is worried about Beijing's growing influence in the Pacific region, including a recent security pact between China and the Solomon Islands.

A leaked draft of the agreement, which has not been made public, includes a section that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomons—less than 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) from Australia.

China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, is set to embark Thursday on a 10-day tour of Pacific island states, including the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Announcing the trip, the Chinese foreign ministry said it would be "beneficial to the peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region". — AFP



WASHINGTON: Orders for US-made, big-ticket manufactured goods continued their upward trend last month, though at a slower pace, driven primarily by demand for commercial aircraft, according to government data released Wednesday.

## German steel workers to strike as inflation bites

FRANKFURT: The German steel workers union said Wednesday it had called strikes after failing to reach a pay deal with management as incomes are squeezed by soaring consumer prices. A "good increase in remuneration" was justified "in light of rising inflation" said Knut Giesler, IG Metall union boss in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's industrial heartland. Consumer prices in Europe's biggest economy rose at a rate of 7.4 percent in April, a record since reunification in 1990 and well above the two-percent rate targeted by central banks.

The union has presented management with demands for an 8.2-percent wage increase in the negotiations, which have been running since April. A one-off payment of €2,100 (\$2,237) put forward by management was "not enough", Giesler said. As a result, regional IG Metall negotiators had decided to call "warning strikes" at steel works. The coordinated walkouts lasting a few hours are a common feature of German industrial relations.

Germany's largest union, IG Metall represents 68,000 steel workers in the region, more than three-quarters of those employed in the branch nationally. The clash came as the cost of living rose precipitously, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Increases in prices for energy and food has driven inflation to multi-year highs. The European Central Bank has been keeping an especially close eye on the development of wages for fear pay increases could stoke inflation further.

ECB policymakers are plotting a first interest rate hike in July to counter inflation, their first in over a decade. But some members of the ECB's governing council are urging the bank to move faster to make up ground on other major central banks, which have already raised their rates. Meanwhile, consumers remained troubled by the impact of the war in Ukraine despite a modest improvement in their confidence heading into June, according to a key survey published Wednesday.

Pollster GfK's forward-looking barometer rose to minus 26 points for June, up from minus 26.6 the previous month, an historic low for the indicator. The improvement in consumer sentiment was "marginal", GfK consumer expert Rolf Buerkl said. "Despite the relaxation of coronavirus-related restrictions, the Ukraine war and inflation above all are weighing on the mood of consumers," Buerkl said. The outbreak of the war has driven increases in the cost of energy, food and raw materials for which Ukraine and Russia are key suppliers. — AFP

## US durable goods see slower growth in April: Govt

WASHINGTON: Orders for US-made, big-ticket manufactured goods continued their upward trend last month, though at a slower pace, driven primarily by demand for commercial aircraft, according to government data released Wednesday. Durable goods orders rose 0.4 percent in April, the Commerce Department said, slightly less than what analysts had expected but still indicating positive momentum.

Orders have increased for six of the past seven months, though the gain in March was lower than originally reported, which analysts say show the US economy is on solid footing despite rising inflation pressures, which has prompted the Federal Reserve to begin raising interest rates aggressively to cool demand. "We don't believe the economy is on the cusp of a major slowdown," said Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics. "Domestic demand hasn't majorly succumbed to the pressures of high inflation, rising interest rates, and enduring supply chain problems." "While it may take time for these headwinds to weigh on business and consumer activity, we think the economy's fundamentals are strong enough to weather the storm in 2022," he said. — AFP

## Business

# US new home sales fall sharply in April as prices continue to climb

## Data a clear recession warning, say experts

WASHINGTON: US new home sales plunged in April to their lowest in two years, even as prices continued to climb, according to government data released Tuesday, as would-be buyers felt the heat of soaring inflation and rising interest rates. Home sales have been booming throughout the COVID-19, but with inflation at its highest since the early 1980s, the Federal Reserve has begun raising interest rates aggressively to cool the economy, which is pushing borrowing costs higher.

Sales of new single-family homes fell 16.6 percent in April to an annual rate of 591,000, seasonally adjusted, the Commerce Department reported, the lowest rate since April 2020. The decline was far worse than analysts had projected, and compounded by the downward revision to the sales figures for March.

"It's pretty scary," said Gregory Daco, chief economist at Ernst & Young. "I was expecting a decline, but not this steep a drop," he told AFP, noting that new home sales had slowed for the fourth consecutive month.

All regions saw sales fall sharply, though the South saw the steepest decline. Last month's sales pace was a 26.9 percent drop compared to April 2021, the report said. However, even amid higher borrowing costs that are cooling demand from homebuyers, prices continued to rise in April, reaching a median of \$450,600 from \$435,000 in the prior month.

The popularity of remote work as well as increased household savings during the pandemic prompted many families to move out of congested

urban areas and purchase larger houses or vacation homes.

The surge in demand sent prices soaring as potential homebuyers competed to snap up properties—even paying cash—in an increasingly tight market hindered by global supply chain snarls that held back new construction.

### 'Recession warning'

Home sales are a key driver of activity, spurring sales of many categories of goods, including furniture and appliances, so a slowdown could have broader effects on the economy, economists say.

"The April drop for new home sales is a clear recession warning," said Robert Dietz, chief economist at the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). "While the nation needs additional housing, home sales are slackening as tightening monetary policy continues to put upward pressure on mortgage rates and supply chain disruptions raise construction costs."

As the sales pace dropped sharply, the supply of new homes on the market rose last month, jumping to a nine months' supply from 6.9 months in April, the report said. Existing home sales have also slowed over the past several months, falling 2.4 percent in April, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) reported last week.

The average rate on a 30-year, fixed-rate mortgage was 4.98 percent in April, up from 4.17 percent in March, and far above the 2021 average of 2.96 percent, according to Freddie Mac.

"Higher mortgage rates and lofty prices are making housing more expensive, particularly for



FALLS CHURCH, US: In this file photo, a home under construction in a new housing development in Falls Church, Virginia. US new home sales plunged 16.6 percent in April, even as prices continued to climb, according to government data released on May 24, 2022. —AFP

first-time buyers," said Oren Klachkin, the lead US economist at Oxford Economics. "Looking ahead, income gains won't keep up with rising borrowing costs and elevated home prices, push-

ing down affordability and pressuring home sales." "Builders will add to the housing stock, but not sufficiently enough to meaningfully tilt housing market dynamics in favor of buyers." —AFP

## 57 shortlisted for Deliveroo Restaurant Awards in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Food lovers across the country have voted for local favorites to be selected as finalists for Deliveroo's first-ever Restaurant Awards in Kuwait. The shortlist of restaurants has been revealed today after the first round of voting saw thousands of votes cast across the country, resulting in 57 restaurants shortlisted to three finalists in each category.

Deliveroo Kuwait's Restaurant Awards will put a spotlight on the very best of what the country's restaurants have to offer, bringing together a host of culinary talent from across Kuwait. The public now has until 30 May, 2022 to cast their vote and help their favorite local restaurant emerge victorious, with the winners announced at Deliveroo's virtual awards ceremony on 9 June, 2022.

Deliveroo is encouraging restaurants and customers to vote and tune in to see who will take home the 19 trophies, including the coveted Restaurant of the Year Award. Below is the list of restaurants that have made it to the Top 3 for each category:

Seham Al-Husaini, General Manager at Deliveroo Kuwait, said: "We are incredibly excited to witness the amazing feedback on Deliveroo Kuwait's first annual Restaurant Awards! We are proud to be the first food aggregator to launch an initiative like this in Kuwait, and we can't wait for our partners to get the recognition and accolades they deserve. We encourage everyone to start voting for their favorite restaurants, and to tune in on 9 June when we will announce the winners." Deliveroo encourages customers to vote for their local favorites in this final stage. To vote, go to the Deliveroo Restaurant Awards <https://kw.deliverooawardstowards.com/>.



## Gulf Bank sponsors INJAZ Kuwait event

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous support for local youth, and in commitment to a partnership that is in its 17th consecutive year, Gulf Bank announced it is a main sponsor of this year's INJAZ Kuwait "Company Program" competition. The annual competition is set to take place on May 27-28, and will culminate with the announcement of the best student project.

The Company Program is extremely popular among local high school and university students, as it provides an unprecedented opportunity for students to practice establishing and managing companies, from developing a business idea to conducting feasibility studies, selling shares, working as management teams, developing business plans, producing and selling products and services and eventually liquidating the company with profit/loss statements. During the first day of the competition, students will have their projects evaluated by a jury that will include Gulf Bank's Head of Investment Management, Dalya Al-Qassem. On the second day, the winners will be announced, with the winners also having the opportunity to participate in the annual INJAZ Al-Arab competition and compete with other budding entrepreneurs from all over the Arab world.

### This year's contestants

At the university level, four companies will be competing this year: "Tvarodeco," a project by Algonquin University students, is a platform that promotes the services of local freelancers; "My Bag," by ACK University students, is a company designed to help freelancing students, young professionals and workers organize and work remotely; "Tryzabeel," by Klech students, is a smart wastebasket; "G Pharmacy," by Box Hill College students, is designed as a government application that links Kuwait's pharmacies with hospitals and clinics.

Four secondary education and high schools will also be competing this year: "Step," a project by the New English School, is designed to fight obesity,

while the American Cultural Academy has submitted three projects: "Active," a project designed to advance youth financially and intellectually, "Eco International," a company that produces a biodegradable vegetable mask made from abaca, and "Envo Char," a company that is introducing an environmentally friendly fertilizer.

### Local entrepreneurship

On this occasion, the Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei, said: "We are proud of our longstanding partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, as it is a partnership that is supporting future generations of youth from local high schools and universities, providing them with the skills required by today's labor market, and paving the path of entrepreneurship."

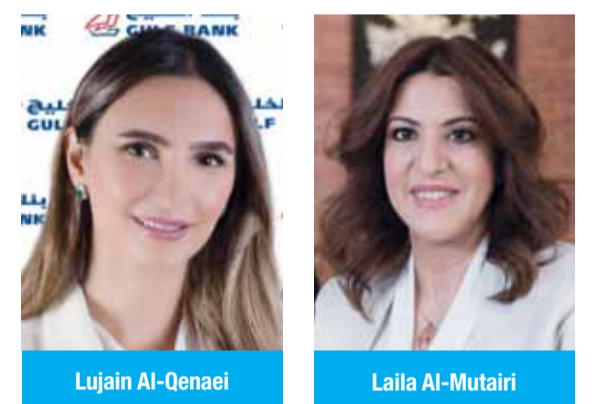
She pointed out that both local and global market requirements are changing rapidly, emphasizing the importance of Gulf Bank's strategic partnership with the INJAZ Foundation in providing local youth with the support and expertise they will need to ensure their competitiveness in the market.

She also explained that Gulf Bank's volunteer team played a major role in guiding and assisting competing youth at all stages of their projects. This year, Gulf Bank's team also provided mentorship programs and mock interviews to Kuwait University and Box Hill College students.

Al-Qenaei also emphasized Gulf Bank's keenness to support and develop professional work skills among local youth as part of its social responsibility program, heading various educational initiatives throughout the year that have a sustainable impact on the lives of youth and society.

Laila Al-Mutairi, the CEO of INJAZ Kuwait, added that the faith of private sector institutions, companies and supporting bodies in these initiatives is one of the drivers behind the continuity and success of the INJAZ Kuwait Foundation. Al-Mutairi noted that their partnership with Gulf Bank is an extraordinary one, as it is a strategic partnership that has extended over multiple years. Gulf Bank is considered a primary supporter of the foundation's activities, regularly providing volunteers at INJAZ events and participating in training programs for students.

She added that INJAZ Kuwait has trained more than 100,000 male and female students across various



Lujain Al-Qenaei

Laila Al-Mutairi

training programs that aim to refine youth skills in three areas: workplace readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. Al-Mutairi also noted that INJAZ Kuwait continues to look forward to providing local youth with the necessary skills and preparation needed to face any challenges the future may hold.

The Company Program is a distinctive program held by INJAZ Kuwait for high school and university students as part of students' academic curriculum. The program provides students with an outlet for untapped creativity and business intelligence, and is designed to encourage students to experiment with their economic and commercial skills. Under the supervision of a volunteer mentor from the private sector, students get hands-on experience across the entire lifecycle of a startup business.

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.

## Financial literacy key to financial inclusion at WEF

DAVOS: Financial inclusion remains the first step towards personal and business wellbeing and is a pre-requisite to meet several goals under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Despite this, over half the world is yet to gain equitable access to finance and this remains one of the biggest challenges facing the world today. The World Economic Forum, which is driving forward the agenda of stakeholder capitalism, has consistently focused on financial inclusion and the role it plays in helping communities thrive.

This all-important topic was a subject of discussion on the second day of the ongoing WEF at Davos, with several global stakeholders convening to discuss this issue. HM Queen Maxima of the Netherlands opened the session raising a question on the need for public and private stakeholders to fully understand the purpose of financial inclusion and evaluate how it can result in better financial health of an individual.

Karabo Morule of Capital Art, South Africa, brought up the subject of financial literacy as a key element of driving better use of access to finance. Her call for financial literacy finds relevance in various research studies which show a significant correlation between financial inclusion and financial education. In fact, developing countries today report a financial literacy level of as low as 30 percent compared to the average of 60 percent in developed economies.

Against this background, Morule spoke of how financial literacy would encourage people to invest in insurance, especially among the underprivileged and marginal groups. Her thoughts on connecting the underprivileged with prudent products was echoed by Adeeb, whose company, LuLu



Financial Holdings, is involved in the cross-border remittances and micro-loans segment. With over 1.1 billion people worldwide locked out of formal financial channels due to lack of a verifiable identity, Adeeb took the examples of India's Aadhar scheme and UAE's Wage Protection Scheme to drive home the need for better traceability of consumer spending. According to him, this is important to complement awareness about products suited to the needs of the underserved. Adeeb also suggested that while digitization has its inherent benefits, financial institutions should remember the emotional aspect at the grassroots level and accordingly bring in a personalized touch to their services to ensure last-mile consumers are on boarded efficiently.

Gelsonima Vigiotti of the European Investment Bank, which works with several developing economies on grassroots level projects, further mentioned that access to finance should come with adequate skill training & development so that the money is utilized properly. Merely gaining financial access doesn't guarantee growth but having a strong business case to deploy it makes the difference, she added.

Andre Soelistyo of GoTo Indonesia asked for greater public-private involvement to drive down the cost of moving money to zero. According to him, this is necessary to build sustainable solutions that can get people to utilize financial products suited to their wellbeing. He spoke of how his com-

pany was able to leverage the potential of digital solutions during the pandemic to onboard millions of motorbike riders in Indonesia, thereby giving them access to the market opportunity.

Central to this point of digitization, the conversation also touched upon various aspects of cyber fraud, especially with digital newbies having little awareness of the security involved. Globally, cybercrime is up by 600 percent as more people move online, with 67 percent of financial institutions reporting an increase in cyber-attacks over the past year.

Against this backdrop, Francois Villeroy de Galhau, Governor of the Bank of France, admitted that while this is a concern, there should not be a trade-off between digitization and regulation in the march towards greater financial inclusion. He expected stakeholders to work together so that both grow in tandem with the demand. He was also vocal about the need to bring in gamification elements into financial literacy campaigns, suggesting strongly that financial literacy cannot be done in isolation.

The conversation, which was moderated by Faisal Islam, Economic Editor of BBC, also touched upon several successful case studies from developing economies such as the UAE, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia and South Africa among others.

## Lifestyle | Features

## Makeup artist who fled Ukraine lands Cannes dream

Ukrainian makeup artist Aliona Antonova had little idea when she fled her hometown the morning of the Russian invasion that she would soon find herself among the stars at the world's top film festival. Antonova's made-for-Hollywood odyssey to Cannes began at dawn on February 24, with the first bombs going off in Odessa not far from her beauty salon and makeup school.

Now the 31-year-old single mum finds herself doing cosmetics for guests bound for the festival's vaunted red carpet. "I believe in my destiny," she told AFP. "When I decided to come here I didn't know: would I have clients here or students? But I just knew that I should come here."

## 'In shock'

Antonova's story began that frightening morning three months ago. "One day before the war started I was arguing with my uncle because he told me soon the war would start. I didn't believe him but I went to sleep and I felt something unusu-



Ukrainian makeup artist Aliona Antonova (right) applies make-up on a model at a salon in Cannes, southern France, on the sidelines of the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

al-it was fear," she said. The next morning at 6:00 am her brother woke her with the news, telling her to prepare to flee the country. "I called a taxi to check on my salon and heard a bomb and was in shock," she said.

Although she hated to leave her home, employees and beloved city, her quick

escape to Moldova proved a wise decision given the massive queues that soon appeared at the border. By chance, her four-year-old son Micha was already with her parents in the Moldovan capital Chisinau for a family celebration.

Harnessing the power of her 72,000 Instagram followers, she quickly landed

work in western European countries which had opened their borders to Ukrainians, doing makeovers and tutorials in cities like Brussels and Berlin. Even back in Odessa she had set her sights on Cannes one day because "all stars are usually in America but it's very far away-this is the closest place with so many stars" in one place at one time.

She contacted local beauty salons and the first one she wrote to offered her a spot as a freelancer during the festival. "I was in shock because it was very easy," she said. "So easy that until the date to come here, I didn't believe that it will be true." Since she set up shop she's been doing a brisk business, with the protagonists of the Netflix documentary "The Tinder Swindler" among her favorite Cannes clients. "They were so fun!"

## 'How brave'

Stargazing on Cannes's famed Croisette seaside promenade, she's already spotted Julia Roberts and Anne Hathaway, as well as Brazilian model and

actress Adriana Lima. Antonova doesn't tell people she's Ukrainian because she doesn't want people to feel sorry for her, unless they ask. "All people who know that I am from Ukraine give support. They always ask, 'How are you? How is your family?' That's very kind," she said.

By charging up to 300 euros (\$320) per person for evening makeup and seeking investors for her own line of cosmetic products, she's hopeful of soon flying Micha and her mother to Cannes to join her. As far as what the future will bring, Antonova fights back tears, admitting the anxiety sometimes gets the better of her. "I think all the world is surprised how brave our people are," she said.

"I hope it will finish very soon. But anyway when the war will be finished, it will be very hard for our people to (rebuild) everything. "No one knows what will happen tomorrow. Now I'm on my way but I want to feel light. I'm trying to be optimistic." — AFP

## 'Pushing boundaries': Indian film industry seeks new horizons in Cannes

India's film industry, the world's most prolific, is taking centre stage at the Cannes Film Festival, but insiders say it's a challenge to please global audiences without losing its massive fanbase at home. India is the festival's first-ever guest of honor this year in its "Marche du Film" where global companies come together to buy and sell film rights and hash out production deals. A high-profile Indian delegation, including a government minister, has been given privileged access to global distributors and screened many work-in-progress movies in search of financing.

"We feel that Indian cinema may be at a turning point, that there's been a renewal of Indian cinema," Jerome Paillard, the Marche du Film's executive director, told AFP. Global distributors took a major interest in India a decade or more ago with global hits like Hindi-language film "The Lunchbox" (2013). "And then nothing much happened", he said. "But now there are several films in the making that we find interesting. Maybe there's a new impetus."

## 'Very self-contained'

The Indian film industry produces up to 2,000 movies per year, more than any other country. The country's 1.4 billion inhabi-



Bollywood film director Sanjay Leela Bhansali attends the press conference for the film "Gangubai Kathiawadi" presented in the "Berlinale Special Gala" section during the 72nd Berlinale Film Festival in Berlin. — AFP

tants, growing middle class, huge theatre network, and sizeable global diaspora give the sector a fanbase that is the envy of the world. It has also made inroads beyond its native speakers-in places like China, Egypt and Nigeria. But catering to Indian tastes can often stand in the way of going further, said Pranad Kapadia, the director of Moviegoers Entertainment, a UK-based distribution firm specializing in Indian cinema. "We're very self-contained," he told AFP at the Cannes festival.

"Obviously a film-maker wants to

make content that resonates with every audience. But in an effort to target a non-core audience, you may alienate your core audience." Indie film-makers in India-with a taste for the more high-brow fare that might interest the global festival circuit-often struggle to get financing from major producers or the government, said Paillard. This was not always the case. In the 1950s and 1960s, a generation of Indian directors moved away from traditional musicals and were supported by the government. The most lauded was Satyajit Ray, whose films won prizes at film festivals in Cannes, Venice and Berlin. But as big-budget blockbusters grew more important in later years, such independent movies were overshadowed by Bollywood's output aimed at a mass audience.

## 'Stay on the dancefloor'

Many still try to break the mould, like "English Vinglish" (2012), that scored well at home and with expat Indians, and went on to be dubbed or subtitled into 12 other languages. "There are directors, storytellers and subjects that can travel," said Kapadia, highlighting director Sanjay Leela Bhansali as someone who appeals

to both the Indian mainstream and the Western arthouse crowd. Bhansali's latest movie "Gangubai Kathiawadi" premiered at the Berlin Film Festival this year. "Our job is to keep pushing the boundaries," said Kapadia. "The sky's the limit."

This year's Marche du Film experience, meanwhile, may take some time to translate into tangible deals outside India's main markets in South Asia and the Gulf states, but is still invaluable, Kapadia said. "You have to be there. Stay on the dancefloor and you'll find a partner," he said. Indian actress Pooja Hegde, who shoots four films a year in three Indian languages and has 20 million Instagram followers, said she too was hopeful. "Things are changing. Indian cinema is going to the world," she told AFP.

She and many other Indian actors present in Cannes-including superstar Deepika Padukone, a main jury member-are promoting "brand India", added the 31-year old former second runner-up at the Miss Universe India contest. "We're spicy," she said laughing. "We manage, we hustle. That's brand India." — AFP



Model Kate Moss is sworn in via video link at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP photos

## Kate Moss says Johnny Depp never threw her down any stairs

British model Kate Moss on Wednesday dismissed reports that her former boyfriend Johnny Depp once threw her down a flight of stairs, saying it never happened. "He never pushed me, kicked me or threw me down any stairs," said Moss, who was testifying as a witness at Depp's defamation trial against his former wife Amber Heard.

The 58-year-old Depp filed suit against Heard over an op-ed she wrote for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse."

Heard, 36, did not name the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star in the op-ed, but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. The Texas-born Heard countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands.

Heard, during her testimony earlier this month, mentioned a reported incident in which Depp was alleged to have pushed his former girlfriend Moss down a flight of stairs. That reference provided an opening to Depp's lawyers to call Moss as a witness to address the allegation and she testified by video link from Gloucestershire, England. The 48-year-old Moss said she had a romantic relationship with Depp from 1994 to 1998.

She was asked about an incident which occurred during a vacation the couple took to a resort in Jamaica. "We were leaving the room and Johnny left the room before I did," Moss said. "And there'd been a rainstorm and as I left the room I slid down the stairs and I hurt my back. "And I screamed because I didn't know what had happened to me and I was in pain. He came running back to help me and carried me to my room and got me medical attention." Heard's lawyers declined to cross-examine Moss. — AFP



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



Indian actress and member of the Jury of the Official Selection Deepika Padukone arrives for the screening of the film "Decision to Leave (Hojil Kyolshim)" during the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes.



Indian actress Pooja Hegde arrives for the screening of the film "Top Gun : Maverick" during the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.

## Outside court, hardcore Depp fans want 'Justice for Johnny'

The early morning sun has barely poked through the clouds, but Luz-Hazel Walrath and Pam Cuddapah have already been huddled outside a courthouse in the suburbs of Washington for nine hours-determined to show their support for Johnny Depp. The two substitute teachers, both 23, drove five hours from their homes in North Carolina to Fairfax, Virginia, arriving at 10:00 pm on Monday evening to try to snag one of the 100 public seats for the next day's hearing. They were among scores who gather each day-and-night-at the court, hoping to catch a glimpse of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" star as he battles ex-wife Amber Heard in a blockbuster defamation case.

"We just wanted to support Johnny," Walrath said, explaining she had grown up watching movies featuring the actor. Walrath and Cuddapah may be biased, but they say they are not convinced by evidence presented by Heard's legal team, who allege the actress suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" from Depp. "I usually believe victims, but

in this specific case... I just don't really fully believe her," Cuddapah said.

She says she came to her conclusion based on research via social media, while adding "also he's a great actor." Almost all those waiting in the queue are loyal to Depp, who says Heard is actually the one who was violent toward him. A few carry signs, some calling for "#JusticeforJohnny." One group has come with a bouquet of heart-shaped balloons and a poster declaring their love for the troubled former pinup.

## Card games, and makeup

In the small hours of Tuesday, many

waited under the building's colonnade to shelter from the rain. They passed the time trying to sleep-wrapped up in blankets on the ground-playing cards, or chatting with new friends. Early arrivals bided their time across the street before rushing across the courthouse lawn to secure a place in line when the Fairfax County Sheriff's Department finally allowed them on the premises.

Office manager Glenna Bobb, who drove three hours from Philadelphia, described the scene as a "mad dash." "Honestly, it was chaos," she said. By the time the sun comes up, the crowd is ready for breakfast and coffee ordered via

delivery apps. Some, still in their sweatpants, do their makeup as 7:00 am approaches-the moment when sheriff's deputies hand out the wristbands that are the fans' prized tickets into the courtroom.

Bobb, 44, started following the trial when it began back in April, when she was in isolation recovering from COVID. "I had nothing else to do," she said. "And then it was just like a train wreck." After all the wristbands are distributed, those who didn't get in traipse to the back of the courthouse, hoping for the next best thing: a glimpse of Depp as he drives in through a rear entrance. Barricades are erected as the street corner quickly fills with spectators, baby strollers and dogs-one wearing its own "Justice for Johnny Depp" sign.

A lone pro-Heard voice, Christina Taft holds up her sign blasting what she calls a social media "operation" against the "Aquaman" star. Facing down the Depp crowd is "really hard," the 28-year-old from Los Angeles said. She uses a bullhorn to shout "Go Amber Heard!" as the actress's car rolls through the parking lot gates, but she is drowned out by boos and taunts. A few minutes later, Depp drives past, waving and smiling through the car's open window at his cheering fans. — AFP

People wait in line to get a pass to enter the court during the final week of the Depp vs Heard defamation trial at the Fairfax County Circuit Court in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP





This photo shows cybersecurity expert Ngo Minh Hieu during an interview with AFP in Ho Chi Minh City.



The cybersecurity expert Ngo Minh Hieu walking on a street in Ho Chi Minh City.



The cybersecurity expert Ngo Minh Hieu working on a computer in Ho Chi Minh City. — AFP photos

## Notorious Vietnamese hacker turns government cyber agent

At the height of his career, Vietnamese hacker Ngo Minh Hieu made a fortune stealing the personal data of hundreds of millions of Americans. Now he has been recruited by his own authoritarian government to hunt, he says, the kind of cyber criminal he once used to be.

After serving seven years in US prisons for stealing some 200 million Americans' personal details, Hieu was sent back to Vietnam, which imposes some of the world's strictest curbs on online freedom. Hieu says he has since turned his back on his criminal past. "I fell to the bottom, now I am trying to climb up again," the 32-year-old told AFP. "Though I don't earn much now, I have peace instead."

His transformation, however, is complicated. Hieu says his new job involves educating Vietnamese citizens about the dangers of the same sort of hacking he perpetrated. But he is also working on

cybersecurity for the government of a one-party state that cracks down ruthlessly on dissent, harassing and arresting people for posting critical opinions online.

### 'More, more, more'

Nicknamed HieuPC when he was 12, Hieu was fascinated by computers as soon as he first laid hands on one. But he was soon racking up \$1,000 fines for stealing others' internet connections for his own personal use. He began hacking into foreign bank accounts, netting up to \$600 a day in high school then using the money to study cybersecurity in New Zealand. Hieu was forced to return home in 2010 after hacking his university and selling students' personal information, and his illegal activities spiraled.

In his 20s, he made \$100,000 a month hacking and selling some 200 million US social security numbers. "I was on the top of success. I was over-proud of myself. I

wanted more villas, more apartments, more luxurious cars," Hieu said. Then, in February 2013, he was lured to the United States in a sting operation and promptly arrested on landing.

### 'Fallen to the bottom'

"I don't know of any other cybercriminal who has caused more material financial harm to more Americans than Ngo," Secret Service agent Matt O'Neill, who executed the plan to catch Hieu, told KrebsOnSecurity.com, a blog dedicated to cybersecurity. Hieu was initially given a sentence of 45 years, later reduced to 13. "I had fallen to the bottom, losing everything in my life," Hieu said. "I thought of hanging myself."

But he struggled through and was released in 2019, returning to Vietnam in 2020. The former millionaire now lives in an average apartment in commercial capital Ho Chi Minh City and works at the state-owned National Cyber Security

Centre. "We're focused on hunting criminals and thwarting cyberattacks," he said, declining to comment on Vietnam's increasingly repressive approach to online censorship.

A new cybersecurity law came into effect in 2019 that Amnesty International has warned grants the government "sweeping powers to limit online freedom" and target those who post opinions it dislikes. The UN Human Rights Council in 2019 criticized the law for imposing "severe restrictions on freedom of expression and opinion".

Activists and bloggers have been arrested, with some even jailed on charges of spreading propaganda against the state, and Amnesty warned last year that government-linked hackers were targeting rights activists. Hieu insists that his work as a "threat hunter" is not political but focused on criminal hackers, tracking those who are trying to steal Vietnamese people's data.

### 'Hacking is like a knife'

Roughly 70 percent of Vietnam's 98 million people use the internet, and cyber threats are rife. A report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies quoted Microsoft data from 2020 showing Vietnam had the highest rate of ransomware attacks in the Asia-Pacific region. Hieu travels the country speaking at schools and universities about the importance of cybersecurity, as well as the consequences of data being stolen.

While the government is pushing public awareness, Hieu said many Vietnamese had little understanding of cybercrime. "Now I still hack, but I hack fraudulent webpages or try to understand data that blackhat hackers are trading online to trace them and find out who they are," he said. "Hacking is like a knife, which you may give to someone who wants to use it on something-bad or good." — AFP

## Italy Oscar-winner Sorrentino says no more Netflix

Already shedding subscribers, Netflix may also be losing some of its big-name directors, with Italian Oscar-winner Paolo Sorrentino telling Cannes on Tuesday that he is finished with streaming platforms. "Maybe it's because I'm becoming old, but the best thing for me is to try to make things for the big screen," Sorrentino told an audience at the Cannes Film Festival.

The director of "The Great Beauty", which won a foreign language Oscar in 2014, said the "power of the image" could only be fully realized on a big screen. "With a TV series, it's not easy to remember great images," he said. "I don't (watch) movies done for TV or platforms because I don't find what I'm looking for." Sorrentino is one of many lauded auteurs-including Martin Scorsese and Jane Campion—who have benefitted from Netflix's deep pockets in recent years.



Italian director Paolo Sorrentino waves as he arrives for the screening of the film "Forever Young (Les Amandiers)" at the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

He made TV series "The Young Pope" for the platform, as well as last year's autobiographical film, "The Hand of God". "The movie I made for Netflix was good for Netflix, but it's not something (I want) to happen again," he said. The influx of easy money was actually a problem, he added. "For many filmmakers there was this overdose of chances to do things-movies, TV series. We started to be very rushed," Sorrentino said. "A good movie needs time. It was a fake opportunity. It's important to go back to the past." Netflix announced earlier this year that it had lost subscribers for the first time in a decade, and trimmed staff last week.

Sorrentino's opinion will be music to the ears of the Cannes organizers, who have barred Netflix and other streamers from competing at the festival because they do not give their movies a long-enough period in cinemas. The 51-year-old director said he was optimistic about the future of cinemas. "At a certain point, people will get tired of watching films at home," he said. He also criticized platforms for not using their money to finance new voices. "Compared to the amount of money that platforms have, I never see that they invest money for younger film-makers, and they could." — AFP



This file photo taken on February 9, 1974 in Stockholm shows the Swedish pop group ABBA with its members (from left) Benny Andersson, Anni-Frid Lyngstad, Agnetha Faltskog and Bjorn Ulvaeus posing after winning the Swedish branch of the Eurovision Song Contest with their song "Waterloo". — AFP photos

## Take a chance on me: ABBA pass the torch on to avatars

In one of the longest awaited musical reunions, Swedish pop legends ABBA return to the concert stage on Friday in London but only as avatars of their 1970 selves shimmering with shiny costumes, glitter and platform boots. While fans will hear the quartet's real voices, the band will not be on stage. Concert-goers will see "ABBAatars" projected as holograms, looking like they did at the peak of their fame.

"We put our hearts and souls into these avatars and they will take over now," 77-year-old band member Bjorn Ulvaeus told AFP in an interview in Stockholm ahead of the premiere. Fans will once again be able to see Agnetha Faltskog, Bjorn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson and Anni-Frid Lyngstad whose first initials form the name ABBA-perform hits from the 1970s and 1980s, as well as their recent comeback album, at the "ABBA Voyage" show in London.

The group announced the reunion in September last year, dropping the new singles "I still have faith in you" and "Don't shut me down". They then released the 10-track album "Voyage" two months later and announced plans for the high-tech concert at a specially-built London arena.

### On tenterhooks

Other attempts at concert holograms have received lukewarm reviews, but the group hopes fans will feel they're seeing the real deal. "This is one of the most daring projects that anyone has done in the music industry ever," said Ulvaeus, who wrote most of the group's biggest hits with Benny Andersson. "How it will be received by the audience, I don't have a clue," he said.

"But I think that they will feel an emotional pull from the avatars, they will see the avatars as real people." In addition to re-recording their songs for the show, the quartet also spent hours in a studio dressed in leotards, having their movements digitally recorded to reproduce them on stage.

The avatars will appear in the band's kitsch 1970s outfits and are also expected to don futuristic get-ups, according to trailers. The show will run seven days a week until early October in the purpose-built theatre ABBA Arena in east London. "I don't know about the others but, me, myself, I felt more nervous a month ago than I do now," Ulvaeus said, adding: "I know that

we have done our utmost."

### 'Almost like someone else'

The holograms are the product of a years-long project, designed in partnership with a special effects company founded by Star Wars creator George Lucas. The concert was recorded using 160 cameras and five weeks of performances. For Ulvaeus, who is also setting up a circus musical in Stockholm about Pippi Longstocking, the main character in an eponymous series of children's books by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren, the overwhelming amount of archival ABBA footage means it is not strange to see his 40-year-younger self on stage.

"For most people it will be weird perhaps, but I have seen my younger self almost daily, all my life. Ever since we broke up, in some form or other, in some pictures somewhere." "So I am kind of used to 'him.'" "He is almost like someone else-he is me yes, but he is also someone else." "And when I see my avatar on stage, it really becomes a mixture: It's as if I have kind of infused life into this guy that we see on the screen." ABBA broke onto the inter-

national scene in 1974 when they won the Eurovision Song Contest with "Waterloo", powered by a flood of British votes.

They went on to record a string of hits, including "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!", "Dancing Queen" and "The Winner Takes it All", before breaking up in 1982. They long steered clear of a reunion despite their music's enduring popularity, fuelled by a hit compilation album in 1992, the "Mamma Mia!" movies starring Meryl Streep, Colin Firth and Pierce Brosnan and a spin-off musical.

Notching up several hundred million album sales over 50 years, ABBA helped put Sweden's pop music industry on the map. The country remains the third-biggest exporter of music after the United States and Britain. In London, concert-goers will be treated to a 90-minute show, with a dozen live musicians on stage backing up the avatars. Will the quartet ever perform together again for real? "ABBA has no plans. It is what it is," Ulvaeus said. — AFP



In this file photo Swedish music band ABBA's wax figures are displayed at the ABBA museum in Stockholm, Sweden.



In this file photo taken on July 15, 1980 Swedish pop group Abba (from left to right) Bjorn Ulvaeus, Agnetha Faltskog, Anni-Frid Lyngstad and Benny Andersson, walk along a street of Marstrand, Sweden.



Women members of the "Tablet al-Sitt" (the Lady's Tabla) perform on stage at the "Sawy Culture Wheel" centre in Egypt's capital Cairo. — AFP photos



Women members of the "Tablet al-Sitt" (the Lady's Tabla) perform with the (from left) "sagat" finger cymbals, the "daf" hand drums, and the "tabla" drum on stage.

# EGYPT'S DRUMMERS BEAT AWAY BAD RAP OF TABLA TUNES

Many Egyptians associate the tabla drum with belly dancers and seedy nightclubs but, despite its image problem, percussionists are giving the ancient instrument a new lease of life. And it is often women who are now playing the goblet-shaped traditional drum, an early version of which has been found in the ancient temple of the Goddess Hathor in Qena, southern Egypt. The beat of the tabla is ubiquitous, animating every Egyptian wedding, concert and impromptu dance party.

And yet professional tabla players have been associated with nightclubs, where they accompany the undulations of belly dancers, looked down on as figures of ill-repute by many Egyptians. "The public's image of the tabla is very negative," said music expert Ahmed al-Maghraby. "People associate it with a lack of morals." That is something the newcomers want to change. "There's a new trend now: solo tabla concerts," said musician Mostafa Bakkar, who struggled with his own family's disapproval of his decision to become

a tabla player and teacher. "People find the environment shameful," he told AFP. "They make fun of me and ask, 'So where's the dancer?'"

### 'Music therapy'

The quip has its roots in Egyptian popular culture. The 1984 hit movie "Al Raqessa wal Tabal" (The Dancer and the Tabla Player) told the story of a percussionist whose career grinds to a halt after leaving his belly dancer partner to strike out on his own. Bakkar, 30, who ties his dreadlocks back with a white bandana, said he also organizes improvised drum-playing circles for amateurs. "I pass out tablas to people around me and we play music in unison," he told AFP.

"It's a kind of group therapy," chimed in neuropsychologist Christine Yaacoub, a regular at Bakkar's drumming sessions. "I saw how happy tabla can make people, so now I use it as music therapy with my patients," she said. By practicing percussion together, "we heighten our attention span", she explained, because the tabla allows people "to express themselves without speaking".

### 'Break the rules'

Most professional tabla players have been men, but now more and more

Egyptian women are taking up the ancient instrument, either professionally or as a hobby. In 2016, tabla players Rania Omar and Donia Sami, one of whom is veiled, went viral on social media with a video

Cairo show under a bridge on the Nile's banks, 500 people gathered at the "Sawy Culture Wheel", singing and clapping along as Tablet al-Sitt played folk favorites. For band member Rougina



Women members of the "Tablet al-Sitt" (the Lady's Tabla) band perform with "daf" hand drums (left, center) and the "tabla" drum (right) on stage at the "Sawy Culture Wheel" centre in Egypt's capital Cairo.



"Tabla" drum instructor Mostafa Bakkar gives a lesson at his studio in Egypt's capital Cairo.



A student plays the "tabla" drum during a music lesson with teacher Mostafa Bakkar (unseen) at his studio in Egypt's capital Cairo.

that attracted a fair share of online hecklers but also an outpouring of support.

Encouraged, the duo went on to become the first all-woman tabla band in Egypt. In 2019, 33-year-old Soha Mohammed joined them to create "Tablet al-Sitt" (The Woman's Tabla), "to give all women a chance to sing freely and play the tabla". Mohammed has since been travelling with eight other percussionists across Egypt, treating audiences to new takes on traditional classics. At a recent

Nader, who at age 21 has spent 12 years playing the instrument, it was a long, difficult road to becoming a full-time percussionist. "We upset men, because we're competition, and audiences love us," she told AFP. "There are obstacles, but that won't stop us from continuing to break the rules." — AFP

## From drones to sensors, Malaysian durian grower goes high-tech

Drones spraying pesticide, sensors taking soil readings, sprinklers that squirt fertilizer at the touch of a button—a Malaysian plantation is using high-tech methods to boost its crop of pungent durians. Grown across Southeast Asia, fans hail the spiky durian as the "king of fruit" due to its bitter-sweet flavors and creamy golden flesh, and it is particularly popular in China.

But to its detractors it is the world's smelliest fruit, with an overpowering stench like rotting food that has seen it banned in hotels and on public transport across the region. In a competitive market, Malaysian grower Top Fruits Plantations has turned to high-tech methods to lift its output. "It's a much faster way to get more consistent results," managing director Tan Sue Sian told AFP during a recent tour of



This picture shows durian fruit hanging on a tree at the Top Fruit durian farm in Batu Pahat in Malaysia's Johor state. — AFP photos

one of the company's plantations in Batu Pahat, southern Johor state.

Using technology allows farmers to gauge more precisely how much fertilizer and water the trees need, he said. "When you give what is needed, the fruit will be much more consistent. The shape will be better, and the aroma will be better," added Tan, who has more than 30 years' experience growing durians.

### Sensors essential

Key in the drive are sensors spread across 400 acres (160 hectares) of Top Fruits' 700-acre Batu Pahat plantation, relaying data on soil quality and content to workers' handheld devices. The sensors are boxes mounted on poles, connected to the soil with a series of cables. By 2024, the entire plantation should be kitted out with them.

Sprinklers attached to a network of pipes are remotely activated to spray

fertilizer onto the trees, while drones hover over the plantation squirting pesticide. Such methods are unheard of on Malaysian durian farms, where growers typically rely on a large labor force, instinct and educated guesses. The investment has been hefty—Top Fruits has spent about four million ringgit (\$900,000) over the past three years on the technology. But it has led to an increase in yields of 40 percent, while its workforce has shrunk by 30 percent.

The company is now able to produce 800 tons of durians from its farms every year, with more than 80 per cent of its crop frozen in factories to be exported overseas, much of it to China. In a bid to further boost their crop, Top Fruits is getting into research by setting up a lab and collaborating with local universities. — AFP



A worker showing durian fruit at the Top Fruit durian farm in Batu Pahat in Malaysia's Johor state.



A worker extracting durian fruit at the Top Fruit factory in Batu Pahat in Malaysia's Johor state.



This picture shows packets of vacuum-sealed durian fruit at the Top Fruit factory in Batu Pahat in Malaysia's Johor state.

## 'The state of being lonely': South Korean horror writer shortlisted for Booker

A head pops out of the toilet, a woman gets pregnant from birth control pills—South Korean Booker Prize nominee Bora Chung's short stories are full of horror, inspired by her own lonely life. An academic specializing in Slavic literature, Chung was considered a "genre writer" and excluded from South Korea's mainstream literary scene. Until recently, she was relatively unknown to local readers.

Her stories—which combine science fiction, horror and fantasy—are not considered "pure" literature by Seoul's cultural elite. But her life took a dramatic turn when her 2017 collection "Cursed Bunny" caught the eye of translator Anton Hur. Hur's English edition of the book, released by British publisher Honford Star, has been named a finalist for this year's International Booker Prize.

Only two South Korean writers—Han Kang ("The Vegetarian") and Hwang Sok-yong ("At Dusk") — have previously been nominated for the honor, and both were far more established and well-regarded domestically. "Cursed Bunny" has not won any prizes in South Korea, and Chung mostly earned a living teaching at a university and translating Russian literature. Despite the elements of horror in her work, Chung said the collection was ultimately about the innate loneliness of being human.

She spent nearly a decade overseas as a graduate student, living year to year and unsure of her next move, which profoundly shaped her imagination as a writer, she told AFP. "I wasn't sure if anything was actually waiting for me in South Korea even if I wanted to return," she said. "I was constantly nervous about the future, and because this lasted for nine years, I became very used to the state of being lonely," she added.

### Horrors of modern society

A graduate of Seoul's Yonsei University, Chung holds a master's degree in Russian and East European studies from Yale and a PhD in Slavic literature from Indiana University, both in the United States. She was deeply inspired by Soviet Russian writer Andrei Platonov's 1928 novel "Chevengur", about a poor orphan whose quest to find a communist utopia ultimately fails and ends in a bloodbath.

The Booker Prize Foundation says Chung's collection uses the fantastical to address the horrors of the "patriarchy and capitalism of modern society". Her characters include a father who locks up his daughter and exploits her for business, a designer who falls in love with a robot companion she's invented and a woman who is constantly shamed after becoming pregnant due to the side effects of birth control

pill. Another character faces the horror of repeatedly seeing a creature appear in her toilet bowl, claiming to be her child. In her own life, Chung said the prospect of falling pregnant felt like a serious threat during her years overseas.

"To me, it was horror," she told AFP at her apartment in the South Korean port city of Pohang before leaving for the United Kingdom to attend the awards ceremony set for Thursday. "All I could think was if I suddenly fell pregnant and gave birth, I would just die with my child. I would just be on the streets and die," she said. "I had no ability to raise a child, didn't have a partner, had no support network and I was a foreigner."



This picture shows South Korean horror writer Bora Chung posing with her book "Cursed Bunny" during an interview with AFP at her apartment in the South Korean port city of Pohang. — AFP

### 'A very hard sell'

Chung's nomination rides a global wave of enthusiasm for South Korean culture, from Netflix's "Squid Game" to author Han Kang's 2016 International Booker Prize winner "The Vegetarian". But Anton Hur, who translated "Cursed Bunny" and marketed its English edition, said the book was "actually a very, very hard sell" given what he characterized as a lack of interest in Korean literature.

"I did everything I could to promote the book, whether it was on social media, at Oxford University where I won a translators residency... and the many literary festivals I dragged the author to so that we could sell just one more book," he told AFP. Chung, who is married to a labor rights activist, prefers to spend her spare time attending political rallies. "I feel at ease at rallies as I get to be with a lot of people who share the same thoughts as me," said the author, who met her husband at a rally. Chung's years overseas, meanwhile, have made her painfully aware of cultural differences, and her work seems to ask: If culture and language are such barriers to intimacy, then what hope do humans have of understanding robots? — AFP

## Sports

# Czech rider Hirt wins stage 16 of Giro; Carapaz retains lead

## Olympic road race champion retains the pink jersey

APRICA: Czech rider Jan Hirt took the 16th stage of the Giro d'Italia on Tuesday to claim his first ever Grand Tour win, while Richard Carapaz held on to his slender overall lead after a brutal mountain stage. The 31-year-old Interim rider attacked two kilometres before the summit of the final of three huge climbs on the 202km run from Salo to Aprica and held off chaser Thymen Arensman for the win.

Hirt's stage win was by far the biggest of his career and added to his overall victory at the Tour of Oman this year. "When people ask me what I want to do with cycling I say that I want to win one stage on the Giro and then I can stop my career," Hirt joked after the win. "So now I am happy but I don't want to stop now."

Hirt had been chasing Lennard Kanna after the Bora-Hansgrohe rider made a run for it just before the start of the final Santa Cristina ascent. However he and Arensman caught Kanna within the closing 10km and Hirt then made his charge for the line in wet Aprica after wrestling with mechanical problems in the last kilometers. "He (Kanna) had a good advantage on us and it was looking quite difficult but I had to try," added Hirt.

"I had quite difficult moments on the stage... in the last climb I had a problem with the bike it wasn't shifting very well, it was jumping my chain. "I was suffering so much and had all these problems but I wanted the win so bad I held on till the end." Olympic road race champion Carapaz retained the pink jersey after crossing just over a minute later alongside Mikel Landa and Jai Hindley. Carapaz responded alongside Hindley when Landa pushed out from the group of general classification contenders with 10km left.

Hindley cut Carapaz's already slim lead to just three seconds after winning four bonus seconds on the finish line, while Joao Almeida dropped time and is now 44 seconds back in third. Meanwhile home hope Vincenzo Nibali has jumped from eighth to fifth place, 3mins 40sec from top spot on this last Giro. "It was a tough day for us. I'm happy in the end I think to have only lost four seconds is OK. We managed to keep hold of the jersey which is the most important thing," said Carapaz. Wednesday's 17th stage is a 168-kilometre run between Ponte di Legno and Lavarone which features two top category climbs—Vetriolo and the Menador—in the final 50km. —AFP



APRICA: Team Wanty's Czech rider Jan Hirt celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 17th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2022 cycling race, 177 kilometers from Salo' to Aprica. —AFP



## Kazma wins Amir Cup

KUWAIT: Kazma SC won Tuesday His Highness the Amir Football Cup after defeating Al-Salmiya SC 2-1 in the final match of the tournament held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, snatching the 8th trophy. The match was held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and in attendance of His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince was received warmly by Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajhi and some senior officials. National Assembly Speaker



Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, senior Sheikhs, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior State officials attended the final. At the end of the match, His Highness Sheikh Mishal handed over the trophy to Kazma. — KUNA



## stc celebrates final match of Amir Cup

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, celebrated the final match of the most exclusive football tournament in Kuwait, the "Amir Cup", which was held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The game was held at the Jaber International Stadium and attended by the Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, along with other government officials and Kuwait football family.

In line with the company's strategy to support the local sports community and as the official sponsor of KFA, stc executives including engineer Maziad Alharbi, CEO of stc, Issam Issa Al Assousi, CCAO of stc as well as the Corporate Communications GM Danah Al-Jasem attended the final game and the closing ceremony. During the final match of the Amir Cup, Kazma Sporting Club were crowned champions for the eighth time in the Club's history after winning the final match against Salmiya Sporting Club 2-1 held at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Engineer Maziad Alharbi, CEO of stc, expressed his happiness for the company's participation in the final game of the Amir Cup Championship as it falls under the strategic partnership with the KFA for the eighth consecutive year. He said, "We were honored by the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince, may God protect him, at the final match of the Amir Cup in its 60th edition and we value his vision for the sports community and the Kuwaiti youth."

Engineer Maziad Alharbi, praised the diligent efforts made by the teams at the KFA and stc to ensure a successful tournament, pointing out that the tournament holds a special place in the heart bearing the name of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, an avid supporter of this great tournament and sport. Alharbi also congratulated the new President of the Kuwait



Maziad Alharbi

Football Association and the new Board Members while wishing them all the success in their new journey.

He added that stc's sponsorship and participation in the several activities under the umbrella of the Kuwait Football Association stems from our pioneering role in the private sector and from the corporate values stc draws on and the belief in the importance of the local sports scene and KFA's role in reviving football in Kuwait. This will have a positive impact on both, the individual and society as a whole".

Alharbi said, "Since its inception, stc has regularly made concerted efforts to support the sports industry and has worked on expanding the local sports movement and supporting Kuwaiti youth athletes as part of its corporate social responsibility strategy." He concluded, "As leading pioneers within our industry, we strive to participate in various significant activities and initiatives that have become a part of our community."

This goes hand in hand with our continuous efforts to offer our valued customers with solutions and rich experiences that go beyond telecom services, considering that our main objective is to enrich the lifestyles of our customers." Alharbi expressed that stc was keen to sponsor the 2021-2022 season due to the positive impact such tournaments generate in both individuals and the community. The sponsorship came as a continuation of stc's ongoing collaborations with the KFA, which were initiated back in 2013.

stc through its influential and supporting role in the local sports scene aims to be actively engaged in activities that encourage individuals of all ages and nationalities to adopt a healthier lifestyle. This dynamic runs parallel to the Company's social responsibility pillars which focus on promoting health awareness, educating, and empowering the younger Kuwaiti generation, and practicing environmentally conscious behaviors.

## Saso's golf odyssey: Philippines to Japan via US Open win

HONG KONG: When a little-known teenager from the Philippines burst into the global golf spotlight by winning last year's US Women's Open it changed her life—but left tricky decisions ahead. Yuka Saso will next week enjoy the new experience of defending a major. But at Pine Needles she will play under a different flag, the crimson red circle of Japan. Saso, who was born in the Philippines and has a Filipino mother and Japanese father, agonised over the "very difficult" decision to switch allegiance to the land of her father. Japan does not allow adults to hold dual nationality, leaving Saso with a gut-wrenching choice to make before she turns 21 next month.

"I grew up in the Philippines and I played big events with the Philippine flag beside my name so it was a big decision," she told AFP. "It was very difficult... I'm a professional golfer. I needed to make a decision that was good for my job." The scales were tipped by the Japanese passport affording easier travel in a post-pandemic world. "I think everybody knows that the Japan passport is more powerful, it takes less work with the stuff outside golf," said Saso via video call from the United States.

The Philippines will always hold a special place in Saso's heart—she won two gold medals for the country at the 2018 Asian Games and played for them again at the Tokyo Olympics last year. "I felt very honored to represent my mum's country, those big events... all those memories," Saso said. "Hopefully people will not think that I abandoned the Philippines, because I love the Philippines. I also love Japan. "It's still the same me, it's just the flag."

### Advice from McIlroy

Twelve months ago Saso arrived in San Francisco as a little-known golfer who had won a couple of events on the Japan LPGA Tour. By the time she left the Olympic Club, after only her seventh LPGA Tour start, Saso had become the first golfer from the Philippines, man or woman, to win a major. "To be able to win the US Open was awesome and to get an LPGA card was my dream," she said. "It was life-changing and ever since I've learned a lot inside and

outside the golf course."

The win propelled her from 40th in the world into the top 10 and brought a five-year exemption on the elite LPGA Tour. It also brought career-enhancing commercial endorsements. First in the queue for Saso's signature was the insurance giant AXA. "I was playing the Japan Tour and to have a big company like AXA reach out, even before the US Open, it gave me confidence to push myself more." Best of all, the major victory gave Saso the chance to meet her idol Rory McIlroy at the men's US Open the following week.

Saso's fluid swing is remarkably similar to that of the four-time major champion from Northern Ireland. It is no coincidence. "It's real that I tried to copy his swing," she laughed, revealing the pair have kept in touch after meeting again at the Tokyo Olympics. "I don't really want to bother him. I know how busy he is. But whenever I have questions, he always replies and gives some advice," Saso said. "One of my dreams is to be able to play with him one day."

### 'Very heart-warming'

Pine Needles, in the windswept sandhills of North Carolina, will present a different challenge for Saso, who won her maiden major alongside the Pacific coast courtesy of a knee-knocking birdie on the third playoff hole. Saso, who reckoned Pine Needles would be "a very difficult course" after practicing there this month, was not even nine years old when she decided to take up golf—and vowed she would win the US Open.

"My dad loved watching golf. In 2010 we were watching the US Open when Paula Creamer won," she recalled. "And I told my dad: 'I want to win that trophy'—at the age of eight—and a-half when I've just barely started playing golf!" she laughed. "My dad was like: 'Are you sure?' I think you should just focus on other things because when you pursue something like being a professional athlete, you need to sacrifice a lot."

"But I didn't understand all of that, because I was so young. So I just told him, 'I want to be a professional golfer.'" Eleven years later on a sunny Sunday afternoon, Masakazu Saso was green-side to witness his daughter's precocious prediction come true. "It was very heart-warming because my dad was there, even though my mum wasn't there," said Saso. "I just felt like I was very thankful for their help because without my family I wouldn't be here." —AFP

## Kerr and LeBron lead sports world fury after Texas school shooting

LOS ANGELES: Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr made an impassioned plea for gun control in the wake of the Texas school shooting that left 18 children dead on Tuesday as the US sporting world reacted with horror over the tragedy. Kerr refused to talk about his team's NBA playoff match with the Dallas Mavericks in a pre-game press conference, held hours after a teenage gunman opened fire at a school in the Texas town of Uvalde.

An emotional Kerr, one of the most outspoken and articulate voices on social issues in American sport, slammed his hand on a table as he accused US lawmakers who refuse to vote on tougher gun laws of "holding the American people hostage." "I'm not going to talk about basketball," Kerr told reporters shortly before Tuesday's Eastern Conference finals game four in Dallas. "Any basketball questions don't matter. "Since we left shootaround, 14 children were

killed 400 miles from here, and a teacher. In the last 10 days, we've had elderly black people killed in a supermarket in Buffalo, we've had Asian churchgoers killed in Southern California, now we have children murdered at school.

"When are we going to do something? I'm tired. I'm so tired of getting up here and offering condolences to the devastated families that are out there. "I've had enough. We're going to play the game tonight. But I want every person here, every person listening to this, to think about your own child or grandchild, mother or father, sister, brother. "How would you feel if this happened to you today?" asked Kerr, whose father was murdered by Islamic militants in Beirut in 1984.

Kerr reserved toughest criticism for members of the US Senate who have refused to vote on legislation that would introduce stricter background checks for gun owners. "Fifty Senators in Washington are going to hold us hostage," Kerr said. "Do you realize that 90 percent of Americans, regardless of political party, want background checks, universal background checks? Ninety percent of us. "We are being held hostage by 50 Senators in Washington who refuse to even put it to a vote, despite what we the American people want." —AFP

Sports

# In Sierra Leone, football offers hope to amputees

## Teammates lost a leg or an arm during the war

FREETOWN: On a sun-drenched Sierra Leone beach, a one-legged man balances on his crutches and fires the ball past a one-armed goalkeeper. Sheku Turay and others like him have found much-needed support and a new lease of life through his team of footballing amputees. "Playing football makes me feel like an important person in society when I see spectators cheering us during matches," said 37-year-old Turay.

He was just 12 years old when rebels attacked his village in the northern Tonkolili district, during the civil war that left tens of thousands dead from 1991 to 2002. Doctors sacrificed his leg to save him from gangrene. Most of his teammates lost a leg or an arm during the war, while others had a limb amputated as a result of disease or a road accident. Life is hard for the disabled in one of the world's poorest countries, where half the population lives on less than \$1.25 a day according to the UN.

After a day's work as a tailor in a workshop in the sprawling Freetown suburb of Kamayama, Turay must struggle through piles of rocks and branches to his one-room hut on the mountainside, among the tin and cinderblock dwellings, carrying his prosthetic limb in a backpack. Turay said he has never received any kind of aid from the government or charities, but is saving up to open his own shop. "I don't depend on people for my survival like other disabled begging on the streets," he said proudly.

**Finger-pointing**  
Sometimes memories of the war come back to haunt Turay in his sleep. But playing football with the "Single Leg" association since 2012 on a stretch of the pristine Lumley Beach in the west end of Freetown, has given him "inspiration, strength and happiness". "The amputee football team help me to realise my sense of purpose in life," he explained. There are a total of 70 players involved, including a dozen women, all missing an arm or a leg. The club was created in 2002, at the end of the war, by Mamoudi Samai, pastor of a church he built in the district where Turay lives. The pastor still manages and financially supports the team and its members. Lahai Makie, 49, is the team's head coach.

He was shot by rebels in 1992. By the time he reached a hospital, he had lost so much blood one of his legs had to be amputated. Makie describes a tough daily life, with even taking a bus presenting a challenge. "In my society the disabled are provoked and discriminated against, but it hasn't dampened my spirit to achieve my goals in life," he said. "The government should open a special vocational training school and provide us with free medical and education as recommended by the 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report," he added.

**Hope, goals and marriage**  
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was



FREETOWN: Members of a Single Leg Amputee Sports Association football team play during training session in Freetown. — AFP

set up to investigate the brutal conflict. In 2004, it recommended that several categories of people affected by the war, including amputees, receive compensation. Since then, of the 32,000 people who have registered for the compensation, 20,000 have received sums ranging from \$70 to \$200, according to the National Commission on Disability.

The ageing National Rehabilitation Centre in

Freetown no longer deals with war victims. Its patients are polio sufferers, road accident victims and diabetic amputees, says Abdulrahman Dumbuya, an orthopaedic surgeon and the facility's assistant director. The centre, whose services are low-priced although not free, makes prostheses, but "we have a weak human resource capacity and lack of working materials at the workshop," bemoaned Dumbuya. — AFP



## Kuwait retain top position at Third Gulf Games

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait increased their medals to 65 at the Third Gulf Games, after winning the Judo's Under 60 kg gold medal and the Women's Futsal silver. The seventh day of competitions saw Kuwait Judo player Meshal Al-Ali winning the first gold medal in the judo competition for the under 60kg category, while women futsal team won the silver medal after losing to Bahrain in the final match.

Bahrain remained in the second place with 53 medals (19 gold, 19 silver and 15 bronze); Qatar - third - with 40 medals (12 gold, 16 silver and 12 bronze); UAE moved to fourth place with 34 medals (12 gold, 12 silver and 10 bronze). Oman slipped to fifth place with 27 medals (11 gold, 5 silver and 11 bronze); Saudi Arabia remained in sixth place with 42 medals (9 gold, 13 silver and 20 bronze).

Kuwait men's Futsal team officially won the gold medal Tuesday after beating Oman 3-1. The team had secured the medal after defeating Bahrain on Sunday 2-1 - collecting all possible 12 points. Saudi Arabia won the silver medal as Bahrain took the bronze. In the 73 kg, Bahrain's Ramzan Dzavashvili won gold; UAE's Saeed Al-Naqabi took silver and Saudi Arabia's Suleiman Hamad took the bronze.

**Ice Hockey**

Kuwait's Ice Hockey Team kicked off their compe-



titions with a win against Bahrain 9-1 and topped the standings on goal difference; UAE who defeated Saudi Arabia 5-1. Kuwait had total control of the match that was held at Kuwait Winter Sports Club hall despite Bahrain's players' attempts to make a comeback. Chairman of the Winter Games club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi lauded the participation of the four Gulf teams. This, he said, will strengthen relations.

**Women's Futsal**

Kuwait Women Futsal team were satisfied with the silver medal as they lost to Bahrain 1-2. Bahrain took the gold while the bronze medal went to Saudi Arabia after defeating UAE 4-1.

**Hayat happy with fans' support**

Member of Kuwait Olympic Committee Fatima Hayat said the large presence of fans during the futsal matches is a major indication on the society's new vision towards women's practice of sports and now women are participating in several games.

Hayat said "we now have women's teams that are

been offended. She said the mistake had occurred as someone was learning how to operate the ticker and was "writing random things not in earnest". The presenter said: "A little earlier, some of you may have noticed something pretty unusual on the ticker that runs along the bottom of the screen with news making a comment about Manchester United, and I hope that Manchester United fans weren't offended by it.

"Let me just explain what was happening-behind the scenes someone was training to learn how to use the ticker and to put text on the ticker, so they were just writing random things not in earnest and that comment appeared." So apologies



## Benzema needs final triumph to make CL his own

MADRID: Real Madrid's Rodrygo was asked on Tuesday what was the best piece of advice he had been given by Karim Benzema, and he answered quickly: "To give him the ball". It has been a sensible strategy for Real Madrid, whose number nine will be the most dangerous player on the pitch in Saturday's Champions League (CL) final against Liverpool and who has been arguably the finest player in the world all season.

Benzema's 49 goals in 52 games dwarfs Mohamed Salah's 33 in 59 while even Kylian Mbappe, whose rejection of Real Madrid has so dominated the early build-up to this final in Paris, is inferior, with 43 in 49. If Real Madrid beat Liverpool to win a 14th European Cup, the expectation is Benzema will also beat the likes of Salah and Sadio Mane to win his first Ballon d'Or.

This season, Benzema has scored the most goals of his career for Real Madrid and the most of his career in the Champions League. He has become the oldest player to score a hat-trick in the Champions League and the most prolific French scorer in history. If he scores two goals this weekend, he will equal Cristiano Ronaldo's Champions League record of 17 goals, the most ever scored by one player in a single tournament.

Zinedine Zidane, whom Benzema described as like an older brother, said Benzema was "a gift to anyone who loves football", "a total footballer" and "the best". Former Ballon d'Or winner Jean-Pierre Papin once said: "Benzema has the power of Ronaldo, the speed of Ronaldinho, the class of Henry and the instinct of David Trezeguet." "We always look for him," said Rodrygo. "He's phenomenal." To score twice against Liverpool, in a final, might be improbable but who would put it past this Benzema, in this sort of form?

He has scored 10 times in the knock-out stages, rattling the very best opponents, including a hat-trick against Paris Saint-Germain, a hat-trick against Chelsea and a brace against Manchester City. "Madrid won because they have Benzema and Chelsea don't," wrote the Madrid newspaper AS after the quarter-final. "The reality is nobody has Benzema, who plays six different positions, often in the same move." On Sunday, as Real Madrid were still reeling from Mbappe's decision and as the finger-pointing and blaming began, it was impossible not to wonder if Benzema might have breathed a little sigh of relief. — AFP



able to win medals, and now we celebrate the futsal team reaching the final and winning the silver medal.

**Second loss for volleyball team**

Kuwait volleyball team lost its second match of the competitions to Qatar 0-3, meanwhile Saudi Arabia defeated UAE 3-0. This result places Qatar on top of the standings with 9 points followed by Bahrain with 9 points also, Kuwait with 4 points, Saudi Arabia 3 points, Oman 2 points and UAE with 0 points.

**Kuwait and UAE in the Basketball final**

Kuwait Basketball team moved to the final match after defeating Saudi Arabia 90-73 and was joined by UAE after defeating Bahrain 78-74.

**Table Tennis**

Saudi Arabia's table tennis team won the gold medal on Tuesday. Qatar took the second place while Bahrain secured the third position.

if you saw that and you were offended and you're a fan of Manchester United." A BBC statement to the PA news agency said: "There was a technical glitch during training with our test ticker, which rolled over to live programming for a few seconds. We apologised for any offence caused on air."

BBC presenter and Manchester City fan Clive Myrie tweeted: "I had nothing to do with this!!" with the hashtag #mfc. Manchester United, who have not won silverware since 2017, finished sixth in the top-flight table with their lowest points tally of the Premier League era. Their new manager, Erik ten Hag, was formally unveiled on Monday, less than 24 hours after Manchester City clinched a fourth league title in five seasons. —AFP

## BBC apologizes to fans after 'United are rubbish' gaffe

LONDON: The BBC was forced to apologize to Manchester United fans on Tuesday after a message appeared on their news ticker labeling the Premier League club as "rubbish". The insult popped up at the bottom of the screen during a tennis update. Later in the morning, a presenter apologized to any United fans who may have

# Classifieds

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

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112



DALLAS: Luka Dončić #77 of the Dallas Mavericks drives to the basket during Game 4 of the 2022 NBA Playoffs Western Conference Finals against the Golden State Warriors on May 24, 2022. —AFP

## Mavericks keep series alive

### Dončić helps Mavs down Warriors 119-109

DALLAS: Luka Dončić scored 30 points as the Dallas Mavericks defeated the Golden State Warriors 119-109 to keep their NBA Western Conference finals series alive on Tuesday. The Mavericks, needing a victory to avoid a clean sweep, delivered a revived offensive performance to ensure a game five in San Francisco on Thursday. No team in the 75-year history of the NBA has ever come back from 3-0 deficit to win a best-of-seven playoff series. But after Tuesday's performance, the Mavericks have at least a lifeline to cling to as the series heads back to California with the Warriors needing just one win from three remaining games to advance to the NBA Finals. Dončić, who has carried the scoring burden for Dallas in the three previous games, finally received scoring support from his team-mates on Tuesday. Six Dallas players finished in double figures, with Dorian Finney-Smith adding 23 points and Reggie Bullock 18. Jalen Brunson added 15 while Maxi Kleber contributing 13 and Spencer Dinwiddie 10.

Dončić however praised the defensive performance of his team-mates after a display which restricted

Golden State's leading scorer-Stephen Curry-to just 20 points. "Our defense was amazing today," said Dončić, who finished with 14 rebounds and nine assists. "That's how we've got to play, when we play like this we're a dangerous team." Asked if he felt the Mavs could still salvage a series victory, Dončić replied: "You never know. We're going to stick together. It's going to be tough, we know that but we have to stay together."

Dallas coach Jason Kidd cautioned that the Mavericks remained only one defeat away from elimination. "We believe it's just one game at a time, we did our part tonight and found a way to win tonight," Kidd said. "The next part is to find a way to win on the road. "We can't get ahead of ourselves. It's still 3-1 and Golden State is a tough place to play. But we've won there before. We just have to take care of the ball and make shots."

After being outplayed in the first three games by the six-time NBA champions, Dallas came out with a renewed sense of purpose at the American Airlines Center. The Mavs led by 15 points at half-time after cutting loose midway through the second quarter with a 19-

2 run that propelled them into a double-digit lead. Golden State struggled to make inroads into that deficit and were successful on only three of 16 attempts from three-point range.

#### Late rally

The Mavs by contrast drained 11-of-23 from beyond the arc in the first half, a statistic that helped them into a 62-47 half-time lead. The start of the second half was delayed by around 20 minutes after what appeared to be a leak from the arena roof allowed puddles of water to gather at one end of the court.

But any idea that the delay would allow the Warriors to regroup quickly evaporated as the Mavericks continued to rain in buckets, outscoring Golden State 37-23. That left Dallas 99-70 in front heading into the fourth quarter, with Dallas seemingly cruising to victory. The Mavs were given a scare in the final minutes of the game as the Warriors bench players suddenly trimmed the lead to just eight points. But Dončić reassured control and a Bullock three-pointer

put Dallas 13 points clear again to secure the win.

"It felt like we had a shot," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said of the fourth quarter rally. "But it wasn't meant to be, Dallas was great tonight and deserved to win." "They played with more force, and executed. This is the conference finals and that's how it's supposed to be-two great teams. And they handled us well tonight." Kerr meanwhile said the Warriors' locker room had been subdued before the game as his team digested the horror of the Texas school shooting earlier Tuesday that left 19 children dead.

"There was an unspoken awareness of what happened today," said Kerr, who had made an impassioned plea for stricter gun control laws in his pre-game press conference. "It was a very quiet locker room beforehand. I felt like as a coach my job was get the team ready to play. But difficult to keep perspective on a day like day. The shock, the anger and the grief is there for all of our guys and I'm sure everyone in the building. "But you just have to accept and go out and play and that's what we tried to do." —AFP

### Kerber and Azarenka win; Djokovic, Nadal eye Open third round

PARIS: Former Grand Slam champions Angelique Kerber and Victoria Azarenka advanced to the third round of the French Open on Wednesday, as Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal prepared to keep their Roland Garros title ambitions on course. Kerber, who won her first clay title in six years on the eve of the French Open, defeated French wildcard and 2020 junior champion Elsa Jacquemot 6-1, 7-6 (7/2) as she seeks the only Grand Slam missing from her collection.

The German 21st seed next plays Aliaksandra Sasnovich, the Belarusian who knocked out US Open champion Emma Raducanu 3-6, 6-1, 6-1. "I think the last week was really important for me to get the title," former number one Kerber said of her Strasbourg triumph. "I had a lot of confidence. It's great to be back here and I hope I can still play a few more matches. "When you achieve everything you want, you play for the love of the game. I just love the sport. Let's see how long I can keep playing at a high level."

Azarenka, a two-time Australian Open winner, beat 2014 Roland Garros semi-finalist Andrea Petkovic 6-1, 7-6 (7/3). She meets Swiss 23rd seed Jil Teichmann in the evening session. Moutet knocked out 2015 champion Stan Wawrinka in round one. Nadal began the year with a 20-match winning run, capturing a second Australian Open title to claim a record 21st Grand Slam and move ahead of Djokovic and Roger Federer. The 35-year-old's record at the French Open stands at a staggering 106 wins and just three losses since his



PARIS: Germany's Angelique Kerber returns the ball to France's Elsa Jacquemot during their women's singles match on day four of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament on May 25, 2022. —AFP



PARIS: Belarus' Victoria Azarenka plays a forehand return to Romania's Ana Bogdan during their women's singles match on day four of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament in Paris. —AFP

2005 title-winning debut, but he is without a title on clay this season after dealing with rib and foot injuries.

Carlos Alcaraz, 19, is attempting to become just the eighth teenager to capture a major men's title, and widely tipped to break the stranglehold of Djokovic and Nadal. He is the tour's dominant player in 2022, posting a 29-3 record and winning a season-leading four titles. Alcaraz faces fellow Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas for a place in the last 32. Zverev, a Roland Garros semi-finalist in 2021, takes on Sebastian Baez of Argentina. The 21-year-old Baez won his maiden title at Estoril at the start of the month. —AFP

### Chelsea sale gets green light from UK government

LONDON: The British government announced Wednesday it had approved Todd Boehly's £4.25 billion (\$5.3 billion) purchase of Chelsea football club from the sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. The Premier League club was put on the market in early March, days before Abramovich was sanctioned by Britain following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The billionaire, also the target of European Union sanctions, was described by the UK government as part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle.

Chelsea have been operating under the terms of a strict government licence that expires on May 31, meaning they have been unable to renew contracts for existing players and have faced a transfer ban. Completion of the takeover has been a lengthy process due to concerns over the potential for Abramovich to profit from the sale of the London club. But the Premier League gave the green light on Tuesday evening and hours later ministers said they would permit Chelsea's sale.

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries, whose brief includes sport, tweeted: "Given the sanctions we placed on those linked to Putin and the bloody invasion of Ukraine, the long-term future of the club can only be secured under a new owner. "We are satisfied the proceeds of the sale will not benefit Roman Abramovich or other sanctioned individuals." A consortium led by Boehly, a co-owner of baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers, beat off competition to agree a record deal to buy the club earlier this month.

At one stage it seemed close to collapse over concerns proceeds would not reach good causes as promised by outgoing owner Abramovich. The Russian, who bought Chelsea in 2003, denied he had asked for his £1.5 billion loan to the club be repaid when the sale was concluded. The government said in its statement it was satisfied that the

"full proceeds" of the sale would not benefit Abramovich or any other sanctioned individual.

"We will now begin the process of ensuring the proceeds of the sale are used for humanitarian causes in Ukraine, supporting victims of the war," it added. Of the total investment, £2.5 billion will be deposited into a frozen UK bank account to be donated to a charitable foundation for the benefit of victims of the war in Ukraine. The new owners will commit £1.75 billion in further investment "for the benefit of the club".

#### Transfer budget

Former Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon told the BBC that the end of the saga would be a "complete relief" for everyone connected to the club. "We've got a very short transfer window and plans will have been made before," he said. "They have already lost some players through not being able to re-sign them so I think everybody-the squad and the management-will be relieved they can get on with the job they're employed to do." Thomas Tuchel's side, who won the Champions League last season, finished third in the Premier League — 19 points behind champions Manchester City—and were beaten by Liverpool in the finals of the FA Cup and League Cup.

The German manager is set to lose key defenders Antonio Rudiger and Andreas Christensen on free transfers to Real Madrid and Barcelona. Tuchel, in an interview on Chelsea's website conducted before the sale was confirmed, said the club had been operating at a "huge disadvantage" and would need to be nimble in the transfer market. Reports on Wednesday said the former Paris Saint-Germain boss would be handed a £200 million transfer kitty.

Chelsea have been transformed since Abramovich bought them in 2003 for just £140 million, winning 19 major trophies in his 19-year reign-including five Premier League titles and two Champions League triumphs. Boehly also has a track record of delivering sporting success with the Dodgers. Thanks to heavy investment in players, they have made the MLB (Major League Baseball) playoffs every season for the past nine years and won their first World Series for 32 years in 2020. —AFP