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Russia presses onslaught, captures strategic town

Moscow test-fires hypersonic missile



KRAMATORSK: A young boy sits in front of a damaged building after a strike in Kramatorsk in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP

KRAMATORSK: Russia pressed its onslaught on eastern Ukraine Saturday, saying it had captured the strategic town of Lyman and had successfully tested hypersonic missiles in the Arctic. Ukrainian forces battled to repel Russian forces from the outskirts of the key city of Severodonetsk, a Ukrainian official said, however denying claims it had been surrounded.

Russia is waging all-out war for the eastern Donbas region-Ukraine's industrial heartland where President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Moscow of carrying out a "genocide." "The town of Krasny Liman has been entirely liberated from Ukrainian nationalists," the Russian defense ministry said, using the Russian name for Lyman and confirming an announcement made a day earlier by pro-Moscow separatists.

Lyman lies on the road to the urban centres of Severodonetsk and Kramatorsk. Russian forces have been closing in on Severodonetsk and nearby Lysychansk in Lugansk province, with conflicting reports about the extent of their advance. Regional governor Sergiy Gaiday said Russian shelling continued on Severodonetsk as Ukrainian soldiers fought to oust the invading forces from a hotel on its edges, but rejected claims the city had been encircled.

"Severodonetsk has not been cut off... there is still the possibility to deliver humanitarian aid," he told Ukrainian television. A Lugansk police official, cited by Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti, late Friday said Severodonetsk was "now surrounded" and Ukrainian troops could no longer leave the city. Three months after Russia launched its invasion on February 24, leaving thousands dead on both sides and forcing 6.6 million people out of the country, Moscow has gained control over swathes of eastern and southern Ukraine, including port cities Kherson and Mariupol.

Other Ukrainian ports have been cut off from the world by Russian warships, preventing key grain supplies from being transported out. Russia and Ukraine supply about 30 percent of the wheat traded on global markets. Russia has tightened its own exports and Ukraine has vast amounts stuck in storage, driving up prices and cutting availability for importers across the globe.

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly rejected any responsibility, instead blaming Western sanctions. But on Saturday he told French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in a phone call Russia was "ready" to look for ways to allow more wheat onto the global market.

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News in brief

31 killed in stampede

ABUJA: At least 31 people were killed on Saturday when a stampede broke out in south Nigeria during a church charity event where food was being distributed, police said. The disaster happened in Port Harcourt city in Nigeria's Rivers state, local police spokeswoman Grace Iring-Koko said, confirming a death toll of 31 people. Local Nigerian media reported the event organized by the King's Assembly church was offering food and gifts for the poor at a sports field. Nigeria has seen several stampede tragedies over food distribution in recent years, including an aid agency food program in north Borno State where seven women were trampled to death last year. — AFP

Biden takes calculated risk

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden the consoled-in-chief will no doubt find exactly the right message on Sunday as he visits Texas to meet the families of children massacred as they celebrated the end of the school year. But Biden the dealmaker has remained conspicuous in his absence from the war of words being waged over gun control that has followed the atrocity, preferring to let his party leaders in Congress do the talking for him. "He can't just be the 'eulogizer-in-chief.'" — AFP (See Page 5)

Gunmen kill policeman

TEHRAN: Gunmen shot dead a policeman and wounded his wife in Iran's restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, state media reported Saturday. "Last night... police captain Abbas Rahanjan was martyred and his wife was wounded," after they were shot by armed assailants, Khodabakhsh Pakirshahi, a deputy governor of the province's Delgan county was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA. The shooting took place on the road from Delgan to Iranshahr city, the official said, adding that the captain's wife was transferred to hospital for treatment. — AFP

Respect the rights of Muslims: Kuwait MP

ANKARA: Kuwaiti MP Dr Hamad Al-Mattar has stressed on the importance of respecting the rights of Muslims in the countries that are non-members of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). In a speech during the first meeting of the Muslim Minorities Committee of the Union of Councils of Member States of the OIC in the Turkish capital Ankara, Al-Mattar expressed concern about the challenges, obstacles and problems faced by Muslim

groups resulting from discrimination, oppression or persecution in several countries and regions.

He also stressed the importance of continuous coordination among the member states of the organization in order to find ways to help Muslim groups solve their problems, protect their religious, cultural, civil, political and economic rights, and preserve their Islamic identity. Al-Mattar stressed the importance of United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution No 16/18 adopted in March 2011 on "combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination and incitement to violence against persons based on their religion and beliefs."

Turkey shows off drones at air show

BAKU: Looping in the air at lightning speed, Turkish drones like those used against Russian forces in Ukraine draw cheers from the crowd at an air show in Azerbaijan. Turkey is showcasing its defense technology at the aerospace and technology festival "Teknofest" that started in Azerbaijan's capital Baku this week. Turkish President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan is expected to attend on Saturday. Turkey's TB2 drones are manufactured by aerospace company Baykar Defense, where Erdogan's increasingly prominent son-in-law Selcuk Bayraktar is chief technology officer.

On Wednesday, Bayraktar flew over Baku aboard an Azerbaijani air force Mikoyan MiG-29 plane. One of his combat drones, the "Akinci", accompanied the flight. A video showing Bayraktar in command of the warplane, dressed in a pilot's uniform decorated with Turkish and Azerbaijani flag patches, went viral on social media.

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Iran unveils underground drone base

TEHRAN: Iranian state television on Saturday broadcast footage of an air force base for drones under the Zagros mountain range in the west of the country. The exact location of the base was not revealed, although the TV reporter said he travelled on a helicopter for nearly 40 minutes from the city of Kermanshah to reach it. Iran started developing drones, or unmanned aerial

vehicles (UAVs), in the 1980s during its eight-year war with Iraq.

The US and the Zionist entity accuse Iran of dispatching fleets of drones to its proxies in the Middle East, including Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, the regime of Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad and Yemen's Houthi rebels. Video aired on state television showed Iran's armed forces chief of staff General Mohammad Bagheri and army commander Abdolrahman Mousavi visiting the underground site.

"More than 100 combat, reconnaissance and attack drones belonging to the army are kept for

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BAKU: A Turkish combat drone 'Akinci' developed by Baykar Defense, is seen from an Azerbaijani airforce Mikoyan MiG-29, as it flies over Baku. — AFP



This handout picture provided by the Iranian Army on May 28, 2022, shows an underground drone base in an unknown location in Iran. — AFP

Local

Spending on luxury items increase in Kuwait despite economic concerns

Economic policies encourage consumers to spend rather than save: Expert

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Central Statistical Bureau showed an unprecedented increase in the monthly consumer price index, which amounted to about 4.36 percent during March 2021 on an annual basis. And despite the price increase on luxury items locally and the concerns of a global economic crisis, buying behavior in Kuwait continues to escalate on non-essential products.

Consumer Behavior Consultant Salah Al-Jemaz explained the reasons why local consumers keep spending their money on luxurious products despite the current global economic situation. "People in the Gulf region are not qualified to consume or spend their money with a studied step, especially with the stability of their income; they see that there is no reason to reduce their spendings and save money while the prices keep going up," he said.

"GCC governments encourage this consuming behavior by constantly supporting its citizens financially, which has led to creating an environment in which the citizen does not take care of his responsibilities," he argued. "Not to mention the cash flow from the supporting communities such as families, friends or charities institutes."

Jemaz assured that the social appearance is one of the main problems that affect consumer behavior regarding reducing their spending on luxuries. "We are not telling people to deprive themselves, therefore saving money, good spending or investing in gold helps them avoid future financial crises, especially among the global economic concerns," he explained.

"Educational institutes in Kuwait should start teaching the coming generation ways of managing their financials, which helps them to prevent inflation, price hikes or reduce the consuming culture," he added. "When the ministry of finance announced during the pandemic that they will have a shortage regarding the salary disbursement, people, instead of stashing their money, went to malls and spent their money unconsciously."

On the other hand, Jemaz mentioned that



Salah Al-Jemaz



Amer Al-Tamimi

"changes of economic conditions are forcing us to keep pace with the global saving methods. Therefore, gold is the safest way to prevent economic swings, while increasing the monthly income helps to save the surplus."

Inflation

Regarding inflation and its effect on consumer spending, economist Amer Al-Tamimi, said that "inflation in Kuwait is starting to exceed 4-6 percent, and since basic food commodities in Kuwait are subsidized by the government, inflation does not easily appear in Kuwait as it does in other global countries."

He added, "In countries such as GCC states which depend on natural resources, consumer behavior will only change when their financial conditions start to be affected by the inflation, which is expected to start in the upcoming 6-12 months. However, if the inflation rate stays as it is, the amount of spending will keep going up."

To explore more about this issue, Kuwait Times visited several shopping malls and asked people about their spending behaviors on non-essential products in the last three months. Some citizens said that they did not reduce their spending on luxurious items due to their high income, while others think that the global economic concerns are a great opportunity to learn how to manage their finances.

A Kuwaiti couple told Kuwait Times that they did

Govt subsidies help mitigate inflation effect



KUWAIT: This file photo shows people inside a mall in Kuwait. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

not reduce their spending on luxury products, saying, "the price hikes are a normal result for the current global economic situation, while we are expecting that the economic issue will not be as bad as speculated."

"After the prices of luxury items started to increase to more than 20 percent, I started to buy international brands so I won't spend my money on perishable products," a female citizen said, mentioning that the current economic crisis is "over-exaggerated."

Spending less

Another citizen started to spend less on luxury products worrying about a potential crisis or price hikes especially on basic goods, adding that "prices have already started to increase, mostly on non-essential products such as make-ups, clothes, and perfumes." An expat said that she started to spend

less than before as prices on luxury products started to increase and, in some cases, "exceeded 15 percent of the original price".

Regarding consumer spending, a salesman in a phone accessory shop confirmed that there is a notable increase in purchases by consumers in the last three months, according to the variety of products. Meanwhile, salesmen in a sports shop said that the demand for sportswear started to increase after the pandemic and the lockdowns and reached its highest in the last six months. "We noticed 15-20 percent increase in our profits for this year compared to last year," they added.

On another hand, a business owner said that there was a decline in sales this year due to the price differences compared to markets abroad, noting that people started to save money by buying their luxury needs while traveling. Another shop owner said that his business sales are down by 20 percent due to the recent global economic situation.

Award symbolizes Kuwait's care for seniors: Official

GENEVA: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed Friday said the award of the late Amir, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for research in the health sector and elderly care symbolizes Kuwait's advocacy of care for the seniors who occupy an esteemed status in the Kuwaiti society. Care for the old citizens is a key priority in the national health programs, said Dr Saeed in a statement to the World Health Assembly (WHA) during a ceremony for the award handover. Dr Hanadi Al-Hamad is mastermind of the campaign, "old age a health priority," as part of Qatar's health strategy. Dr Hanadi has earned this award due to her distinguished achievements for improving the elderly care services in Qatar, the Kuwaiti health



GENEVA: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed speaks at the World Health Assembly. —KUNA

minister said. "This prize which we are celebrating for the year 2022 constitutes a bright spot within cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the World Health Organization dating back to six decades ago since Kuwait joined the organization in 1960," he added. —KUNA

Deputy FM talks with Rome established broader relations base: Ambassador

ROME: Kuwait Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah said Saturday that the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri's successful visit to Rome aims to develop strategic relations with the European nation. In a statement to the press, the Ambassador said at the conclusion of Al-Dhafiri's visit and talks with his Italian counterpart, Marina Serini, that these discus-

sions resulted in establishing a broader base of bilateral cooperation. Expanding and developing cooperation between Kuwait and Italy include continuation of mutual consultation and establishment of regular mechanisms for political consultations between the two countries in preparation for the launch of the strategic dialogue by activating the Kuwaiti-Italian Joint Committee, he said. —KUNA



ROME: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri, Kuwait Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah and other officials pose for a group photo. —KUNA

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Local

Food union discusses global food crisis impact on Kuwait



KUWAIT: A view from the Kuwait Food Union's press conference. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Chairman of the union Abdullah Al-Beajian

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Food Union held a press conference on Thursday to discuss the global food crisis and its economic effect on Kuwait. Chairman of the union Abdullah Al-Beajian said that the Kuwaiti government has taken several urgent measures to prevent the rapid rise in prices of products and foodstuffs, as well as to reduce the severe shortage of supplies after several exporting countries took decisions to stop exporting their goods abroad.

He added that the Council of Ministers recently formed a committee that includes the ministry of commerce and industry, the Ministry of Finance, and several relevant authorities, to maintain Kuwait's food security, monitor price hikes, and set steps to mitigate the repercussions of the global crisis.

Beajian indicated that the current crisis is primarily a food supply crisis and not a price hike issue, pointing out that rich countries, which have abundant financial resources, are able to buy their basic needs of medicine, food, and others. "The problem lies in how to provide these products after some countries stopped exporting its goods abroad," he explained.

In the meantime, Beajian reassured that a report was submitted to the Cabinet by the Ministry of

Commerce, confirming that the strategic stock, based on agreements with exporting countries, guarantees the flow of basic supply commodities until the first quarter of next year.

Regarding the price control law, Beajian revealed that the Economic Committee in the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Commerce have great awareness regarding the decision to stabilize prices, clarifying that the government will study the decision during the next two weeks. "Scrapping this law was worthy during the pandemic; however, it has become an obstacle to the movement of trade and import in Kuwait," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, Beajian explained the obstacles that Kuwait faces while preventing the effects of global food crisis. "The main problem in Kuwait is the breakdown of the development process over the past years, which has resulted in imbalances in its ability to deal with this kind of crisis," he said. "The last industrial zone allocated to foodstuffs was distributed 53 years ago in specific areas, which led to price and space control."

As for sea and land ports, Beajian indicated that Kuwait suffers from a problem of "outdated" ports that do not keep up with global development, but at the same time charge high prices for clearing goods and

handling fees, which negatively affect the prices of imported goods.

On another side, Beajian mentioned that "negative practices by co-ops are reflected on the final prices offered to the consumers, which include delays in paying to merchants, exorbitant fees for renting its shelves, offering free goods, and not to mention their return policies."

Meanwhile, Deputy Chairman of the Kuwait Food Union Azara Al-Husaini assured that stakeholders in Kuwait have provided direct and clear support for stock and food security, and therefore there is no need to panic. Regarding the availability of poultry and egg products, Husaini stressed that there is no shortage of poultry, mentioning "but, as a result of the increase in feed prices and the rush to buy by citizens and residents, we are currently suffering from high prices in poultry."

At the same time, Husaini noted that "local poultry companies cover more than 40 percent of the Kuwaiti market's need, while the market is currently witnessing a surplus of eggs that exceeds 140 percent of the market's need." He added, "the country is currently working to ensure increasing poultry production by providing feed, immunizations and the necessary crews for that."

Envoy heads to US to discuss lifting citizens off 'terror list'

Arab nations prepare for 2023 UN Water Conference



Kuwaiti Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Development and International Cooperation Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan.

KUWAIT/NEW YORK: Kuwaiti Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Development and International Cooperation Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan heads to New York on Sunday to meet with Ombudsman Richard Malangum to discuss lifting some Kuwaiti citizens from the Security Council's lists concerned with combating terrorism. In a statement Saturday, the foreign ministry said that this meeting comes under the directives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah.

Mashaan chairs the Committee to Rehabilitate the Names Listed on the Security Council Lists Concerned with Combating Terrorism emanating from the Committee for the Implementation of Security Council Resolutions under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter related to combating terrorism. The committee also includes the Ministry of Interior (State Security Service), the Ministry of Health (Psychiatry), Kuwait University (College of Sharia), the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, and the Public Prosecution. The Ombudsman is concerned with evaluating any person placed on the Security Council's special terrorist lists by



Kuwait Representative to the UN Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during a meeting to discuss the water situation of the Arab region ahead of the UN's 2023 Water Conference.

reviewing the list's file and its activities before and after its inclusion through research, investigation and request for information.



Under directives of foreign minister

Water situation

In other news, UN permanent representatives of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Tunisia held a meeting on Friday to discuss the water situation of the Arab region ahead of the UN's 2023 Water

conference at the Kuwaiti society, said in a statement to the press that the accord envisages delivery of more than 9,000 food parcels in five Afghan provinces, in coordination with the Afghan relief association. "The Afghan fezaa campaign" is being executed in line with a request by the Kuwaiti Government, Al-Nouri said, noting that the campaign has drawn substantial response from official departments, Kuwaiti citizens and expatriates. The Kuwaiti Relief Society is the umbrella entity for a number of Kuwaiti charities in this campaign — all registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Al-

Conference. Kuwait Representative to the UN Mansour Al-Otaibi said the meet was organized in coordination with UN's Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) where issues and cases regarding water resources significant to the region are being arranged for the upcoming conference. The meeting was attended by Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Special Envoy of International Water Affairs of the Netherlands, as well as the Co-Chair of the International Steering Committee of the 2022 Dushanbe Conference of Tajikistan, and Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs at UN-DESA.

The topic is very concerning for the region, considering that 19 out of 22 Arab states are considered to be water scarce, therefore global and regional collaborative efforts are needed to manage such an issue. A major issue is utilizing water resources with better practice, while taking into consideration the repercussions of climate change as they are more important now than ever. The 2023 UN Water Conference will be held in New York in March, and will be a recurrence since its last session in 1977. —KUNA

Nouri said, also noting that the relief efforts have been exerted in coordination with the ministry of foreign affairs and the Kuwaiti embassy in Qatar. The Afghan Red Crescent Society is "an official partner empowered to implement all terms of the accord," he added. He has indicated that there will be more accords, aimed at funding mobile clinics, aiding children and mothers as well as distributing more food to the limited income people in Afghanistan. The term 'fezaa' is an old Arabic word meaning a call for collective and urgent action in dire condition. —KUNA

Kuwaiti charity to secure food for needy in Afghanistan

DOHA: The Kuwaiti Relief Society on Saturday signed an agreement with the Afghan Red Crescent Society to secure food for the needy in Afghanistan. Jamal Al-Nouri, the treasurer and head of the relief

local spotlight

Injustice under the kafala system



By Atyab Al-Shatti

local@kuwaittimes.net

Harmonizing national laws is a goal to be achieved by many countries, considering the latest changes that the world encountered since the pandemic. Migrant workers were the most affected by the pandemic as many of them in Kuwait hardly survived, deprived from reaching out to their basic rights stipulated by the labor law number 6 for the year 2010. This necessitates taking a deep look into the structure of the laws and provisions that govern expatriates in Kuwait.

Many civil society activists call to revoke the kafala (sponsorship) system and consider it as a form of modern slavery. It is essential to look into the small projects' visa issued under article 18 of the labor law, which contain major restrictions on migrant workers' right of movement within the labor market, unlike other visas issued under article 18 whose holders can transfer visas more freely in case they face injustice.

Holders of an article 18 visa issued for a small business find themselves restrained by a condition stating that they can only transfer to an employer in the same type of work field. This does not guarantee a migrant worker's interest, freedom of mobility or rights similar to those granted to the general public.

The main challenge about the kafala system is that it gives the power for a national to grant visas for migrants, instead of the government operating this duty. For the migrant workers, the sponsor is the employer at the same time, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation. In many cases, they are unable to settle a fair work agreement, unable to discuss an unlawful salary deduction or even to report on any breach and violation that they may face fearing to be struck with fraudulent absconding case and permanent deportation. How many workers out there are quiet about brutal injustice? How many are facing salary deductions or verbal abuses without being able to report?

Meanwhile, delivery drivers are in my opinion the most vulnerable to some greedy companies, who want to take advantage of every dime the worker makes on his bike. They try to structure ways to make profits by giving drivers monthly salaries between KD 120 and KD 150, plus a KD 30 as rent allowance from the money that the driver makes. Is there any suitable residence for a person to stay in for a KD 30 monthly rent in Kuwait? This specific type of contracts seems unrealistic as such contractual relationships drive the migrant worker to poverty. Justice within the law must be activated which can only take place once the law is reformulated.

—Atyab Al-Shatti is a bilingual Kuwaiti lawyer, admitted to practice before all courts in Kuwait including the Constitutional and Supreme Courts. She brings 10 years of rich experience in corporate, commercial, companies, employment and labor related matters. She is also a human rights activist.

Kuwait oil price rises to \$121.61

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil rose by \$3.30 to \$121.61 per barrel on Friday as opposed to \$118.31 pb on Thursday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Saturday. The prices of the Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate saw the first going up by \$2.03 pb to reach \$119.43 per barrel, while the latter went down by 98 cents to \$115.07 pb.

Food security

Meanwhile, many Kuwaitis and expats have complained of a significant increase in the prices of basic commodities, including poultry, which rose by 20 percent, despite the official denial of any increase, local media reported. According to a local daily, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry had not allowed any poultry company to increase its prices in cooperative societies and markets. Yet, poultry companies, took advantage of the set margin for prices.

Residents alleged a 20 percent increase in the price of chicken. There are fears the price will go up further in the coming months. According to the report, poultry producers had asked the Ministry of Commerce to allow them to increase their prices, but the ministry rejected their request. According to Kuwait news agency, the prices of commodities will be under the supervision and monitoring of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to prevent any increase and to maintain food security for households in Kuwait.

Local

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

News in brief

Amir sends condolences to Jordan's King

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Saturday sent a cable of condolences to the King of Jordan Abdullah II on death of Dr Faisal Sedki Al-Yassin, father of Queen Rania of Jordan. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a similar cable of condolences.

No traffic ticket for driving someone else's vehicle

KUWAIT: A person driving a vehicle registered in another person's name is not considered a traffic violation, the interior ministry said. A driver must make sure to carry valid driving license and registrations for the vehicle before driving, it explained.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Birds perched on a light post in Kuwait. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Firemen responded to a fire in an Arab style house in Salmiya. The firemen evacuated the building before extinguishing the flames, Kuwait Fire Force said, adding that no injuries were reported. Investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire, it added.

Zionists 'destroying plans for a 2-state solution': Arab League

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit assured said that the circumstances in occupied Palestinian territories is approaching a critical point and is "destroying plans for a two-state solution", due to Zionists' continued aggravating acts. In a statement following his meet with Jibril Rajoub Fatah's Secretary General, he revealed that the conditions on Palestinian territories will only lead to no solution, instead it will stimulate conflict and violence.

Meanwhile, Palestinian civil society institutions on Saturday organized a sit-in in front of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters in Gaza, denouncing the government's permission for dispossessed Jews and settlers to organize a march in the Old City of Jerusalem.

In a statement, the Palestinian NGOs Network said that the participants in the sit-in raised Palestinian flags and carried banners and slogans emphasizing the rejection of Judaization schemes and the temporal and spatial division of the Holy City. The statement described the settlers' march as "a conspiracy by the extreme right aimed at changing the features of Al-Aqsa Mosque and taking away the Islamic, Arab and Palestinian character, in addition to implementing the temporal and spatial division."

Abu-Akleh's death

In another development, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday highlighted "the importance of concluding the investigations" into the death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu-Akleh. In a phone conversation with Zionist Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid, he reaffirmed belief in "the importance of Zionists and Palestinians working to maintain calm." Blinken renewed US support of "a negotiated two-state solution" to the Palestinian conflict. A long-time TV correspondent for Al Jazeera Arabic, Shireen was killed on May 11 while covering army raids in the city of Jenin.— KUNA



JERUSALEM: A girl poses for a picture with the Palestinian flag in front of the Dome of the Rock mosque inside Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, on May 27, 2022. — AFP



GAZA: Gazans light candles during a vigil in honor of slain Palestinian Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Gaza City. — AFP



KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors carried out unscheduled campaigns at domestic help offices to make sure that they are committing to the recruitment fees set by the government.



Samoa signs China agreement amid South Pacific push

Berlusconi's bad break-up with Putin reveals Italy-Russia ties

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UVALDE, United States: Monique Rodriguez (R), mother of Audrey and Aubrey Ramirez, lay flowers at a makeshift memorial outside the Uvalde County Courthouse in Uvalde, Texas. —AFP

Biden takes risk on gun control

'We have done our part... But, right now, we need the help of Congress'

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden the consoler-in-chief will no doubt find exactly the right message on Sunday as he visits Texas to meet the families of children massacred as they celebrated the end of the school year. But Biden the dealmaker has remained conspicuous in his absence from the war of words being waged over gun control that has followed the atrocity, preferring to let his party leaders in Congress do the talking for him.

"He can't just be the 'eulogizer-in-chief.' He also needs to put the full force of his office into the legislative process," Peter Ambler, executive director for the gun safety group Giffords, told Politico. "Otherwise it will seem like he has lost hope." So far, the 79-year-old Democratic US president has appeared reluctant to drill down into the details of the firearms control debate, a decision that has more to do with pragmatic politics than any personal disinclination.

Biden, a heart-on-sleeve politician and a twice-bereaved father who lost a baby daughter to a car accident and an adult son to cancer, takes his role as consoler-in-chief seriously. He would like to believe that Americans can bridge their deep division at least

to unite in mourning over the 19 children and two teachers who were shot dead by an 18-year-old gunman at their school in Uvalde, Texas—where he will visit Sunday with First Lady Jill Biden.

Political calculus

But if Biden's focus for the moment is at the emotional end of the register—"When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby?" he cried on Tuesday—there is a sanguine political calculation behind the passion. A former senator with a deference to the separation of powers, he wants Congress to pass a bill that would make psychiatric and criminal background checks for gun buyers more widespread, while banning assault rifles and high-capacity magazines.



Biden the consoler-in-chief

"We have done our part... But, right now, we need the help of Congress. You know, the president has been very clear that it's time to act, it's time for Congress to act," his spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said Thursday.

The White House believes Biden inserting himself into the middle of negotiations, at a time when he is very unpopular in the polls, would likely undermine a delicate legislative process. The 50 Democrats in the evenly-divided Senate, who support a broad range of actions, will need to win over Republicans to hit the 60-vote threshold required to get any bill signed into law. Biden has so far held back from

openly criticizing the Republicans, who are mostly hostile to reform, with many campaigning for the November midterm elections on their support for

access to firearms.

'Bare minimum'

The administration also argues that a federal law would have a more profound impact than an executive order that would not be binding on all US states and can only regulate at the margins. But several gun control groups say, without questioning the president's beliefs, that he needs to be more involved.

Igor Volsky, executive director of the organization Guns Down America, said on Twitter that Biden could create an agency at the White House specifically dedicated to firearms, travel the country to meet affected communities, welcome activists to the Oval Office and personally lobby members of Congress.

"This is literally the bare minimum for what a President who ran on gun violence prevention should be doing," he tweeted. Meanwhile activists fear that the United States will fall back into the now-familiar pattern that plays out after every mass shooting: a wave of outrage that subsides before it can be translated into any significant reform. —AFP

Venezuela, Cuba rally after rejection from LA summit

HAVANA: The leftist leaders of Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia railed against the United States Friday in Havana, days ahead of the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, whose invitation list has overshadowed the agenda. US President Joe Biden has described the June 6-10 summit, being held in the United States for only the second time, as an opportunity to champion democracy over authoritarianism and has not invited the leaders of Cuba, Venezuela or Nicaragua.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has said he will "under no circumstances" go to Los Angeles, held an alternative summit of sorts in Havana. Entering the Palace of the Revolution, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro called the gathering "a firm, forceful and absolute rejection of

the imperial vision that seeks to exclude peoples from the Americas."

Bolivian President Luis Arce said of the Los Angeles gathering: "If they want to have a meeting among friends, let them do it, but don't call it the Summit of the Americas." The talks in Havana were part of the ALBA grouping, set up in 2004 by Maduro's late predecessor Hugo Chavez and Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro to counter a US proposal for a pan-American free trade area.

The bloc's grievances received a boost from the leader of Latin America's second most populous nation, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who said he would not travel to Los Angeles unless all nations were invited.

On a visit to Havana on May 8, the leftist Mexican leader said it should be for "each country to decide freely if they will attend." In Havana, Maduro hailed Lopez Obrador for "standing up for the entire continent's truth, morals and dignity." Mexico may still send its foreign minister to LA, but the leaders of Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras and the 14-nation bloc of Caribbean states have also put their attendance in doubt. —AFP



HAVANA, Cuba: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro (L) and Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel (R) shake hands during the XXI Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP), at the Palace of the Revolution in Havana. —AFP

Seven Indian troops killed near disputed border

SRINAGAR: At least seven Indian soldiers were killed and 19 others injured in a road accident in the remote Ladakh region, close to the country's disputed border with China, police said Friday. The world's two most populous nations redirected tens of thousands of additional troops into the high-altitude Himalayan region after a deadly hand-to-hand battle in June 2020 left at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers dead.

"Seven soldiers killed, 19 injured in the remote Nubra area," a senior police officer in Ladakh told AFP. The incident happened early Friday when a vehicle carrying the soldiers for deployment close to the contested frontier skidded off the road and plunged about 15 metres (50 feet) into the Shyok River, according to the official.

"Anguished by the bus accident in Ladakh in which we have lost our brave army personnel," India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted. "My thoughts are with the bereaved families. I hope those injured recover at the earliest. All possible assistance is being given to the affected."

India and China, after fighting a full-scale border war in 1962, have long accused each other of trying to seize territory along their unofficial divide, which is known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Relations have soured dramatically since a June 2020 clash along one section between Ladakh and Tibet.

Both sides have since reinforced the region with extra soldiers, military hardware and new infrastructure as multiple rounds of military and diplomatic talks have failed to de-escalate tensions. —AFP

UN rights envoy defends China visit

BEIJING: The UN rights envoy on Saturday said her contentious visit to China was "not an investigation", and insisted she had unsupervised access during meetings in Xinjiang, where Beijing is accused of widespread human rights abuses. Michelle Bachelet's long-planned trip this week has taken her to the far-western region, where Beijing is accused of the detention of over a million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, forced sterilisation of women and coerced labour.

The United States has labelled China's actions in Xinjiang a "genocide" and "crimes against humanity",

allegations vehemently denied by Beijing which says its security crackdown was a necessary response to extremism.

Bachelet has come under fire from rights groups and Uyghurs overseas, who say she has stumbled into a six-day Communist Party propaganda tour, including a meeting with President Xi Jinping in which state media suggested she supported China's vision of human rights. Her office later clarified that her remarks did not contain a direct endorsement of China's rights record. Speaking at the end of her trip while still inside China, Bachelet framed her visit as a chance for her to speak with "candour" to Chinese authorities as well as civil society groups and academics.

"This visit was not an investigation," she told reporters, later insisting she had "unsupervised" access to sources the UN had arranged to meet in



GUANGZHOU, China: Handout image shows UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet (2nd L) attending a virtual meeting with Vice Minister Du Hangwei of China's Ministry of Public Security in Guangzhou, as Bachelet begins a long-awaited and controversial trip to Xinjiang. —AFP

Xinjiang. It is the first trip to China by the UN's top rights envoy in 17 years and comes after painstaking negotia-

tions over the conditions of her visit, which the UN says is neither a fact-finding mission nor a probe. —AFP

International

Berlusconi's bad break-up with Putin reveals Italy-Russia ties

Prime Minister Mario Draghi is committed to NATO and the EU

ROME: After a tycoon bromance, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi is struggling to break up with Russia's Vladimir Putin over the Ukraine war-like many in his country, where ties with Moscow run deep. The billionaire former premier's unwillingness to speak ill of Putin is echoed by other leading Italian politicians, while in the media, there are concerns that pro-Russian sentiment has warped into propaganda.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi is committed to NATO and the EU, strongly backing sanctions against Moscow, and at his urging a majority of Italy's MPs approved sending weapons to help Ukraine defend itself. But much of Draghi's coalition government-Berlusconi's Forza Italia, Matteo Salvini's League and the once anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) — has long pursued a "special relationship" with Moscow.

Italy used to have the largest Communist party in the West, and many businesses invested in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, while Russians in turn sought opportunities here. Barely a month before the February 24 invasion, Putin spent two hours addressing top Italian executives at a virtual meeting.

Beds, hats, parties

Berlusconi, 85, has been out of office for more than a decade but remains influential both in politics and through his media interests, as founder of the Mediaset empire. He was an ardent admirer of the Russian leader, and a close chum—they stayed in each other's holiday homes, skied together and were snapped sporting giant fur hats.

"They were two autocrats who mutually rein-

forced their image: Power, physical prowess, brava-do, glitz," historian and Berlusconi author Antonio Gibelli told AFP. Putin gave Berlusconi a four-poster bed, in which the Italian had sex with an escort in 2008, according to her tell-all book. He in turn gave Putin, 69, a duvet cover featuring a life-sized image of the two men.

In the months before the Ukraine war, Berlusconi continued to promote his close ties, including a "long and friendly" New Year's Eve phone call. It was not until April, two months after



"No ifs and no buts"

Russia's invasion, that he publicly criticised the conflict, saying he was "disappointed and saddened" by Putin.

He has struggled to stay on message since then. Speaking off the cuff in Naples last week, he said he thought "Europe should... try to persuade Ukraine to accept Putin's demands", before backtracking and issuing a statement in Kyiv's support.

"Breaking the twinning with Putin costs Berlusconi dearly: He has to give up a part of his



Silvio Berlusconi

image," Gibelli said. Meanwhile, the leader of the anti-immigration League, Salvini, who has proudly posed in Putin T-shirts in the past, has argued against sending weapons to aid Ukraine.

The League did condemn Russia's military aggression, "no ifs and no buts", on February 24 when Russia invaded. But an investigation by the L'Espresso magazine earlier this week found that, in the over 600 messages posted by Salvini on social media since Russia invaded, he had not once mentioned Putin by name. He did so for the first time on Thursday, saying "dialogue" with Putin was good, and encouraging a diplomatic end to the war. —AFP

Grief, exasperation after Senegalese hospital fire

TIVAOUANE: President Macky Sall on Friday ordered an audit of Senegal's neonatal services after the death of 11 newborns in a hospital fire sparked fresh grief and indignation over the country's health system. The blaze in a neonatal ward in the western city of Tivaouane, weeks after the tragic death of a mother-to-be, has turned a spotlight on flaws and funding problems and triggered calls for senior-level sanctions.

Sall on Thursday fired his health minister, Abdoulaye Diouf Sarr, replacing him with the former director-general of the public health authority, Marie Khemesse Ngom Ndiaye. But for many Senegalese, that is not enough. They have demanded more action, fearing Wednesday's fire will not be the last.

After cutting short a trip abroad and visiting the Tivaouane hospital room where the babies died, a visibly emotional Sall said the health system was obsolete and ordered a nationwide audit of neonatal services. A "modernisation effort" would look at what was not working so that hospitals would no longer be "a space of despair or tragedy", he added, vowing: "Never again". He said he would meet the families of the dead babies later in the evening.

In April 2021, four newborns died in a hospital fire in the northern town of Linguere. The mayor blamed an electrical malfunction. Last month, a heavily pregnant woman died in agony after her appeals to be given a Caesarean at a public hospital in the north-western town of Louga were denied.

Three midwives were sentenced to six months' suspended imprisonment as public outrage rocked the country. Details behind the fire at Tivaouane's Mame Abdou Aziz Sy Dabakh public hospital remain sketchy. The new neonatal ward was inaugurated just last year.

Sarr and mayor Demba Diop said the blaze was caused by a short circuit, and staff blacked out and were unable to save the babies. But Serigne Cheikh Tidiane Sy Al Amine, a local religious figure, said the hospital had been plagued for 15 years by "donations of obsolete equipment and broken promises to build a new hospital". Private health services are expensive in Senegal, and many residents of Tivaouane and its surrounding areas must choose between the hospital or traditional medicine.

Calls for sanctions abound on social media, with many tweeting "Never again." "We have qualified doctors, but... if we do not create the conditions for them to practise, there is no point in dismissing a minister to replace him with another who will end up facing the same problems," said Nina Penda Faye, spokeswoman for a campaign group called Patients in Danger. —AFP

Iran cops tear-gas protesters after building collapse

TEHRAN: Iranian police fired tear gas and warning shots to disperse protesters in the southwestern city of Abadan where a tower block collapse killed 28 people, local media reported on Saturday. A large section of the 10-storey Metropol building that was under construction in Abadan, Khuzestan province, crumbled on Monday in one of Iran's deadliest such disasters in years.

It was the third night of protests in Abadan and other cities of the province which borders Iraq, local media reported. Security forces in Abadan "used tear gas and shot in the air near the collapse site" on Friday night to disperse hundreds of protesters, who were mourning the lives lost and demanding justice for the perpetrators of the incident, Fars news agency said.

A number of people shouted "death to incompetent officials" and "incompetent officials must be executed", similar to calls in protests on Wednesday and Thursday nights, it added. Elsewhere in Khuzestan another protest, in the city of Bandar-e Mahshahr, saw people chanting while banging on traditional drums and hitting cymbals, images published by Fars showed.

People also took to the streets further afield including in the central Iranian cities of Isfahan, Yazd and Shahin Shahr on Friday to express sympathy



ABADAN, Iran: Handout picture shows Iranian vice president Mohammad Mokhber (C) visiting the site where a ten-storey building collapsed in the southwestern city of Abadan on May 27, 2022. —AFP

with the victims of the tragedy, Fars news agency said. On Thursday night, a shop in Abadan belonging to the family of the building's owner "was set on fire and destroyed by unknown individuals," Tasnim news agency reported earlier.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, who is in Abadan, said on Saturday that "two more bodies were recovered" and sent for identification, raising the death toll to 28, according to state news agency IRNA.

Officials, however, have not announced how many are people still trapped under the rubble. The number of suspects has also risen. Khuzestan's

provincial judiciary said on Saturday that 13 people have now been arrested in relation with the incident, including the mayor and two former mayors, IRNA said.

In a statement posted on his official website on Thursday, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for those responsible to be prosecuted and punished. First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber told state television that "widespread corruption existed between the contractor, the builder, the supervisor and the licensing system". —AFP

Russia presses onslaught...

Continued from Page 1

market. "Russia is ready to help find options for the unhindered export of grain, including the export of Ukrainian grain from the Black Sea ports," the Kremlin reported him as saying.

He called for the lifting of sanctions to allow "an increase in the supply of Russian fertilizers and agricultural products" onto the global market. Macron and Scholz urged Putin to hold "direct serious negotiations" with Zelensky, the German chancellor's office said. And they demanded Russia free 2,500 Ukrainian fighters taken as prisoners of war after surrendering earlier this month at a sprawling steelworks in the ravaged port city of Mariupol.

Zelensky late Friday said his country was doing everything to defend the Donbas from intense artillery and missile strikes. "We are protecting our land in the way that our current defense resources allow. We are doing everything to increase them," he added.

To further help the Ukrainians, Washington was preparing to send advanced long-range rocket systems, US media reports said. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby did not confirm the plans to deliver the

M270 Multiple Launch Rocket System, highly mobile equipment capable of firing up to 300 kilometers that Kyiv has said it badly needs.

But he said Washington was "still committed to helping them succeed on the battlefield". British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged his country's continued support "including helping provide the equipment they need" in a call Saturday with Zelensky, his office said. But Putin warned Macron and Scholz that ramping up arms supplies to Ukraine would be "dangerous" and risk "further destabilization". He spoke after his army said it had successfully fired one of its Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles some 1,000 kilometers across the Arctic.

As he seeks to ramp up international pressure on Moscow, Zelensky will speak to EU leaders at an emergency summit Monday as they try to agree on an embargo on Russian oil, which is being held up by Hungary, whose Prime Minister Viktor Orban has close relations with Putin. "We need to act until they stop their policy of aggression," Zelensky told a think tank in Indonesia.

But Moscow said Russia expects to receive one trillion rubles (\$15 billion) in additional oil and gas revenues this year, a windfall from the sharp rise in oil prices caused in part by its invasion of Ukraine. In Ukraine, a spokesman for the Russian-controlled Mariupol port said a first ship had docked there on Saturday. "It will be loaded up with 2.7 tons of steel," he told Russian state news agency TASS. There was however no official announcement from either the Russian or separatist authorities. —AFP

lant," he added. Mousavi told state television the base was located "several hundred metres (yards) underground", without giving further details.

State TV said the flagship of the fleet was the "Kaman-22", a drone equipped with missiles and able to fly at least 2,000 kilometers. The US Treasury slapped sanctions on the drone program of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in October last year. It accused the Guards of being behind a September 2019 drone strike on a Saudi oil refinery, as well as a July 2021 drone attack on a commercial ship off the coast of Oman that killed two crewmen. Iran denied the charges. —AFP

Turkey shows off drones at...

Continued from Page 1

"This has been a childhood dream for me," Bayraktar told reporters after the flight.

Proximity to 'threats'

Turkey's drones first attracted attention in 2019 when they were used during the war in Libya to thwart an advance by rebel commander, General Khalifa Haftar, against the government in Tripoli. They were then again put into action the following year when Turkey-backed Azerbaijan in recapturing most of the land it lost to separatist Armenian forces in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Azerbaijani audience members at the aviation festival applauded during a display of TB2 drones, which are now playing a prominent role against invading Russian forces in Ukraine.

A senior official from the Turkish defense industry said his country was facing a wide spectrum of "threats", including the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Islamic State group jihadists. The PKK is listed as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies. But with NATO allies—including the United States—having imposed embargoes on Turkey, Ankara was forced to take matters into its own hands to build defense equipment, the official told AFP. "The situation is changing now with the war in Ukraine," the official said.

Turkey has been looking to modernize its air force after it was kicked out of the F-35 fighter jet program because of its purchase of Russia's S-400 missile defense system. But Ankara's role in trying to mediate an end to the Ukraine conflict through direct negotiations may have helped improve its relations with Washington in the past months. In April, US President Joe Biden's administration said it now believed that supplying Turkey with F-16 fighter jets would serve Washington's strategic interests.

Exports to 25 countries

Michael Boyle, of the Rutgers University-Camden in the United States, said Turkish drones



BAKU: People gather to look at the Bayraktar TB2 drone, manufactured by Turkey's Baykar, as it is presented during the opening of the aerospace and technology festival 'Teknofest Azerbaijan' at Baku Crystal Hall on May 27, 2022. —AFP

such as Bayraktar TB2 drones were "increasingly important to modern conflicts because they have spread so widely". For years, leading exporters like the United States and the Zionist entity limited the number of countries they would sell to, and also limited the models they were willing to sell, he told AFP. "This created an opening in the export market which other countries, notably Turkey and China, have been willing to fill," added the author of the book "The Drone Age: How Drone Technology Will Change War and Peace".

The Turkish official said Turkey has been investing in the defence industry since the 2000s, but the real leap came in 2014 after serious investments in advanced technologies and a shift towards using locally made goods. While Turkey's export of defense technologies amounted to \$248 million in early 2000, it surpassed \$3 billion in 2021 and was expected to reach \$4 billion in 2022, he said.

Today Turkey exports its relatively cheap and effective drones to more than 25 countries. Boyle said these drones could be used "for direct strikes, particularly against insurgent and terrorist forces, but also for battlefield reconnaissance to increase the accuracy and lethality of strikes". "So they are an enabler of ground forces, and this makes them particularly useful for countries like Ukraine which are fighting a militarily superior enemy," he said. —AFP

Iran unveils underground...

Continued from Page 1

operations in this base located in the heart of the Zagros mountains," the report said. Bagheri, quoted by the official news agency IRNA, described the site as a "safe operational base for strategic drones". "We never underestimate threats, we never assume the enemy is asleep, and we are constantly alert and vigi-

International

Samoa signs China agreement amid South Pacific push

China to provide infrastructural development support to various Samoan sectors

APIA: Samoa signed a bilateral agreement with China on Saturday, promising "greater collaboration" as Beijing's foreign minister continues a tour of the South Pacific that has sparked concern among Western allies. The deal's details are unclear, coming midway through a Chinese delegation's eight-nation trip—but an earlier leaked draft agreement sent to several Pacific countries outlined plans to expand security and economic engagement.

The mission has prompted Western leaders to urge regional counterparts to spurn any Chinese attempt to extend its security reach across the region. A press release from the Samoan government confirmed that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Samoan Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa had met and discussed "climate change, the pandemic and peace and security".



Local media invited to witness signing of a deal

Local media were invited to witness the signing of a deal, but no questions were taken. The deal also contained an agreement to help build a police fingerprinting lab in addition to an already announced police academy in the country, which follows earlier commitments of "capacity building" for law enforcement in the Solomon Islands. The release said that China would continue to provide infrastructural development support to various Samoan sectors and there would be a new framework for future projects "to be determined and mutually agreed".

"Samoa and the People's Republic of China will continue to pursue greater collaboration that will deliver on joint interests and commitments," the release said. The Chinese delegation has already visit-



APIA, Samoa: Picture shows CEO of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Poseta Noumea Simi (L) and China's Ambassador to Samoa Chao Xiaoliang signing one of the bilateral agreements as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (back row R) and Samoa Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa look on during agreements signing ceremony. — AFP

ed the Solomon Islands and Kiribati this week.

It arrived in Samoa on Friday night before flying on Saturday afternoon into Fiji, where Wang will visit Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama and attend a group meeting of foreign ministers from Pacific countries.

Other stops are expected in Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and East Timor. In a duel for influence, Australia's new Foreign Minister Penny Wong was in Fiji on Friday, seeking to woo island states after the Solomon Islands took Canberra by surprise last month by signing a wide-ranging security pact with China.

"We have expressed our concerns publicly about the security agreement," Wong told reporters in the capital of Suva. "As do other Pacific islands, we think there are consequences. We think that it's important

that the security of the region be determined by the region. And historically, that has been the case. And we think that is a good thing."

At the first stop in Honiara on Thursday, Wang lashed out at "smears and attacks" against the security pact already signed with the Solomon Islands. While the wide-ranging draft agreement and a five-year plan circulated to several Pacific nations, both obtained by AFP, would give China a larger security footprint in a region seen as crucial to the interests of the United States and its allies. In a stark letter to fellow Pacific leaders, Federated States of Micronesia President David Panuelo warned the agreement seems "attractive" at first glance but would allow China to "acquire access and control of our region". — AFP

Cardinal Sodano, right-hand man to two popes, dies

ROME: Italian cardinal Angelo Sodano, right-hand man to former popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, has died at the age of 94, the Vatican announced on Saturday. The Vatican power-broker cut a controversial figure in recent years, linked to many controversies, but wielded great influence over the church under the two popes in the 1990s and 2000s.

Pope Francis paid tribute to "this esteemed man of the Church, who fulfilled his priesthood with generosity... in the service of the Holy See," in a telegram addressed to the family and published by the Vatican. Sodano died on Friday in Rome where he had been hospitalised since May 9 after testing positive for COVID-19, according to the official news website Vatican News. The Vatican did not provide details on his cause of death. His funeral will be held on Tuesday at St Peter's Basilica, with Pope Francis attending. John Paul II made Sodano his second-in-command when he named him secretary of state in 1991. Sodano accompanied him on around 50 foreign trips.

After Benedict XVI's appointment in 2005, Sodano stayed in the post until September 2006. The then pope also approved Sodano's election as Dean of the

College of Cardinals in 2005, remaining in the post at the time of Benedict XVI's resignation in 2013.

Pope Francis then accepted Sodano's resignation in 2019 after he garnered criticism over his support for priests accused of wrongdoing. Critics condemned Sodano's involvement in many scandals. In one expose, National Catholic Reporter weekly alleged that Sodano protected Father Marcial Maciel, the Mexican-born founder of the Legion of Christ religious order.

Maciel lived for years with a woman with whom he had a child and was also accused of having sexually abused children and seminarians. He died in 2008. Sodano was also one of the central characters of French journalist Frederic Martel's book, "In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy", which referred to the cardinal's lifestyle in Rome and his links to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet during his time in Chile.

Born on November 23, 1927, Sodano was the second of six children in a family living in the town of Isola d'Asti in Piedmont region, northwestern Italy. His father was a lawmaker between 1948 and 1963. Sodano studied theology and canon law and was ordained a priest in 1950.

He then began a diplomatic career with the Vatican in 1959 with several posts abroad, especially in South America. In 1977, the then pope, Paul VI, appointed Sodano as apostolic nuncio in Chile. He also previously served in Ecuador and Uruguay. He returned to Rome in 1988 before taking on a role similar to that of foreign minister in 1989. — AFP



VATICAN CITY: File photo shows Pope Francis (R) speaks with Italian Cardinal Angelo Sodano, as he arrives to take part with cardinals and bishops in the Papal consistory before the nominations of new cardinals at the Vatican. — AFP

UN Security Council members fail to agree on Myanmar text

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council failed Friday to agree on a statement aimed at pushing Myanmar's junta to take steps toward a peaceful solution to the country's ongoing crisis, diplomats said. China and the United Kingdom, which drafted the text, blamed each other for the failure of the day-long negotiations, which followed a closed-door Council meeting on Myanmar in the morning.

For London, China was asking "too much," which led to the collapse of the negotiations. A spokeswoman for China's UN delegation told AFP that at the end of the day, there was only a "slight difference" to reach an agreement that was "not impossible to overcome."

The original text proposed that the Security

Council express deep concern over "limited progress" in implementing a five-point plan on ending the crisis, which was set out more than a year ago by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It also called for action to implement the roadmap. China proposed using the terms "slow" progress rather than "limited," the Chinese delegation said. "Our wording was factual but less condescending" and "it's a real shame" that there was no agreement, the spokeswoman added.

The rest of the text, seen by AFP, reflected the Security Council's concern about the continuing violence and humanitarian difficulties in the country. At the Council meeting, the ASEAN envoy for Myanmar,

Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sokhonn Prak, and the UN envoy, Noeleen Heyzer, provided an update on the situation.

According to diplomats, Heyzer, who was appointed in October 2021, has been given a general green light to make her first trip to Myanmar, but has not yet received the necessary authorizations for her stay and the people she may meet. The UN is insisting that she be able to meet with various Burmese parties, not just the ruling junta.

Since the military launched its coup in February 2021, more than 1,800 people have been killed in a crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group. — AFP

News in brief

Ferry sinks in Indonesia

JAKARTA: Twenty-six people were missing Saturday after a ferry ran out of fuel and sank in bad weather off the coast of Indonesia, officials said. The country's search and rescue agency said the vessel was carrying 43 people when it capsized on Thursday in the Makassar Strait, the sea separating the islands of Sulawesi and Borneo. News of the accident only reached officials on Saturday, the local head of search and rescue Djuandji, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name, told AFP. "Seventeen people have been rescued alive by two tugboats that were passing by. We have deployed a rescue team to search for the missing others," he said. A group of 40 rescuers were at sea searching for survivors, Djuandji added. Marine accidents are common in Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago of around 17,000 islands where safety standards are often lax. — AFP

Gunmen kill policeman

TEHRAN: Gunmen shot dead a policeman and wounded his wife in Iran's restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, state media reported Saturday. "Last night... police captain Abbas Rahanjan was martyred and his wife was wounded," after they were shot by armed assailants, Khodabakhsh Pakirshahi, a deputy governor of the province's Delgan county was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA. The shooting took place on the road from Delgan to Iranshahr city, the official said, adding that the captain's wife was transferred to hospital for treatment. Assailants "using Kalashnikov rifles", fired at the police officer's car, and "ran away from the scene," said provincial police chief Ahmad Taheri, according to the ISNA news agency. "Police investigations have been launched to identify and arrest the on-the-run perpetrators" he added. The province, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan, is often hit by attacks or clashes between security forces and armed groups, generally involving smuggling gangs as well as separatists or extremist groups. — AFP

Nigeria postpone primaries

ABUJA: Nigeria's ruling party on Saturday postponed for a week a primary vote to choose its candidate to replace President Muhammadu Buhari in the 2023 presidential elections. A day before the primaries were scheduled to start, Buhari's All Progressives Congress or APC pushed the vote to June 6 through June 8, the party said in a statement. The APC said the decision followed a ruling by electoral authorities to extend a deadline for the submission of potential candidates' names for the primaries. The APC gave no further details, but the ruling party has been caught in fierce wrangling over who should run, including former Lagos governor Bola Tinubu and current vice president Yemi Osinbajo. Buhari has not endorsed any candidate and some analysts expect him to seek a consensus nominee to keep the APC's factions together ahead of the February 2023 general election. An alliance of smaller parties drawn together for Buhari's 2015 election win, the APC has often struggled to contain internal divisions. Opposition party Peoples Democratic Party or PDP was scheduled to start its primaries on Sunday for its candidate to govern Africa's most populous country. — AFP

Greece blocked 40,000 migrants at Evros: Govt

ATHENS, Greece: Greece said Saturday some 40,000 illegal migrants had been blocked from entering the country along the northern border with Turkey since the beginning of the year. Greece is often the country of choice for migrants fleeing Africa and the Middle East to try to reach a better life in the European Union.

Many come via Turkey at the Evros border and in 2020 Athens bolstered border controls after large numbers of migrants tried to cross the Evros River in the north. Athens has accused Ankara of not doing enough to stop smugglers from sending migrants across the border—often in flimsy boats that make for dangerous journeys. On Saturday, Greece's Civil Protection Minister, Takis Theodoridakos, said tens of thousands of illegal migrants had been stopped from coming into the country at the Evros border this year. "In the first four months of 2022, about 40,000 illegal immigrants have tried to enter the country illegally," he told Skai TV, specifying they had been stopped at Evros.

"We effectively repel any threat to our country, to our borders." He also sent a message to Turkey, saying it is not "allowed to tolerate traffickers of desperate people, nor to foster such situations". The Evros River, which separates Greece and Turkey, has seen an increase in traffic in recent weeks because water levels are low.

A migration ministry source said migration flows to all of Greece in the first four months of 2022 were nearly 30 percent higher than in the same period last year. In March 2020, Greece bolstered border patrols and installed cameras, radar and a 40-kilometre (25-mile) steel fence over five metres (16 feet) high in some areas.

Over 3,000 asylum seekers have arrived in Greece so far this year, including over 1,100 last month, according to the ministry's data. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2022

Boursa Kuwait shares insights on investment prospects in Kuwait

8th Corporate Day held in collaboration with EFG Hermes

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait hosted its 8th Corporate Day, organized in collaboration with EFG Hermes, the leading investment bank franchise in Frontier Emerging Markets (FEM), from the 23rd to the 26th of May. The four-day event brought together 13 Kuwaiti companies with more than 175 international investors from over 95 institutions (\$2 trillion in AUMs), to discuss and share insights on some of the most compelling opportunities across the Kuwaiti capital market.

Among the takeaways from the 8th Corporate Day was that Kuwait is well-placed for continued growth over the coming period. Kuwait's increasing importance in Emerging Markets can be traced back to its reclassifications in the world's leading index providers, which has led to wider investor exposure. Boursa Kuwait remains committed to attracting foreign investments, organizing a series of meetings to raise awareness among international investors about the latest in the Kuwaiti capital market, highlighting the company's development efforts as well as the opportunities and benefits

offered by investing in the companies listed on the stock exchange. Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector Noura Al-Abdulkareem said: "Boursa Kuwait continues to provide opportunities for both companies and investors through its series of Corporate Days. The eighth edition, which was organized by EFG Hermes,



13 Kuwaiti companies, over 175 international investors attend event

reflects the exchange's role in the growth of the Kuwaiti capital market and the national economy."

"We were delighted to hold this virtual investor conference with our long-term partner Boursa Kuwait, as this progressive exchange continues to

prove it is a market to watch. While global growth is expected to slow down in 2022, emerging markets are a favored destination for investors, driven by economic reform activities and attractive valuations, making Boursa Kuwait an appealing destination. Apart from rising oil prices, investors are drawn to Kuwait's stock market given the strong consumer recovery after the imposed lockdowns in 2020 and the prospect of IPOs. Government initiatives to push further market reforms that can boost liquidity, such as adding margin trading, have also bolstered the Kuwaiti stock market's position," said Mohamed Ebeid, Co-CEO of the Investment Bank, EFG Hermes.

"Volumes continue to rise thanks to strong retail sentiment and rising foreign interest. In 2022, turnover averaged \$210 million, up from \$179 million in 2021 and \$144 million in 2020. The current oil price boom and removal of Russia from key EM indices have fueled fresh foreign interest in the market as foreigners net bought \$576 million in IQ22, and \$4.2 billion in the past



Noura Al-Abdulkareem

three years," said Ahmed Waly, Head of Brokerage at EFG Hermes.

"Boursa Kuwait has developed into a leading regional stock exchange that follows international standards and believes in the private sector's role in advancing the country's economic development, and we expect it to gar-

ner strong results during the coming period," he added.

Boursa Kuwait's series of Roadshows and Corporate Days showcases some of the standout listed companies and the investment opportunities that reside in the Kuwaiti capital market. Putting these companies in touch with some of the world's leading investment firms and financial institutions, the events aim to highlight these companies' financial health and business strategies and outlooks helping investors gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits and opportunities of investing in Kuwaiti companies.

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to create a credible exchange built on efficiency and transparency, creating a liquid capital market, a progressive exchange platform and developing a comprehensive set of reforms and enhancements that has allowed it to compete on an international level. Over the past five years, the company has rolled out numerous market reforms and new initiatives as part of its comprehensive multi-phase market development (MD) plans.

Turkey shows off drones at air show

BAKU, Azerbaijan: Looping in the air at lightning speed, Turkish drones like those used against Russian forces in Ukraine draw cheers from the crowd at an air show in Azerbaijan. Turkey is showcasing its defense technology at the aerospace and technology festival "Teknofest" that started in Azerbaijan's capital Baku this week.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is expected to attend on Saturday. Turkey's TB2 drones are manufactured by aerospace company Baykar Defence, where Erdogan's increasingly prominent son-in-law Selcuk Bayraktar is chief technology officer. On Wednesday, Bayraktar flew over Baku aboard an Azerbaijani air force Mikoyan MiG-29 plane. One of his combat drones, the "Akinci", accompanied the flight.

A video showing Bayraktar in command of the warplane, dressed in a pilot's uniform decorated with Turkish and Azerbaijani flag patches, went viral on social media. "This has been a childhood dream for me," Bayraktar told reporters after the flight.

Proximity to 'threats'

Turkey's drones first attracted attention in 2019 when they were used during the war in Libya to thwart an advance by rebel commander, General Khalifa Haftar, against the government in Tripoli.

They were then again put into action the following year when Turkey-backed Azerbaijan in recapturing most of the land it lost to separatist Armenian forces in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Azerbaijani audience members at the aviation festival applauded during a display of TB2 drones, which are now playing a prominent role against invading Russian forces in Ukraine. A senior official from the Turkish defence industry said his country



BAKU: The Bayraktar TB2 drone, manufactured by Turkey's Baykar, is presented during the opening of the aerospace and technology festival 'Teknofest Azerbaijan' at Baku Crystal Hall in Baku, on May 27, 2022. — AFP

was facing a wide spectrum of "threats", including the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Islamic State group jihadists.

The PKK is listed as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies. But with NATO allies-including the United States—having imposed embargoes on Turkey, Ankara was forced to take matters into its own hands to build defense equipment, the official told AFP. "The situation is changing now with the war in Ukraine," the official said.

Turkey has been looking to modernize its air force after it was kicked out of the F-35 fighter jet program because of its purchase of Russia's S-400 missile defense system. But Ankara's role in trying to mediate an end to the Ukraine conflict through direct negotiations may have helped improve its relations with Washington in the past months.

In April, US President Joe Biden's administration said it now believed that supplying Turkey with F-16 fighter jets would serve Washington's strategic interests.

Exports to 25 countries

Michael Boyle, of the Rutgers University-Camden in the United States, said Turkish drones such as Bayraktar TB2 drones were "increasingly important to modern conflicts because they have spread so widely". For years, leading exporters like the United States and Israel limited the number of countries they would sell to, and also limited the models they were willing to sell, he told AFP.

"This created an opening in the export market which other countries, notably Turkey and China, have been willing to fill," added the author of the book "The Drone Age: How Drone Technology Will Change War and Peace". The Turkish official said Turkey has been investing in the defense industry since the 2000s, but the real leap came in 2014 after serious investments in advanced technologies and a shift towards using locally made goods. While Turkey's export of defense technologies amounted to \$248 million in early 2000, it surpassed \$3 billion in 2021 and was expected to reach \$4 billion in 2022, he said. —AFP

Rising US wages support spending as inflation slows

WASHINGTON: American wages continued to rise in April, supporting an ongoing increase in consumption in the face of an inflation wave that nonetheless shows signs of waning, according to government data released Friday. US personal income rose 0.4 percent compared to March, while personal consumption expenditures (PCE) gained 0.9 percent, slowing from the gain in the prior month, according to the Commerce Department report.

But in a bit of good news for shoppers, the PCE price index slowed sharply, increasing just 0.2 percent after several months of accelerating at more than twice that pace and 0.9 percent in March.

The world's largest economy has been battered for months by a cresting inflation wave, made more painful by the surge in energy prices caused by the fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Over the last 12 months, the key inflation measure slowed to 6.3 percent from 6.6 percent in the prior month, according to the data. Excluding volatile food and energy goods, the increase in the "core" PCE price index was a more modest 4.9 percent.

PCE is the Federal Reserve's preferred price gauge, and the central bank has launched a counter-offensive against inflation with a series of aggressive interest rate hikes to cool the economy.

The process began in March and was followed early this month by a half-point increase, the biggest since 2000. Policymakers argue that the US economy is strong enough to withstand the increased borrowing costs, and though the hot housing market has cooled, consumers show no signs of reducing spending. The data show "consumers are resilient, for now," said Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics.

"With inflation still uncomfortably high, the labor market strong and household spending maintaining positive momentum, the Fed will stick with its plan" to raise rates by a half point at the next two meetings, she said. Personal income increased \$89.3 billion in April, while disposable personal income rose \$48.3 billion and expenditures increased \$152.3 billion, the report said. Outlays on services were the biggest element, led by food services, but also hotels, housing and utilities. The report said spending rose across all categories, except for gasoline, led by outlays on autos.

The US inflation wave showed signs of waning last month, posting the smallest increase since late 2020, as rising wages supported continued spending by American shoppers, according to government data released Friday. The relief was good news



Food and energy prices have surged since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but US inflation showed signs of easing last month. — AFP

for consumers who have been the key support for the US economy, but also for President Joe Biden who has made battling rising prices his top domestic priority. Surging prices at the grocery store and at the gas pump have hit families and become a political liability for Biden and his Democratic party heading into midterm congressional elections in November. The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index slowed sharply in April, increasing just 0.2 percent—the smallest monthly rise since November 2020, according to the Commerce Department report. —AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka gets Russian oil

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka took delivery Saturday of Russian oil—which could soon be subject to a European embargo—to restart operations at the country's only refinery, the energy minister said.

The island nation is suffering its worst economic meltdown since independence, with shortages of fuel and other vital goods making life miserable for its 22 million people. The state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) refinery was shuttered in March in the wake of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange crunch, which left the government unable to finance crude imports. The Russian crude delivery had been waiting offshore of the capital Colombo's port for over a month as the country was unable to raise \$75 million to pay for it, energy minister Kanachana Wijesekera said.

Colombo is also in talks with Moscow to arrange direct supplies of crude, coal, diesel and petrol despite US-led sanctions on Russian banks and a diplomatic outcry over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"I have made an official request to the Russian ambassador for direct supplies of Russian oil," Wijesekera told reporters in Colombo. "Crude alone will not fulfil our requirement, we need other refined (petroleum) products as well."

Around 90,000 tons of Siberian light crude will be sent to Sri Lanka's refinery after the shipment was acquired on credit from Dubai-based intermediary Coral Energy. Wijesekera said Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) was already in arrears of \$735 million to suppliers and no one came forward to even bid for its oil tenders. He added that the Siberian grade was not an ideal match for the refinery, which is optimized for Iranian light crude, but no other supplier was willing to extend credit.

Sri Lanka will nonetheless call for fresh supply tenders in two weeks before the stock of Siberian light runs out, Wijesekera said. The Sapugaskanda refinery on Colombo's outskirts will resume work in about two days.

European Union leaders are meeting on Monday in an effort to negotiate a fresh round of sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine conflict, including an oil embargo.

Russian oil is already subject to a US embargo and its barrels have traded at a steep discount from international benchmarks, which have risen substantially since the conflict began. Sri Lanka's economic crisis has seen long queues of motorists outside gas stations, waiting hours and sometimes even days for scant supplies of petrol and cooking gas. Its people are also grappling with acute shortages of imported food and pharmaceuticals, along with record inflation and lengthy daily blackouts.

Anti-government protests erupted into riots earlier this month, leaving nine people dead and many more wounded. A demonstration outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office in Colombo demanding his resignation over the government's economic mismanagement entered its 50th day Saturday. —AFP

Business



KFH, KFH Turkey and KFH Capital officials with the awards.



Ahmad Al-Sumait receives the award.



Khalid Al-Rukhayes



Khalid Al-Shami

KFH wins 8 prestigious awards from Islamic Finance News

Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait and major deals in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Turkey

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House Group (KFH Group) won eight prestigious awards from Islamic Finance News (IFN) thus representing the largest number of awards received by a banking group from a single entity. The award "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait 2021" took the lead among the eight awards. They included also best three "Deals of The Year" awards organized by the group in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. There were other newly created awards that recognize the innovative quality of the finance and investment products provided by KFH Group, eg. Social Impact Deal of the Year, Sovereign and Multilateral Deal of the year.

The awards, announced recently in a ceremony held in Dubai, comprised the following: Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait, Kuwait Deal of The Year - Kuwait Finance House's \$750 million Tier 1 Sukuk, Social Impact Deal of the Year - IsDB's \$2.5 billion sustainable Sukuk, Sovereign and Multilateral Deal of the year - UK Government's GBP 500 million sovereign Sukuk, Turkey Deal of the Year- Kuveyt Turk Katilim Bankasi's \$350 million Tier 2 sustainability Sukuk, Hybrid Deal of the Year - Saudi Aramco's \$6 billion hybrid Sukuk, Saudi Arabia Deal of the Year - Saudi Aramco's \$6 billion hybrid Sukuk.

Islamic Finance News Group (IFN) has selected KFH for these awards based on

the recommendations of a jury of global experts and analysts specialized in the Islamic finance. The evaluation was made in accordance with a set of financial calibers, standards and indicators on the best institutional activities and Islamic deals during the year. The awards have affirmed KFH's leading position, innovative finance solutions, diversified contributions, and continued efforts to enhance Islamic finance sec-



tor worldwide by providing innovative products and services to accommodate retail and corporate customers and fulfill government's aspirations, taking into consideration environment preservation, sustainability, governance, development programs and society development.

KFH's representatives at the awards ceremony included: General Manager Treasury Kuwait at KFH, Ahmad Al-Sumait, Executive Manager - Capital Markets at KFH, Khalid Al-Rukhayes, Vice President

Investment Banking services at KFH Capital - Khalid Al-Shami.

Ahmad Al-Sumait

General Manager Treasury Kuwait at KFH, Ahmad Al-Sumait indicated in a press release after receiving the awards that these awards reflect the bank's leading and pioneering position in the Islamic finance and Sharia-compliant banking industry as well as KFH competencies in innovating finance and banking solutions and tools in the global markets where the Group operates. He added that the awards stand as a motive for further accomplishments and success to match the praise and appreciation which KFH has gained from various global organizations.

He said that KFH has firmly established leading position in the Islamic banking industry. KFH provides a fully integrated system of technology, finance, and banking services to enhance the development sustainability pillars of Islamic finance industry by financing several projects and participating in many economic, growth deals and mega projects having a positive impact on the societies where they operate. These economic and financial projects enhance KFH's participation in driving economy wheels as well as the development and growth plans in such societies. Also, these deals accelerate KFH's growth and expansion in various markets and qualify KFH to lead, arrange and participate in the biggest

financial deals worldwide. KFH has participated in the biggest and most successful three deals in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey last year.

Al-Sumait reiterated that KFH will keep working as per set plans in all markets and countries where it operates through professional and methodical performance, diversification, and the ability to compete with the largest banks worldwide. KFH is supported by the most remarkable indicators of success and distinction at all levels which render KFH as the best Islamic bank in Kuwait and worldwide and the source for Islamic banking.

Khalid Al-Rukhayes

Executive Manager - Capital Markets at KFH, Khalid Al-Rukhayes expressed his delight at winning the awards and considered them an earned appreciation of KFH's accomplishments in several mega Sukuk deals for governmental institutions. He added that KFH will continue its endeavor to maintain its leading position in the Islamic finance industry worldwide and will continue presenting innovative financial solutions that would fulfill customer's aspirations.

Khalid Al-Shami

Vice President Investment Banking at KFH Capital, the investment arm of KFH Group, Khalid Al-Shami said that KFH Group's participations in the arrangement and management of major Sukuk issuances,

value and returns-wise and most distinguished environment and sustainability-wise, have strengthened KFH's role in the Sukuk market as a main dealer and a market maker at the regional and global levels. KFH enjoys a strong financial position, reputable rank, and long experience in the field of Sukuk which have become the most favorable option for companies and governments to finance their projects, development plans, expansion, and execution of development plans.

He indicated that KFH's success in the development of certain Sukuk structuring and enhancing its competency against traditional debt instruments, thus increasing demand thereon and merging them in several major projects and deals of government institutions and private sector. Sovereign Sukuk have become one of the major instruments of the main global finance market. He reiterated that its distinguished long experience in the arrangement and issuance of Sukuk deals over the preceding decades has rendered KFH as one of the most important sources of Sukuk at the global level. KFH has become one of the main competitors among the bank's organizing premier Sukuk issuance on Bloomberg Global Platform.

IFN provides Islamic finance and banking industry awards and publishes articles about the banking sector. Established in 2004, IFN is a subsidiary of REDmoney and has offices in Dubai and Kuala Lumpur.

بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House



Your Trust.. First Award



Business

Why S America's breadbasket isn't the answer to global wheat crisis

India's suspension of exports exacerbates problem

DOCTOR JUAN EULOGIO ESTIGARRIBIA, Paraguay: As the world faces a growing food crisis provoked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many have looked to South America's "breadbasket"—major wheat producers Brazil and Argentina, along with Uruguay and Paraguay—as a possible solution.

But experts and analysts say a variety of factors—climate, cost, domestic needs—make such a solution highly unlikely. Russia and Ukraine alone produce 30 percent of the world's wheat supply. Moscow's military offensive in Ukraine and subsequent sanctions on Russia have disrupted supplies of fertilizer, wheat and other commodities from both countries, pushing up prices for food and fuel, especially in developing nations.

A suspension of India's exports has further exacerbated the problem. Here's a look at the major wheat producing countries in South America, and how they might, or might not, be able to help alleviate the crisis: Brazil: higher yield, but big needs at home.

Agricultural giant Brazil is due to increase its wheat crop coverage by between three and 11 percent this year, according to Embrapa Wheat, a state-run research unit affiliated with the Brazilian agriculture ministry. Record prices, surging demand and the "expectation of favorable weather, strengthen the projection of an increase in the planted area" from 2.7 million hectares in 2021 (6.7 million acres) to a little over three million in 2022, said Embrapa Wheat.

But the country of 213 million people is already unable to meet domestic demand—estimated at 12.7 million tons a year, and rising. Internal logistical and transport costs have pushed many farmers, particularly in the south, to favor exporting, thus

ramping up the need to import.

Brazil is actually the world's eighth largest importer of wheat, most of which (87 percent) comes from Argentina.

Argentina: Lack of water reserves

Argentina, home to 45 million people, is also traditionally a major wheat producer—but current climatic conditions are unfavorable, meaning it is unlikely to help fill the global void. "We expect about an eight percent drop in the land area planted with wheat," Tomas Rodriguez Zurro, an analyst at the Rosario grains exchange, told AFP.

That amounts to a drop from 6.8 million to 6.3 million hectares, due mostly to a drought affecting the country, Rodriguez Zurro explained. "In general, we plant wheat to then plant soybean, but the water reserves are very low, so the producers don't want to risk planting wheat in case it reduces the humidity reserves even more" for subsequent plantings, said Rodriguez Zurro.

On top of that, farmers say they will use less fertilizer due to soaring prices—another factor limiting production, the analyst said. Russia is the world's largest exporter of fertilizers with more than 12 percent of the global market, but its sales have been virtually paralyzed by sanctions.

Paraguay and Uruguay: small global impact

Both Paraguay, a country of 7.5 million, and Uruguay (population: 3.5 million) enjoy good wheat yields—but they have a much smaller global impact and neither expects to increase production.

"Wheat production is expensive, very expensive," said a source at Uruguay's agriculture ministry. Farmers there expect a yield "similar to last



DOCTOR JUAN EULOGIO ESTIGARRIBIA, Paraguay: In this file photo, a man works in a wheat field, in Doctor Juan Eulogio Estigarribia, known as Campo 9, 270 km east of Asuncion, Paraguay. — AFP

year, or slightly higher," the source said—a total that should satisfy domestic demand and allow exports to remain at roughly one million tons a year. In Paraguay, production should also remain stable, according to Hector Cristaldo, president of Paraguay's farmers' union, but he added: "Our vol-

umes are not significant on the world stage." Paraguay consumes 700,000 tons and exports as much again, almost exclusively to Brazil. In mid-May, when India banned exports, wheat reached a record price of 438.25 euros (\$456.68) per ton in European trading. —AFP

Will higher interest rates push euro-zone to new debt crisis?

PARIS: The sharp rise in global interest rates since the beginning of the year means that countries are having to pay more to borrow and that is putting pressure on public finances just as economic growth risks being snuffed out by high inflation and disruptions in supply chains. Nevertheless, the specter of another debt crisis—such as the one that brought the euro-zone to its knees more than a decade ago—is still a long way off, experts say, as the impact on public finances will only be gradual.

How high?

The rise in sovereign bond interest rates has been steep. For France, the rise in the interest rate, or yield, on its 10-year bonds between January and mid-May was the steepest since 1994, going from near zero percent to 1.5 percent. Germany's 10-year bonds experienced a similar increase, as have other euro-zone nations. Greece, which still faces the highest interest rates in the euro-zone after a sovereign debt crisis that began over a decade ago, has seen the yield on its 10-year bonds recently surpass 3.5 percent.

The impact?

Higher borrowing costs mean that governments have to pay more to refinance their debt. As countries have taken on vast amounts of additional debt to stave off economic collapse from the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, the higher interest rates will inevitably impact public finances. For France's 10-year bonds, "each percentage point increase in interest rates translates into nearly 40 billion euros (\$43 billion) in additional annual costs, or nearly the current defense budget," the head of the central bank, Banque de France, Francois Villeroy de Galhau said recently. Analysts at investment bank Natixis suggest that for debt to remain sustainable, long-term interest rates must keep below the rate of economic growth in the long term.

How big a worry?

For now, however, the higher rates "remain absorbable, we're not at levels of 10 or 15 percent," said Virginie Maisonneuve, global chief investment officer for equity at Allianz Global Investors. "Some gymnastics and adjustments are needed, but its manageable," she said. Moreover, countries do not need to refinance all of their debt, so the impact of higher interest rates on state coffers will only be gradual. In addition, soaring inflation, paradoxically, has a positive effect, as it boosts the value of economic output and, in turn, tax revenue, but at the same time reduces the proportion of debt to the overall economy.

The risk for euro-zone?

While no country is currently facing a situation like the one Greece faced in 2009 — and which triggered a debt crisis across the entire euro-zone—the situation could become something of a headache for the European Central Bank. Investors do not just look at interest rates themselves, but also at the so-called "spread" or difference between the borrowing costs of individual countries. —AFP

Gangs, inflation and politics bring Haiti economy to brink

PORT-AU-PRINCE: With gas sales already subsidized by the government at a loss, the Haitian economy—fragile from incessant crime and political instability—appears close to collapse as the war in Ukraine sends

Markaz holds marketing masterclass

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) has announced that it recently organized a masterclass for its executive and senior management leaders as part of the company's efforts to drive further growth and expansion building on the success of its well-established brand.

Held as its half-yearly Executive and Management Learning Event, the masterclass was titled "Strategic Marketing for Niche Services" and was delivered by renowned branding and marketing expert, Fergus Wallace. Markaz is implementing strategies recently refreshed with its Board of Directors, and the stimulating masterclass was designed to expand the toolbox Markaz leaders and managers will have at their disposal to achieve these goals. Wallace explored how the highly successful Markaz brand can be leveraged to feed and inform an overall strategy that resonates with clients and stakeholders, ensuring their expectations even more closely drive business goals. Peter Kelly, Executive Vice President, Human Resources at Markaz commented: "Over nearly five decades, Markaz has grown into a well-established business and our commitment to excellence has earned us a good reputation. As we are well known in our markets and networks and our service offerings are trusted and sought after, we recognize that this invaluable brand holds tremendous potential to accelerate Markaz's journey of success. The masterclass reflects



our strong desire to enable Markaz to stimulate its planned growth through specialized strategic marketing and add measurable value to our existing strength in communicating our brand, while also exploring where greater impact with our clients and partners can help steer, inform and accelerate our business strategy."

During his insightful and engaging masterclass, Wallace delved deep into the centrality of marketing communication and branding within strategic management processes and the key role of marketing methodologies in achieving and exceeding strategic goals with a focus on integrated marketing communications strategies. He also explored how to harness the power of the brand and leverage it to reveal

hidden strengths and values of an organization.

Wallace is Managing Director and owner of Brandstorm, an international corporate communications agency. Since graduating with honors in 1987 at Dublin City University in International Marketing and Languages, Wallace has developed a profound knowledge of sales and marketing in various sectors, having managed senior roles in multinational corporations such as Ericsson, Diageo, Pernod Ricard and in private companies. He develops and delivers advanced management training and university courses in mass communications theory, integrated marketing communications, strategic marketing, sales, branding and general management at the European School of Economics, SAA Business School, and the University of Turin.

Skyline Team in Kuwait to introduce 'Ranch' - Garden Bungalows in Kochi

KUWAIT: Skyline, the most trusted builder in Kerala, is in Kuwait from May 23 to June 12 to present its elegant Garden Bungalow project in Kochi - 'Ranch'. 'Skyline Ranch' offers you unlimited extravagance with wide open space, a verdant green cover, state of the art amenities, top of the line garden bungalows - all in close proximity to Kochi city at Tripunithura. Spread across 12.5 acres of verdant green, Skyline Ranch has 67 ultra-luxury independent garden bungalows with more than four acres of pristine open spaces. The exotically designed gardens, well-manicured lawns and two large central parks with rich flora offer an emphatic green ambience to this project. Nestled amidst the flowering shrubs and palms, these garden bungalows offer opulent ambience with utmost privacy.

The skillfully designed Skyline Ranch is a new lifestyle statement, which places topnotch comfort level that exceeds everything contemplated before. Skyline Ranch accommodates a state-of-the-art clubhouse of 11,000 sqft, majestically facing the central park. The clubhouse named, The County, is a 3-storeyed independent building with passenger lift. It hosts an array of luxury amenities like a stunning swimming pool with kid's wading pool, Jacuzzi, party deck, well-equipped fitness centre, spa, AC mini-theatre, spacious AC recreation hall and an indoor



Skyline's Ranch Garden in Tripunithura, Kochi

games room. It is also equipped with amenities like Football table, Table Tennis Room and Billiards room. Along with this, outdoor facilities include two large central parks, half-basketball court, skating rink, children's play area, water bodies, barbecue counter, open stage, well-manicured gardens, jogging track, etc. All in all - world beyond imagination.

The first phase of Ranch is ready to move in with 3 and 4 BHK ultra-luxury garden bungalows in 6 different combinations. This phase offers exceptionally stylish 39 ultra luxury bungalows. Phase 2 consist of 28 exclusive 4 BHK ultra-luxury garden bungalows ranging from 2791sq.ft to 4686 sq ft which are nearing completion. The bungalows

have all luxuries, such as home elevator, home theatre, patio garden with fountain, open bathroom etc.

For those concerned with safety and security, Skyline Ranch offers tri-level security features. Manned security guards, controlled entry and exit etc. make this project a safe dwelling for families. Situated at the most aristocratic locations of Kochi, Tripunithura, Skyline Ranch commands an enviable position. This project has proximity to all major conveniences in Tripunithura like educational institutions, shopping malls, metro station, 5-star hotels, highways etc. To contact Skyline Team in Kuwait and know more details about the project, call +965 67003536 or +91 9847500222

"This year, these fuel subsidies have increased by more than 200 percent: that is around 18 billion gourdes," or more than \$164 million euros, said economist Kesner Pharel.

In cash-strapped Haiti, that is a staggering amount, equalling more than twice the budget of the health ministry. And it does nothing to reduce the misery of the 60 percent of Haitians living below the poverty line. "This does not help socially because it is a generalized subsidy: we do not target the most disadvantaged people," said Pharel. "In December, a mechanism was floated to support only the public transport sector, but, so far, it has not been done because of the state's

lack of efficiency," he said.

And as the impoverished country imports five times more food than it exports, the increase in maritime transport costs is aggravating inflation, which had already crossed the 25 percent mark at the start of the year. "We are going to suffer from imported inflation because our main trading partners, the United States and the Dominican Republic, now also have high inflation: at home, we could reach 30 percent this year," warned Pharel. The specter of the 2008 food riots hangs over Haiti while wheat prices are also soaring due to Russia's war in Ukraine, the two leading grain-producing countries. —AFP

fuel prices soaring.

The global surge in fuel costs comes at the worst possible time for Haitian authorities: Last December, they had for the first time in five years made the highly sensitive move to hike the price at the pump—just two months before Russia invaded its neighbor. Still well below the global average, Haitians now pay 49 US cents for a liter of gasoline and 84 cents for diesel.

The state pays the difference to the oil companies, and that gap between what the government pays for fuel and what ordinary Haitians pay at the pump has become unbearably steep since the invasion of Ukraine sent world oil prices skyrocketing.

Business

Moody's affirms Kuwait's ratings at A1; maintains stable outlook

Kuwait's balance-sheet and fiscal buffers will remain strong

NEW YORK: Moody's Investors Service ("Moody's") has on Thursday affirmed the government of Kuwait's long-term local and foreign currency issuer ratings at A1. The outlook remains stable. The decision to affirm the ratings is underpinned by Moody's assessment that Kuwait's balance-sheet and fiscal buffers will remain strong for the foreseeable future, which preserve macroeconomic and external stability and anchor the credit profile.

Balanced against this key credit strength is the persistently challenging political environment that limits the prospects for reforms that would reduce the vulnerability of the economy and government finances to long-term carbon transition risks. The stable outlook reflects balanced risks to the ratings. Effective implementation of measures to reduce the government's exposure to oil revenue and diversify the economy, which Moody's does not currently factor into its baseline assumptions for at least the next two years, may raise the resilience of Kuwait's credit profile to oil price fluctuations. By contrast, accelerating global momentum towards carbon transition that lowers the demand for and price of oil, in the absence of reforms including the passage of legislation to expand the government's financing options, may reintroduce liquidity risks and weigh on the credit profile longer term. Kuwait's local and foreign currency country ceilings remain unchanged at Aa2.

The narrower-than-average two-notch gap between the local currency ceiling and the sovereign rating reflects the country's stable balance of payments through episodes of oil price volatility, against the economy's exposure to a key revenue source and a challenging domestic political environment that constrains reform and diversification prospects. The zero-notch gap between the foreign currency ceiling and local currency ceiling reflects very low transfer and convertibility risks, given the country's very large net external creditor position that includes ample foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank.

Kuwait's credit profile is supported by its large sovereign wealth buffers and very low debt level, and

Moody's expects the government's balance sheet to remain extraordinarily strong for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, in the current environment of high oil prices and rising production agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with some other major oil exporting countries, Moody's expects the government to reaccumulate liquid assets in its General Reserve Fund (GRF), which will eliminate



liquidity risk - even if self-imposed - for at least the next two to three years. Moody's estimates that liquid sovereign wealth fund (SWF) assets managed by Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) far exceeded the size of its GDP at the end of 2021 and dwarfs the government's debt of just below 6 percent of GDP at the end of fiscal 2021 (year ending March 2022). The size of Kuwait's SWF assets as a share of GDP is one of the three largest globally, together with Norway and Abu Dhabi. With the sharp increase in oil prices this year driven by the Russia-Ukraine military conflict, coupled with higher oil production under the OPEC+ agreement, Moody's expects Kuwait's stock of SWF assets to grow over the next two years. This is driven by Moody's forecast that Kuwait will run a fiscal surplus of 7-8 percent of GDP in fiscal 2022 and around 2-3 percent of GDP in fiscal 2023, based on the rating agency's oil price assumptions of \$105 and \$95 per barrel on average in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Moreover, with very limited amounts of debt to repay and no requirement to transfer surpluses to the Future Generations Fund (FGF,

which is at the discretion of the finance minister after the change in law in September 2020), Moody's expects the surpluses to be accumulated in GRF as liquid buffers.

The reaccumulation of assets after seven consecutive years of drawdown because of fiscal deficits will bolster Kuwait's credit profile and eliminate the need for government financing and any associated liquidity risk while the fiscal balance is in surplus. While these needs will return from fiscal 2024 onwards, when, based on Moody's oil price assumptions, Kuwait will again run fiscal deficits, the near-term period of high oil prices provides time to the government to take some measures that would allow it to finance its deficits. Meanwhile, the large proportion of SWF assets invested in liquid, foreign currency assets help preserve macroeconomic and external stability. Moody's estimates that Kuwait runs a very large net international investment position because of FGF and foreign exchange reserves are ample.

At the same time, Kuwait's very high exposure to developments in the oil sector weighs on the resilience of its credit profile because of the long-term transition away from hydrocarbons. Moreover, compared to many hydrocarbon producing peers that are making progress in fiscal and economic diversification away from reliance on hydrocarbons, prospects for reforms and diversification will remain weak in Kuwait, hampered by the country's political climate. In Kuwait, oil revenue accounts for around 90 percent of government revenue while hydrocarbon exports make up around 80 percent of total exports; the contribution of the hydrocarbon sector is among the largest across sovereigns that Moody's rates. Although the government has sought to introduce fiscal reforms, it has yet to implement any nonoil revenue measure since the oil price shock in 2015, unlike other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The country's focus on welfare for citizens through wages and subsidies also implies limited scope for deep expenditure cuts as wages and subsidies account for around three-quarters of spending. As a result, Kuwait's fiscal balance is significantly more volatile compared to

GCC peers. As for economic diversification, the government has made some initial progress, but prospects remain limited. The completion of the Clean Fuels Project in 2021 and the likely completion of the Al-Zour refinery this year will provide some downstream diversification within the hydrocarbon sector. However, other projects aimed at spurring non-hydrocarbon sectors such as transport and logistics - including the Silk City and the Mubarak Al-Kabeer port - have faced delays, with the economic returns still uncertain. Economic diversification prospects are in part limited by Kuwait's still weaker economic competitiveness compared to GCC peers. In Moody's view, the inability to implement fiscal and economic reforms and lack of progress in diversification stem from the fractious relationship between the government and parliament.

In particular, the possibility of Kuwait's balance-sheet strength significantly eroding over time will increase with the acceleration in carbon transition trends if institutions are unable to adjust to an environment of lower oil prices and demand.

The stable outlook reflects balanced risks to the ratings. On the upside, the implementation of reforms to reduce the government's reliance on oil revenue may raise the resilience of the credit profile to oil price fluctuations and longer-term carbon transition risks. The government has been considering various types of nonoil revenue but has yet to push any new tax through parliament. Moody's does not currently factor any such measures into its baseline assumptions for at least the next two years. Moody's expects Kuwait's oil production to increase over 2022-23 and underpin real GDP growth of 8 percent this year and 5.5 percent next year.

Kuwait has the ability to increase oil production further if allowed by OPEC+, as its expected capacity for fiscal 2022 is 3.1 million barrels per day (mbpd), compared to an average production of around 2.7mbpd that is likely this year. On the downside, Kuwait is highly vulnerable to accelerating momentum towards carbon transition that may reduce the demand for and price of oil.— Moody's Investors Service

Wall St stocks end with weekly gains

NEW DELHI: Wall Street stocks rallied Friday following signs of moderating inflation, finishing with weekly gains for the first time in about two months.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 1.8 percent, or about 575 points, to 33,212.96, a weekly increase of 6.2 percent. The broad-based S&P 500 gained 2.5 percent to 4,158.24, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index jumped 3.3 percent to 12,131.13.

It was the first weekly gain for the Dow in eight weeks and the first for the S&P 500 and Nasdaq in seven weeks. Friday's gains extend a rally that began Wednesday, reversing the battering stocks have encountered most of the year as the Federal Reserve has launched aggressive steps to tighten monetary policy in

response to inflation.

But Friday's data from the Commerce Department showed the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index climbed 0.2 percent after several months of accelerating at more than twice that pace. The data gives support to the argument from stock market bulls that the US economy is moving past-or has progressed from-a period of "peak inflation"-indicating there will be less grim consumer price news in the months ahead.

The figures "suggest perhaps inflation is plateauing," said Quincy Krosby, chief equity strategist of LPL Financial. "That helps the sentiment in the market." "The market itself was oversold and we knew that we were overdue for a bounce," said Krosby, who added that investors were encouraged by the \$61 billion takeover of VMware by Broadcom. Friday's gains were broad-based, with all 30 members of the Dow advancing. The biggest jumps were: Apple, up 4.1 percent; Boeing, up 3.5 percent; and Disney, also up 3.5 percent. — AFP



HONG KONG: A woman walks past an electronic display showing the Hang Seng Index in the Central district of Hong Kong on May 27, 2022. — AFP

Russia truckmaker Kamaz puts 5,500 on three-day week

MOSCOW: Russian truckmaker Kamaz on Friday announced it was putting more than 5,000 staff on reduced hours owing to parts shortages stemming from sanctions the West has imposed on Moscow over Ukraine. Kamaz has put management staff, specialists and production site workers alike on a three-day week owing to the shortages, the group's news site Vesti Kamaza reported.

In all, 5,500 staff are affected, Vesti Kamaza quoted the company's head of employee relations Sergei

Romanyuk as saying, with all affected staff offered "temporary employment" that will keep them on the payroll with no loss in wages. Russia's economy has been hard hit across the board by Western sanctions imposed after Russian troops entered Ukraine at the end of February.

Many firms have resorted to cutting hours, a move typically accompanied by a reduction in salary.

A majority of the 40,000 workforce at Russia's leading automaker AvtoVAZ were placed on furlough at the start of April, under which they receive two thirds of their normal salary. The furlough is supposed to last until at least June 6. AvtoVAZ, maker of the Lada brand, was until earlier this month majority-owned by French automaker Renault.

Like many other Western firms, it decided to pull out of Russia. It sold its stake in AvtoVAZ to the Russian state in the first major nationalization since the Ukraine offensive began. — AFP

S&P cuts Ukraine debt rating amid Russia conflict

WASHINGTON: S&P Global Ratings on Friday cut Ukraine's debt rating and said the outlook is negative, due to the ongoing fallout from the Russian invasion and the expectation the conflict will not end any time soon. The agency lowered the grade on Ukraine's long- and short-term foreign currency debt to 'CCC+/C' from 'B-/B' due to the "expectation of a prolonged period of

macroeconomic instability in the country."

It was the second downgrade since the invasion began in late February. The fighting has taken "a severe toll on Ukraine's economy and society," and on Kyiv's ability to collect taxes, S&P said. "The Ukraine government's capacity to meet its foreign-currency commercial debt payments is contingent on the flow of donor sup-



BOGOTA: A boy walks along a street in Ciudad Bolivar, Bogota, on May 25, 2022, days ahead of presidential elections. Ciudad Bolivar is one of the most populous mega neighborhoods in the world, inhabited mainly by poor families displaced by violence. — AFP

In Bogota, trash of the rich becomes lifeline for the poor

BOGOTA: They appear at nightfall, dragging heavy carts from dustbin to dustbin in the affluent northern suburbs of the Colombian capital Bogota. Informal recyclers, they rifle through the trash of the rich looking for waste plastic, glass bottles and cardboard they can sell for a handful of pesos.

It is back-breaking work for little reward, but a salvation for thousands in a country where one in eight city dwellers is unemployed, and the poverty rate approaches 40 percent. "This life is hard, but it is my only option to survive," Jesus Maria Perez, 52, told AFP. Men, women and even children: these waste pickers are the face of the misery that candidate after candidate for Sunday's first round of presidential elections has vowed to eradicate. Many, Perez included, are among the estimated 1.8 million migrants to have fled neighboring Venezuela in search of a better life in Colombia-Latin America's fourth-largest economy but one of the world's most unequal. In 2020, according to the Bogota city council, 25,000 of the capital's eight million inhabitants worked as informal rubbish recyclers. On average, each earns between 12,000 and 18,000 pesos (\$3 to \$4.50) daily for their efforts, according to Alvaro Nocua of the "Give Me Your Hand" association set up to help this community.

Human work horses

For Perez, who used to be a cook in Venezuela, it is a struggle to meet his daily goal of 40,000 pesos—about \$10 — to cover his one meal a day, a bed for the night and parking for his wooden cart. He has no horse

or donkey to pull the heavy burden: the Bogota municipality banned the practice eight years ago to combat animal abuse.

And as few can afford a self-propelled vehicle, it is people who do the heavy lifting, pulling their carts for kilometers every day. Whole families take part in the endeavor: the parents wading through the garbage as little ones wait in the cart, playing among the rubbish.

Bogota produces nearly 7,500 tons of waste every day, of which as much as 16 percent, municipal data shows, is recycled by people like Perez. Nearly 80 percent of Colombian households did not recycle or even separate their waste at home, according to 2019 figures.

A small income

Martha Munoz, 45, runs a small recycling station where she buys waste from the informal collectors before reselling it to one of 15 large centers in Bogota.

"Many of those who come here live on the street; this allows them to have a small income," she told AFP. Munoz said she raised her seven children with her recycling income—one is a lawyer today and another an engineer.

Perez's expectations are shorter term. On the day AFP met him, he had managed to earn only 25,000 pesos, just over half of what he needs. Subtracting the rent for his room in a filthy boarding house in a rough neighborhood and expenses for parking his cart, Perez is left with just 1,000 pesos—about a quarter of a US dollar. To make up the difference, he sets out again, this time to sell candy and bin bags on the street.

In this way, he collects enough to pay for his first and only meal of the day: a small sachet of rice with a bit of meat. According to the World Bank, Colombia is one of the countries with the highest income inequality and biggest informal labor markets in Latin America. Colombians go to the polls Sunday for elections in which deepening economic woes—which gave rise to deadly protests last year—are a key campaign issue. — AFP

citing similar concerns. The International Monetary Fund in March approved a \$1.4 billion aid package for the war-torn country, while the World Bank has approved a loan of \$350 million as part of a total package of more than \$700 million. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his government needs \$7 billion a month to keep its economy afloat. — AFP



INDIAN EMBASSY HOSTS CULTURAL SHOW TO MARK 'ODISHA DAY'

By Sajeev K Peter

Embassy of India, Kuwait hosted an impressive cultural show on Wednesday to celebrate 'Odisha Day', facilitating the Indian state of Odisha that is known for its rich tribal cultures and tradition. "Today, we are here to celebrate Odisha, a great state of India that needs no introduction. It is India's best kept secret which is like a hidden gem for all visitors to India. It is a gifted serene landscape with uncrowded and unspoiled beaches," Indian

Ambassador Sibi George said in his inaugural address.

Kuwait Odisha Association presented several unique cultural programs as part of the celebration including 'Vade Utkala Janai' song, Odissi/Kathak and a Bharatnatyam fusion, Odissi semi-classical dance, Sambalpuri folk dance, etc.

The ambassador said that Odisha is one of the fastest growing states of India with its economy registering a growth rate of 10.1 percent in the financial year 2021-22. He invited Kuwaiti business partners to explore Odisha, an

attractive destination for mineral-based industries and also include it in their tourism itinerary.

He said that the embassy has been organizing multiple events under the banner 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) and conducting various state facilitation events, focusing on different states of India. "We have been celebrating India in Kuwait with at least one major event being held every week, and at least one online display every day on our social media platforms. The various platforms that we created such as

Indian Business Network (IBN), Indian Cultural Network (ICN), Indian Professional Network (IPN) and Indian Readers Network (IRN) are all taking steady steps aimed at showcasing Indian culture, tourism and heritage. We are also deepening our economic engagement and highlighting our scientific achievements," he said.

The ambassador lauded the Indian associations and groups in Kuwait for wholeheartedly participating in these events and organizing them. "Our Three Ts program to enhance our engagement

in trade, technology and tourism is yielding positive results," he pointed out.

During the event, a video presentation on Odisha focusing on its trade and tourism was made and a documentary on Odisha tourism was shown to the invitees. The ambassador distributed medals to winners of various sports activities organized by the Kuwait Odisha Association. The event witnessed enthusiastic response with people from different walks of life in Kuwait participating virtually as well as physically.



In this file photo singer & songwriter Don McLean performs at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee.—AFP

Country music stars distance themselves from NRA after school massacre

Country music has long been closely linked to America's pro-gun lobby, but several stars have distanced themselves from the National Rifle Association following the mass shooting at a Texas school. At least five country musicians, including "God Bless the USA" performer Lee Greenwood, pulled out of the NRA's annual convention that opened Friday in Texas. "American Pie" singer-songwriter Don McLean also withdrew.

Their initial billing highlights the close links between country music and the gun-supporting right in the United States, but experts say their withdrawal is indicative of shifting attitudes. McLean, 76, said it would be "disrespectful and hurtful" to perform at the convention's "Grand Ole Night of Freedom" concert scheduled for Saturday after 19 students and two teachers were killed at an elementary school in the small town of Uvalde.

Greenwood, whose patriotic signature song regularly rings out at Donald Trump rallies, said he canceled "out of respect" for those mourning, while Larry Gatlin said he couldn't perform "in good conscience." T. Graham Brown and Larry Stewart, lead singer of country band Restless Heart, also withdrew, according to statements carried by USA Today.

'Not monolithic'

Conjuring up images of stetson hats, cowboy boots and the Stars and Stripes flag, country has traditionally been the favorite music of conservative white Americans. Its fan base is predominantly white, with roots in the largely Republican southern US states. "Country music is not monolithic by any means," Professor Mark Brewer, who teaches a class on music and American politics at the University of Maine, told AFP. "But I think it's safe to say that the predominant themes over the years have been more conservative, maybe with a hint of libertarian populism mixed in."

Brewer says there have been "long-standing connections" between country music, conservative politics, and gun culture. One of the reasons is geography. "There's a big regional overlap. Country music has its origins in the American south and southern American politics have always been conservative. "The United States as a whole has a pretty prevalent gun culture, but it's even

more pronounced in the south," he added. Professor Joel Schwindt, who teaches country music history at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, said the genre was "very specifically marketed" to white America from the start. Adding to its appeal amongst white working class groups was a "firm support for the military."

2017 Las Vegas shooting

Unlike Hollywood and the US pop music industry, which lean left, country music has plenty of conservative artists. The musicians who withdrew from the NRA convention were careful not to criticize the gun body in their statements.

Stewart praised it as a "great organization" as he defended the US constitution's famous Second Amendment right to bear arms. Numerous country musicians have called for more gun regulations though, including Eric Church, Jason Isbell, Maren Morris and Kacey Musgraves.

Several spoke out after a man opened fire from his hotel on a Las Vegas country music festival in 2017, killing 60 people in the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history. Rosanne Cash, singer-songwriter and daughter of late country musician Johnny Cash, wrote an Op-Ed in the New York Times later that year calling on country musicians to stand up to the NRA.

"I think we've had more genuinely progressive stands in the last decade than we've probably ever had before," including on LGBTQ issues, said Brewer. Although there are no conclusive studies, he thinks this might be because younger performers tend to be more progressive, as are the fans they are trying to attract.

Schwindt notes that while country music's fan base is primarily white, "regular listenership among non-white listeners, Black listeners and Hispanic listeners in particular, has grown pretty significantly over the past 10 to 20 years." Could that lead to more country stars taking progressive stances in the future? "It's something we're seeing more of," said Brewer. "I don't know if I'd say that's the dominant position still by any means. But it's becoming more and more visible," he added. — AFP

ABBA superfans flock to avatar show in London

Glammed up in satin knickerbockers, sequins and platform boots, ABBA fans streamed into a concert hall in east London Friday for the opening night of "ABBA Voyage", the Swedish supergroup's digital avatar show. Many had crossed continents and had bought tickets for multiple nights. "I've been a fan since 1975," said one woman, Roxanne Dixon, who wore sparkly "A" and "B" earrings, a gold-trimmed white satin tunic and gold boots. "I came from Australia just for this." "We came all the way from America and it was worth it," said Caleb Graham, 33, from Florida, he and his partner wearing matching black ABBA T-shirts.

The concert show at a purpose-built 3,000-seat theatre features digital avatars, or "ABBAverse" performing hits from the 1970s and 1980s as well as songs released last year, when the septuagenarian former bandmates announced they had reunited to record a new album. After an invitation-only premiere Thursday-attended by Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia-Friday was the first chance for ordinary fans to experience the hi-tech show. Ages varied from children to people old enough to remember ABBA first time round. "I just think it's incredible how, you know, ABBA draws people of all different walks of life together, all different ages," said Jordan Charlesworth, 27, a public health agency staff member wearing a sequined one-piece. "It's close to the soundtrack of your life, isn't it, when you get to 56," said Sarah Armstrong in swirly turquoise trousers, who had come with her sister and daughter.



This file photo taken on February 9, 1974 in Stockholm shows the Swedish pop group ABBA with its members (from left to right) 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

The ambitious show is a hugely expensive project, with The Times reporting that ABBA need to recoup £140 million (\$177 million, 165 million euros) to cover costs. Band member Bjorn Ulvaeus, 77, told AFP ahead of the premiere: "I know that this is one of the most daring projects that anyone has done in the music industry, ever."

'Jaw-dropping'

Concert-goers see a 90-minute show, with a dozen live musicians on stage backing up the avatars. It is set to run seven days a week until early October. The avatars are the product of a years-long project, designed in partnership with a special effects company founded by "Star Wars" creator George Lucas. Critics praised them after previous shows "resur-

recting" dead performers have been slammed as unrealistic and creepy. This time, there was "nothing ghoulish," wrote The Times.

The Guardian said the digital effects were a "triumph" and "the effect is genuinely jaw-dropping". Fans said they felt they had watched a live show. "It was amazing, so immersive, I really felt like they were there," said Dawn Waugh, 63, who was attending with her 26-year-old daughter. "It was the most wonderful feeling of being back in time," said another fan, Stan Papoulias, 56, originally from Greece. "I've been an ABBA fan for 45 years and I never thought I would see them in the flesh-or something like that." — AFP

Blockbuster Depp vs Heard defamation case goes to the jury

A jury began deliberations on Friday in the blockbuster defamation case between Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard after a six-week trial featuring blistering mutual accusations of domestic abuse. The seven-person jury met for about two hours after lawyers delivered closing arguments in the case heard in Fairfax, Virginia, near the US capital. The jury, which is considering both Depp's defamation claim against Heard and her counterclaim against him, will resume deliberations on Tuesday after the holiday weekend.

Elaine Bredehoff, an attorney for Heard, said the defamation suit filed against the "Aquaman" star by Depp and a campaign of "global humiliation" has made her life "pure hell." "It has destroyed her life. This has consumed her. She's getting death threats," Bredehoff told the jury. Benjamin Chew, one of Depp's lawyers, countered that while the 58-year-old "Pirates of the Caribbean" star may not be a "saint" and has struggled with drugs and alcohol, "he is not a violent abuser."

"He did not and does not deserve to have his life, his legacy destroyed by a vicious lie," Chew said. "Miss Heard's attempt to paint herself as a heroic survivor, an innocent survivor, and Mr Depp as a terrifying abuser, are utterly false. "We ask you, we implore you, to give him



Actor Johnny Depp gestures to spectators in court after closing arguments at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP photos

his name, his reputation and his career back," he told the jury. Bredehoff said any damage to Depp's career was self-inflicted. "Hold this man responsible," she told the jury. "He has never accepted responsibility for anything in his life. "He's blamed everybody in the world-his agent, his manager, his lawyer, Amber, his friends, everybody." Depp's lawyer Chew meanwhile referenced the #MeToo movement but said "it's for true survivors of abuse, not Miss Heard." "Nobody has come out of the woodwork to say 'me too.' This is the unique and singular 'me too' case where there's not a single 'me too.'" Camille Vasquez, another of Depp's attorneys, told the jury the evidence has "shown that Miss Heard is the abuser." "She was violent, she was abusive and she was cruel," Vasquez said.

'Monster'

Depp filed suit against Heard over an op-ed she wrote for The Washington Post in December 2018 in which she



Actor Amber Heard hugs her attorney Elaine Bredehoff after closing arguments at the Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse in Fairfax, Virginia.

described herself as a "public figure representing domestic abuse." The Texas-born Heard did not name Depp in the piece, but he sued her for implying he was a domestic abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. The 36-year-old Heard countersued for \$100 million, claiming that she suffered "rampant physical violence and abuse" at his hands.

Dozens of witnesses testified during the trial, including bodyguards, Hollywood executives, agents, entertainment industry experts, doctors, friends and relatives. Depp and Heard each spent days on the witness stand during the televised trial, attended by hundreds of fans of the "Pirates" star and accompanied by a #JusticeForJohnnyDepp campaign on social media. Video and audio recordings of heated, profanity-laced arguments between the couple were played for the jury, which was also shown photographs of injuries allegedly suffered by Heard during their volatile relationship. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Vampires gather in the grounds of Whitby Abbey during a Guinness world record attempt to gather the largest number of vampires together in one place, in Whitby, north-east England. — AFP photos



‘Fang-tastic’: Dracula fans in UK set new world record

Author Bram Stoker only had one bloodthirsty creature of the undead in mind when a visit to the seaside Yorkshire town of Whitby inspired “Dracula”. But to mark the 125th anniversary of the chilling book’s publication, 1,369 people have gathered to break the world record for the largest crowd of vampires. They needed to stand together

in the same place for five minutes to break the Guinness record, which previously stood at 1,039 people set at a 2011 event in the US state of Virginia.

Costume requirements were strict: attendees had to wear black shoes, black trousers or dress, a waistcoat, shirt, black cape or “collared overcoat” and, of course, fangs. “We’d like to say a

BIG thank you to everyone who has come along to Whitby Abbey to help make this happen—you all looked fang-tastic!” organizers English Heritage tweeted after the stunt on Thursday evening. The novel was first published in 1897, seven years after Stoker visited the picturesque seaside town in northern England and took creative inspiration

from the Gothic surroundings of its 11th century abbey. The Irish author found the name Dracula in the local library, in a book about a 15th-century prince in present-day Romania who was said to have impaled his enemies on wooden stakes. —AFP



‘Goodfellas’ actor Ray Liotta dead at 67

Actor Ray Liotta, who starred in Martin Scorsese’s gangster classic “Goodfellas,” has died suddenly in the Dominican Republic, officials and police said Thursday. He was 67. Liotta, whose blistering turn as real-life mobster Henry Hill in Scorsese’s crime masterpiece won universal admiration, was shooting a new film in the country when he died in his sleep. Police said emergency services were called early Thursday morning to a hotel in Santo Domingo where they found Liotta already dead.



In this file photo actor Ray Liotta arrives for the world premiere of Disney’s “Muppets Most Wanted,” at El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, California.

The actor’s publicist in Los Angeles, Jennifer Allen, confirmed his death, saying there were no suspicious circumstances. Allen said he had been working on a movie called “Dangerous Waters.” Liotta became a household name in 1990 when he was cast alongside Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci in what is widely considered one of the greatest films of the 20th century.

“Goodfellas” won one Oscar, and was nominated for five others. Scenes from the movie continue to resonate as cultural touchstones more than three decades later. A year before “Goodfellas,” Liotta had played baseball star “Shoeless Joe” Jackson in beloved sports movie “Field of Dreams,” opposite Kevin Costner. The film was nominated for three Oscars, including best picture.

‘A gentle man’

News of Liotta’s death sparked a flood of tributes from colleagues and contemporaries, with “Goodfellas” co-star Lorraine Bracco, who played on-screen wife Karen, saying she was “utterly shattered to hear this terrible news.” “I can be anywhere in the world & people will come up & tell me their favorite movie is Goodfellas,” she tweeted. “Then they always ask what was the best part of making that movie. My response has always been the same... Ray Liotta.” Actress Jamie Lee Curtis, who worked with Liotta on “Dominick and Eugene,” tweeted: “His work as an actor showed his complexity as a human being. A gentle man. So sad to hear.”

Jennifer Lopez, who starred opposite Liotta in the television series “Shades of Blue,” said he was “the epitome of a

tough guy who was all mushy on the inside.” “Like a raw nerve, he was so accessible and so in touch in his acting. We lost a great today ... RIP RAY ... it’s so sad to lose you what seems way to soon.” Seth Rogen, who was cast alongside Liotta in black comedy “Observe and Report” called him “a true legend of immense skill and grace... a lovely, talented and hilarious person.” Despite branching out to show the breadth of his talent, Liotta had recently returned to the world of mob films, with roles in Steven Soderbergh’s “No Sudden Move” and 2021’s “The Many Saints of Newark.”

Alessandro Nivola, who played alongside Liotta in “The Many Saints of Newark,” a prequel to hit TV series “The Sopranos,” said his co-star’s death had come “too soon.” “I feel so lucky to have squared off against this legend in one of his final roles,” he wrote on Twitter.



In this file photo US actor Ray Liotta jokes with photographers before the screening of his film “Cop Land” directed by US director James Mangold at the Deauville festival of American films. — AFP photos

Depeche Mode keyboardist Andy Fletcher dies

Andrew Fletcher, a founding member of the British electronic band Depeche Mode, had died aged 60, the band announced Thursday. “We are shocked and filled with overwhelming sadness with the untimely passing of our dear friend, family member, and bandmate Andy ‘Fletch’ Fletcher,” it said on Twitter. “Fletch had a true heart of gold and was always there when you needed support, a lively conversation, a good laugh, or a cold pint.”



In this file photo singer of rock band Depeche Mode Andrew Fletcher poses during a press conference to promote their new album “Spirit” in Milan. — AFP

Born in 1961 in Nottingham, Fletcher was a keyboardist and one of the founders of electronic pioneers Depeche Mode. The band have sold more than 100 million albums since they started up in 1980, winning over a global audience with hits like “Personal Jesus” or “Just Can’t Get Enough”.

Depeche Mode triumphed with a string of hits in the 1980s and early 1990s, at first becoming synonymous with danceable synthpop but then gradually adopting a darker sound. Fletcher was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame along with the other members of Depeche Mode in 2020. The band’s last studio album “Spirit” came out in 2017. In an interview with AFP ahead of its release, its members said they were proud to have attracted listeners of other genres, including rock fans who would have rarely stepped into a dance club. —AFP

Sudan women’s activist wins human rights prize

Sudanese women’s activist Amira Osman Hamed has won a Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk, the organisation announced Friday. The activist and engineer, now in her forties, has been advocating for Sudanese women for two decades, and was detained this year in a crackdown following the country’s latest coup.

She was among defenders from Afghanistan, Belarus, Zimbabwe and Mexico who also received the 2022 award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk. Osman “never deterred from her mission,” Dublin-based Front Line Defenders said in its awards announcement, “consistently (advocating) for democracy, human rights, and women’s rights.” After first being charged for wearing trousers in 2002, she drew international support in 2013 when she was detained and threatened with flogging for refusing to wear a headscarf.

Both charges fell under morality laws



This file photo shows Sudanese Amira Osman Hamed speaking with an AFP journalist during an interview in Khartoum. — AFP

during the rule of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir who took power in an Islamist-backed coup. Osman told AFP at the time that the morality laws had “changed Sudanese women from victims to criminals” and targeted “the dignity of Sudanese people.” In 2009 she established “No to Women Oppression”, an initiative to advocate against the much-derided Public Order Law. It was finally repealed in 2019 after Bashir’s ouster following a mass uprising.

Women were at the forefront of protests that toppled Bashir, and hopes were high for a more liberal Sudan as restrictions were removed that had stifled their actions and public lives. But many fear for the hard-won liberties gained since his ouster, after the October coup led by army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan derailed a fragile transition to civilian rule. A crackdown on civilian pro-democracy figures has followed, with at least 96 people killed in protests and hundreds detained. —AFP

Sports

Leclerc completes 'double top' for Ferrari in Monaco practice

Disgruntled Lewis Hamilton down in 12th

MONTE CARLO: Charles Leclerc completed a convincing 'double top' at his home Monaco Grand Prix on Friday, finishing second practice fastest ahead of his Ferrari team-mate Carlos Sainz. The 24-year-old Monegasque driver, who was also quickest in the opening session, clocked a best lap in one minute and 12.656 seconds to outpace the Spaniard by just 0.044 seconds, leaving the two Red Bulls of Sergio Perez and world champion Max Verstappen third and fourth, more than three-tenths adrift.

Lando Norris, still battling tonsillitis, was fifth for McLaren ahead of George Russell of Mercedes and Pierre Gasly, an impressive seventh for the Alpha Tauri team on a very warm afternoon in the Mediterranean principality. Two-time champion Fernando Alonso was eighth for Alpine ahead of four-time champion Sebastian Vettel of Aston Martin and Yuki Tsunoda in the second Alpha Tauri.

This left a disgruntled Lewis Hamilton down in

12th, behind Kevin Magnussen's Haas, in the second Mercedes, the seven-time champion struggling with continued bouncing as he sought a set-up that would be comfortable and fast. The session was interrupted once by a red flag when Daniel Ricciardo crashed in the Swimming Pool complex, emerging unscathed from his damaged McLaren.

After topping the times in the opening session, Leclerc was quickly back on the pace in his Ferrari, running on hard tyres, as he sought to become the first Monegasque to score points at home since Louis Chiron finished third in 1950 and regain the lead in this year's drivers' championship. After his third consecutive win in Spain last Sunday, Dutchman Verstappen leads on 110 points, six ahead of Leclerc. In a fast-switching contest between them, the Red Bulls and Ferraris were within two-tenths of a second of each other as Russell and the rest bumped in pursuit, Mercedes still searching for a successful set-up.

'Undrivable' Mercedes

In opening practice, Hamilton had complained of continued serious bouncing described by team chief Toto Wolff as making their car 'undrivable'. He explained it was not the same 'porpoising' as seen earlier this year, but a ride height problem. "Sometimes, it is a combination of aerodynamics and stiffness, but this is just due to the stiffness," he said, adding that Hamilton had requested padding for his elbows for the second session.

"We'll try to make it more enjoyable for them, but we want a fast car," he said. "If it's fast, we will make him all the pads he needs." Ricciardo delivered another example of the bumpy challenge the drivers faced after 14 minutes when he lost control of his McLaren and smacked into the barriers at the 'swimming pool' complex.

He was unhurt but his car suffered severe front damage, ending his participation. A seven-minute delay for the day's second red flag ensued before

Valtteri Bottas, back in action after earlier gearbox problems, led the field back in his Alfa Romeo. The pause offered all involved a chance to breathe and relax in the heat, with an air temperature of 30 degrees and the track at 53, before returning to an intense 'qualifying rehearsal' scrap. Leclerc continued to look dominant, trimming his lap to 1:12.656, three-tenths clear of an improved Perez before Sainz climbed back to second, two-tenths off the pace.

At this point, with 20 minutes to go, Ferrari were on top of Red Bull's challenge, while others scrambled and scraped. Russell clipped the barriers at Tabac, Norris did the same at Ste Devote and Hamilton locked up at Mirabeau - three Britons sliding in the heat before switching to longer high fuel-load running. Leclerc was notable for his absence with 12 minutes remaining, but he returned for the final six to complete a solid day's work by the 'scarlet Scuderia' who finished with a strong one-two.—AFP



Kuwait strengthens grip on top of medals table

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait strengthened its grip on top of the medals table at the Third Gulf Games as it is expected to add to grab more gold medal at the start of Fencing and Karate on Sunday. Meanwhile, UAE National Ice Hockey squad were proclaimed champions of the 3rd Gulf Games Kuwait 2022 on Friday evening.

The Saudi team won the silver medal and the host Kuwait team won the bronze medal. The game, (hosted by Kuwait Winter Games Club), saw the UAE team unbeaten in the three matches, thus securing nine points. The Green squad, of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, secured six points from

two wins and one loss. The Blue, of Kuwait, won bronze from one win and two losses, while Bahrain's team lost their three matches.

President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Association lauded the excellent organization of the Third Gulf Games. "We are proud to host various competitions. This strengthens relations between brothers," he said. He said organization is great and everyone is carrying out their role as they should - starting with state institutions including the ministries of Interior, health, and information, volunteers, civil defense, Public Authority for Sport and Kuwait Olympic Committee (KOC).

Tennis

Kuwait defeated Bahrain 3-0. In singles matches, Abdelhameed Mubarak defeated Ali Hassan Abdelredha 6-2/6-0 while Essa Qabazard defeated Yousuf Qaed 6-4/6-2. In the doubles, Qabazard and Bader Antar beat Ashraf Yousuf and Jaber Abdelaal 6-1/6-2. In the other competition, Qatar overpowered UAE 3-0. In the other matches, Rashed Nawaf defeated Abdelrahman



Al-Janahi 6-1/6-1; Mousa Shanan beat Ali Al-Janahib 6-3/6-3.

Handball

Kuwait Handball Team will face UAE in the fourth round on Sunday (7:00 pm), while Bahrain will face Saudi Arabia. The second round was played on Thursday - with an exciting draw between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia 26-26. Qatar defeated UAE 29-21 in the same round.

Women Padel

Kuwait Women Padel team won their third game against UAE. UAE's team won the first match (1-6/6-2/6-1); the second match was won by Kuwait 6-3/6-1 while the deciding match was won by Kuwait 6-3/5-7/6-4. In the other matches, Oman defeated Bahrain 2-1. Meanwhile, in the men's competitions Qatar defeated UAE 2-1, while Saudi Arabia defeated Bahrain 2-1.



Gulf Tennis Coordination Committee, officials meet

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Gulf Tennis Coordination Committee held its first meeting at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex with presidents of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia,

Bahrain along side with the representatives of UAE and Qatar associations. President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah welcomed those present and lauded the role of the coordination committee in developing the game and taking it further at the international level. The meeting discussed several scheduled events and championships at the Gulf and Arab levels.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber insisted that there should be an effective Gulf participation in the coming championships in order to achieve the maximum benefit for players of both genders. The meeting alluded to working on removing all obstacles tennis faces in GCC through focusing on the juniors as well as exchanging experiences.

McCullum aims to rid England of 'fear of failure'

LONDON: England's new Test coach Brendon McCullum hopes his outsider status as a New Zealander will help rid the under-performing team of their "fear of failure" after a dismal 15 months. The former Kiwi captain-appointed earlier this month has inherited an England side that sits rock bottom of the World Test Championship with just one win in 17 Tests.

England-also with a new captain in charge in Ben Stokes-face a tough start against New Zealand in the first of a three-match series at Lord's, beginning next Thursday. They then play India in a single Test after the fifth match of last year's series was called off due to a coronavirus outbreak, before a series against South Africa. The 40-year-old McCullum believes the strain of playing so much cricket during stifling coronavirus restrictions was a major factor in England's poor run of form, which included a 4-0 Ashes drubbing.

"I think the bubbles were difficult for them (England)," McCullum told reporters at Lord's on Friday. "And when you lose one or two games that can snowball." "I see guys who are maybe just a little bit struck by the fear of failure rather than the possibility of success," added the former New Zealand skipper, who explained he wanted a relaxed approach that would strip players of unwanted "baggage". "If we can do that, talent can come to the fore."

'Might be terrible'

Many of England's best results in the past 25 years have come under overseas coaches, with Zimbabwe's

Asitha rips through Bangladesh; Lanka win Test series

DHAKA: Asitha Fernando finished with a career-best 6-51 as Sri Lanka thrashed hosts Bangladesh by 10 wickets in the second Test on Friday to win the series 1-0. The visitors bowled out Bangladesh for 169 runs in their second innings with the 24-year-old playing a starring role at Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. "We knew we needed a couple of wickets to go our way," said Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne. "The fast bowlers did the job for us, both in the first innings as well as the second."

Sri Lanka made 506 runs in the first innings after bowling out Bangladesh for 365. Oshada Fernando sealed the devastating win with an unbeaten 21 in three overs. Play had resumed on the fifth and final day with the hosts at a precarious 34-4 and Sri Lanka upped the pressure when Kasun Rajitha bowled Mushfiqur Rahim for 23 in the eighth over. Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das both hit fifties in a 110-run stand and held on through the first session with a mix of caution and aggression.

Shakib's counter-attack saw him hit Rajitha for three fours in one over, forcing Sri Lanka to widen their field set-up, while Liton played an anchor role after resuming on one overnight. Liton was given out caught behind off Rajitha on nine as he attempted to flick a ball going down the leg, but survived on review. It was the fourth caught behind decision overturned in the match, all given by West Indies umpire Joel Wilson. A counter-punching Shakib brought his 27th Test fifty in the last ball before lunch with a boundary off Dhananjaya de Silva, before Asitha drove the hosts' collapse after lunch.

He took the scalps of both Liton and Shakib soon after the break, claiming four of the last five wickets after dispatching openers Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Tamim Iqbal the previous day. Ramesh Mendis trapped Mosaddek Hossain for nine before Asitha wrapped up the Bangladesh innings with the wickets of Tajul Islam and Khaled Ahmed in successive deliveries. "A disappointing performance," said Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque. "They put us under pressure with the new ball, we'll have to handle it better next time," he added. Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews, who was unbeaten on 145 in the first innings, won the player of the series award. The first Test in Chittagong ended in a draw.—AFP

Duncan Fletcher and his compatriot Andy Flower chalking up notable successes. In white-ball cricket England's men won a maiden 50-over World Cup title in 2019 when Australia's Trevor Bayliss was in charge. "It's funny how that's worked out," said McCullum. "I've spoken to both Andy and also Trevor Bayliss in a little bit of depth about the challenge and what it entails, and both were pretty similar in their views that you've just got to try and take pressure away from the guys."

"Maybe that's the thing with being overseas, you can identify that and go about trying to bring that simplified method in, rather than maybe if you are English, you're probably a little bit more involved in the whole thing throughout." He added: "I don't know, maybe it's a coincidence, but we'll find out. I might be terrible." Pacemen James Anderson and Stuart Broad are in the squad announced for the first two New Zealand Tests after England's two most successful Test bowlers of all time were controversially left out of a recent series loss in the Caribbean.

Should McCullum, who lauded the pair's physical and mental toughness, see out his four-year contract, the likelihood is that both England greats will retire on his watch. The New Zealander said the two should think about how they want to leave the game. "If you do that and you understand your mortality as a cricketer, I think you're then really able to enjoy and really find that sweet spot in the final years of your career," he said. "But for now, we should enjoy the fact we've got them in our bowling unit."

As for coaching against New Zealand, the "staunch Kiwi" said the "enticing opportunity" of trying to revive England would ease any awkward emotions. "I've invested a lot of my life in trying to perform for New Zealand and I feel I left the camp in a better position than I took it over," he said. "And I'm very proud of that. "It'll be difficult, no doubt, looking across the New Zealand balcony at times, but that's just life." —AFP

Sports

Lyon dominate Toulon, claim European Challenge Cup title

Berdeu kicks the conversion despite deafening whistles

MARSEILLE: New Zealanders Jordan Taufua and Charles Ngatai were at the heart of a tough-as-teak Lyon defense that helped the Top 14 team to its first European title with a comprehensive 30-12 victory over Toulon in the Challenge Cup final on Friday. Lyon led 10-7 at half-time thanks to Baptiste Couilloud's try converted by Leo Berdeu, who also bagged a penalty. Baptiste Serin crossed for Toulon's try, Louis Carbonel hitting the extras.

Lyon turned the screw in the second-half, with a penalty try followed by a try for Pierre-Louis Barassi with Toulon's Aymeric Luc in the sinbin. Cheslin Kolbe crossed for a late consolation try, but by then Berdeu and Ngatai had each hit a penalty to condemn Toulon to a fourth Challenge Cup final defeat. Taufua said his team had been "after a performance we could be proud of and I thought we did that tonight. "Championships are won on defense and the boys stepped up." Toulon coach Franck Azema said Lyon had produced a "great performance". "Rugby is a pressure game and we yielded to the pressure.

"They were better in just about everything." Fans had barely got comfortable before Couilloud gathered a Ngatai rhip and streaked over, but referee Luke Pearce ruled the try out because of an earlier knock-on by Lyon captain Taufua. Taufua's barnstorming start to the match, however, got just desserts in the eighth minute when he intercepted a pass by Italy veteran Sergio Parisse and surged towards the Toulon tryline.

The defense managed to bring him down, but the former Samoa and New Zealand under-20 representative popped up a delicious offload that Couilloud took without breaking stride for the opening try. Berdeu kicked the conversion despite

the deafening whistles from the massed ranks of Toulon fans. Toulon reacted as they would have wanted, enjoying their first period of sustained pressure, Serin eventually crashing over from short range with the Lyon defense in tatters.

Impressive Ngatai

Carbonel booted the extras, but Berdeu restored Lyon's lead after Toulon were penalised for a high tackle. One-cap All Black centre Ngatai, who is due to join Leinster at the end of the season, seemingly went close as he ran on to his own grubber through, but referee Pearce wasn't even tempted to go to the television match official.

Toulon roared back up the pitch, the ball was worked wide to Fiji's Olympics sevens gold medalist Jiuta Wainiqolo and only a double tackle from Toby Arnold and Josua Tuisova prevented a try. Berdeu shanked a straightforward second penalty just before half-time, and if that was not bad enough, Lyon's teenage Georgian winger Davit Niniashvili had a try disallowed after his effort to go in under the posts saw his boot just nick the dead-ball line.

Toulon proceeded to suffer a shocking start to the second period, full-back Aymeric Luc yellow carded for a deliberate knock-on of an Arnold pass that would have seen Niniashvili in the clear: a situation that left the referee with no option but to also award a penalty try. Just a minute later, Tuisova broke up his right wing and fed Berdeu who put in a delicate grubber that Barassi gathered for Lyon's third try, the fly-half also converting.

Toulon spurned two shots at goal, opting instead for an attacking scrum, but Lyon responded with vigour to win their own penalty on the second set-



MARSEILLE: Lyon's French scrum-half Baptiste Couilloud (left) is tackled during the European Challenge Cup rugby union final match between Lyon Olympique Universitaire (LOU) and Rugby Club Toulonnais (RCT) on May 27, 2022. —AFP

piece. With the temperature at the Stade Velodrome, home to French Ligue 1 club Marseille, hovering around 29 degrees Celsius (84F), fatigue kicked in and a raft of replacements disrupted the rhythm of the game, played out in front of a new Challenge Cup record of 51,431 spectators.

With less than 20 minutes to go, Berdeu was

shown yellow for an illegal tackle, handing Toulon a possible route back into the match. But Ngatai, who also got a late yellow card, closed down options in midfield and English lock Joel Kpoku became increasingly conspicuous in close quarters, nullifying the threat from the likes of South African World Cup winner Kolbe. —AFP

Scheffler keeps share of PGA Colonial lead

LOS ANGELES: Top-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler fired a five-under par 65 to keep a share of the lead after Friday's second round of the US PGA Charles Schwab Challenge. Scheffler, chasing his fifth victory of the year, stood alongside fellow Americans Beau Hossler and Scott Stallings on nine-under 131 after 36 holes at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas.

After winning his first US PGA title at Phoenix in February, Scheffler won at Bay Hill and captured the WGC Match Play title in March then won his first major title at the Masters in April to overtake Spain's Jon Rahm as world number one. "I've definitely enjoyed the stuff that comes with winning majors and winning the other tournaments that I have," Scheffler said. "It has been a lot of fun."

Scheffler has not made a bogey in the first two rounds. "I love that stat," Scheffler said. "I kept the stress off myself for the most part." Scheffler missed the cut at last week's PGA Championship, giving him a much-needed break before a hometown event. "It has been busy," he said. "Definitely a good reset. I came home and did nothing on Saturday and had a relaxing practice on Sunday. It was definitely a good little break." Hot and windy weather is forecast for the weekend.

"I like it when the conditions are really hard and

so I'd rather it be very difficult than very easy," Scheffler said. "If you're playing really good golf, you can extend yourself and I'm really excited for the challenge this weekend." Scheffler opened with back-to-back birdie putts from about four feet and made a par save from just inside 10 feet at the par-4 seventh. He began the back nine with a birdie then holed a 24-foot birdie putt at the 12th and a 14-footer for birdie at the 17th to share the lead again after being among eight co-leaders following the first 18 holes.

"I worked really hard just improving my iron play and creating a lot of different shots for myself," Scheffler said. "This course is a lot about the approaches to the green and it looks like the hard work is paying off out here." Stallings fired a 64, the best round so far this week. He closed the front nine with a 20-foot birdie putt at the eighth and holeout from 37 feet at the ninth, then sank a birdie putt from just inside 29 feet at the 18th to share the lead.

"Had some good looks early," said Stallings. "I felt good on the greens, felt good with my stroke and nice to see them fall in there towards the second half of the round." Hossler holed birdie putts at the par-3 eighth from 24 feet and the par-3 13th from 21 feet to highlight his bogey-free 65. "Played a solid round," Hossler said. "Nothing too exciting. Hit a lot of greens and just made the round relatively stress free."

Thomas misses cut

Patrick Reed, the 2018 Masters champion, was fourth on 132 with fellow Americans Pat Perez and Chris Kirk sharing fifth on 133. Justin Thomas, who won his second major title at last week's PGA



TEXAS: Scottie Scheffler of the United States putts on the seventh green during the second round of the Charles Schwab Challenge at Colonial Country Club on May 27, 2022. —AFP

Championship, and fellow American Will Zalatoris, who lost at Southern Hills in a playoff, each missed the cut. Chile's Mito Pereira, who missed out on the PGA playoff after a 72nd-hole collapse on Sunday, fired a 66 to stand on 136. —AFP

Lyon's Challenge Cup win just rewards for Mignoni

MARSEILLE: Lyon scrum-half Baptiste Couilloud said his team's 30-12 European Challenge Cup victory over Toulon was a perfect send-off for coach Pierre Mignoni. Mignoni found himself in the unlikely position of coaching his squad in Marseille against a team he not only played for, but was also backs coach during their European Cup glory days when the likes of Jonny Wilkinson and Matt Giteau led Toulon to three consecutive titles. If that wasn't enough, he has also signed up to be director of rugby at Toulon next season working alongside current coach Franck Azema.

"We all wanted to do our best and win this title before Pierre left," Couilloud said, with Lyon never having won a continental title before. "We've put Lyon on the European rugby map!" Couilloud said Mignoni's departure had not really been discussed in the build-up to the match. "But yes, you've got to be honest and say it's the end of a cycle," the scrum-half said. "He's given so much to the club. For him and all the players he's helped improve, we wanted to get him this win."

"We're very happy with what we've done this year," he added. "Hopefully the best is yet to come." Lyon completely overpowered a misfiring Toulon side at Marseilles Stade Velodrome late Saturday, Couilloud simply saying: "We were present in all aspects of the game." Toulon coach Azema agreed: "They piled pressure on us and we just weren't able to counter them. We were systematically late and at the collision we weren't fierce enough."

"The notion of territory was essential at the beginning of the match. We managed a try to get back into the match... but one team was better than the other." That's competition. We still have one more match in the Top 14 against Racing next week. We'll relax, recuperate and go again. It's a new opportunity given to us." Azema added: "When you lose, it's frustrating. It's going to go away, otherwise don't do competitive sport."

"You have to accept it. It's going to be rough tonight, but we will improve and we have to motivate ourselves once again." Toulon skipper Charles Ollivier insisted it was not a case of the favourites being over-confident. "We just never got into the match," he said. "We got pushed back in attack and defense, our kicking game was below par and there was no sector of play where we dominated." —AFP

Debutants Gujarat face Rajasthan's red hot Buttler in IPL final

AHMEDABAD: Indian Premier League debutants Gujarat Titans will take on a Shane Warne-inspired Rajasthan Royals in Sunday's final, both teams eyeing a fairy tale victory after each enjoyed a dominant season run. Fourteen years ago, Warne led underdogs Rajasthan to glory in the marquee T20 tournament's inaugural season.

This year they face another set of first-timers in the final of a season that began just weeks after the Australian spin legend's shock death. "Shane Warne... is such an influential figure for the Rajasthan Royals and having led the team to success in that first season," said star batsman Jos Buttler. "We will miss him dearly, but we know he is looking down on us with a lot of pride." In-form Buttler led Rajasthan's fightback in the second qual-

ifier to knock out Royal Challengers Bangalore and reach their first IPL final after they won the inaugural edition in 2008.

He equalled Virat Kohli's record of four tons in an IPL season with 106 net out during Rajasthan's chase, and leads the season's batting chart with 824 runs. Gujarat skipper Hardik Pandya has established his side as the team to beat this year after topping the league table and storming into the final when they beat Rajasthan by seven wickets in the first play-off. "It's really going to be a tough challenge," Rajasthan head coach Kumar Sangakkara said of the looming showdown.

"(Pandya) is an exceptional player. He has led his side really well," the former Sri Lanka captain told reporters. "They are an exceptional team, highly skilled, really well settled, performing at peak consistency through this entire tournament." Gujarat will be playing at their home ground at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. The franchise, owned by venture fund CVC capital, have been a force to reckon with since their opening win over fellow newcomers Lucknow Super Giants and they were the first to book a play-off spot.

'Killer' Miller

South Africa's David Miller and Indian batsman Rahul Tewatia have been key to their success with the middle-order pair rescuing Gujarat out of tough spots. "Killer" Miller, as the left-handed hard hitter is known, made an unbeaten 68 to power Gujarat into the final early this week with a seven-wicket win in Kolkata. Tewatia made two sixes in the last two balls to snatch a one-run victory over Punjab Kings last month. Mohammed Shami has meanwhile led the team's dominating bowling charge with 19 wickets in 15 matches, ably assisted by Afghan spinner Rashid Khan.

Rashid not only claimed 18 wickets but also boosted the team's batting at crucial moments, including two sixes on the final two balls to pull off a sensational chase in the league stage, mirroring Tewatia's feat. "The more important thing was the balance that we had in the team really helped us to reach this position," said the champion leg-spinner. Everyone on the team had been certain of what role they were to play, he added. "There was no confusion in the players' mind." —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Khalidiya	24848075	Dasmah	22532265
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Kaifan	24849807	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Shamiya	24848913	Shaab	22518752
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Clinics		Shuwaikh	24814507	Qibla	22459381
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaizen center	25716707	Abdullah Salem	22549134	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Rawda	22517733	Nuzha	22526804	Mirqab	22456536
Adan Hospital	23940620	Adaliya	22517144	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764	Sharq	22465401
				Qadsiya	22515088	Salmiya	25746401

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PARIS: Poland's Iga Swiatek returns to Montenegro's Danka Kovinic during their women's singles match on day seven of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris on May 28, 2022. —AFP

Swiatek racks up 31st straight win

Medvedev and Tsitsipas eye last 16

PARIS: World number one Iga Swiatek racked up her 31st straight win to reach the French Open last 16 on Saturday as Daniil Medvedev and Stefanos Tsitsipas looked to make the second week and pounce on any slip-up by title favorites Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal. Swiatek, the 2020 champion in Paris, dropped serve three times against 95th-ranked Danka Kovinic of Montenegro before sealing a 6-3, 7-5 victory. Kovinic recovered from 1-4 down in the second set to lead 5-4 but the Pole steadied with a hold and a break before serving out for victory.

Swiatek will next face either Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen, making her debut in Paris, or France's Alize Cornet, playing in her 61st consecutive Grand Slam. "I wanted to play really aggressively but sometimes I felt I was hitting with too much power and it was hard to control," said Swiatek. "I needed to play with a little less risk and be more consistent. She did a pretty good job of defending and giving back at full speed." Swiatek's winning streak is the best on tour since Serena Williams's run of 34 successive victories in 2013.

11 set points wasted

In early action, Mackenzie McDonald, the 60th-ranked American, slipped to defeat to Italian 11th seed Jannik Sinner after managing to squander 11 set points in the second set. Sinner, a quarter-finalist in 2020, triumphed 6-3, 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 and will face seventh-seeded Andrey Rublev for a last eight spot. "I am not 100 percent but I found a solution," said the 20-year-old Sinner who played with strapping below his left knee.

Rublev, also a quarter-finalist two years ago, defeated Chile's Cristian Garin 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, 7-6 (13/11). Garin saved three match points in the fourth set while Rublev saved five set points in the tiebreak. Leolia Jeanjean's run ended when the 227th-ranked wildcard was defeated 6-1, 6-4 by Irina-Camelia Begu of Romania. Jeanjean, once one of France's greatest hopes before her career was derailed by a succession of knee injuries, had knocked out former world number one Karolina Pliskova in the second round.

'Shaking a little'

"In the end, I was shaking a little bit," admitted 63rd-ranked Begu who is in the fourth round for the first time since 2016. Begu goes on to face either 2021 semi-finalist Tamara Zidansek of Slovenia or US 11th seed Jessica Pegula for a place in the quarter-finals. Later Saturday, world number two Medvedev and 2021 runner-up Tsitsipas, who are seeded to meet in the semi-finals, also target the last 16. So far, Medvedev has looked the most likely to reach that stage, dropping just 16 games in two straight-sets wins. Fourth-ranked Tsitsipas, however, had to come back from two sets down to beat Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in the first round. Then he needed four hours and four sets to see off 134th-ranked qualifier Zdenek Kolar. Medvedev, a quarter-finalist at Roland Garros last year after four successive first round exits, takes on 28th seed Miomir Kecmanovic.

The 22-year-old Serb has had a solid clay season with a semi-final run in Munich and a quarter-final spot in Belgrade where he took Novak Djokovic to three sets. He also made the last eight in Rio and Santiago. Tsitsipas

faces unseeded Mikael Ymer of Sweden, the world number 95 who arrived at the tournament on a seven-match losing streak, stretching back to a semi-final defeat to Alexander Zverev in Montpellier in February.

However, Ymer has rediscovered his form in Paris, reaching the third round for a second successive season. The third round also throws up two battles of tennis past and tennis future. Holger Rune, just 19, faces 21-year-old Hugo Gaston. In stark contrast, 37-year-old Gilles Simon of France, playing on the tour for the final year, meets former US Open champion Marin Cilic, 33.

Now ranked 158, Simon, a former sixth-ranked player, has made the fourth round on three occasions having made his debut in 2005. He enjoys a career edge of 6-1 over 23rd-ranked Cilic with their first meeting having taken place at Wimbledon in 2007. Women's third seeded Paula Badosa, who made the quarter-finals in 2021, is up against Russian 29th seed Veronika Kudermetova. Badosa has won both the pair's meetings this year, including on the Madrid clay for the loss of just three games. —AFP

Butler powers Heat over Celtics to force game 7

NEW YORK: Jimmy Butler scored a career playoff high 47 points and the Miami Heat forced a winner-take-all showdown for an NBA Finals berth by defeating Boston 111-103 on Friday. The Heat leveled the best-of-seven Eastern Conference finals at 3-3 to set up a seventh-game clash with the Celtics on Sunday at Miami. "We know what we're capable of. We get to take it back to the crib and win game seven," Butler said. "We knew we were going to come in here and get one. We know we're going to win this next one too." Sunday's winner will face the Golden State Warriors in the NBA Finals that begin Thursday in San Francisco. Butler hit 16-of-29 shots from the floor, 4-of-8 from 3-point range, and all 11 of his free throws in 46 minutes while contributing nine rebounds, eight assists, four steals and a blocked shot. "Jimmy just brought his competitive will tonight," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And it was a will that would not let us lose." Such faith inspired the superb effort. Butler said.

"My team... my coaches got so much belief in me," Butler said. "They give me that confidence to just go out there and play basketball the right way and just hoop." Butler battled through a sore right knee to produce his fourth 40-point game of the playoffs and thanked a message from former Miami star guard Dwyane Wade for inspiring him. "He was telling me I could do this," Butler said. "Knee a little banged up but nobody cares. Go out there and continue to build your legacy and it meant the world to me." The Heat seek a second trip to the NBA Finals in three seasons, having lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in 2020. Miami last captured the NBA crown in 2013. The Celtics seek their first trip to the NBA Finals since losing the 2010 title to the Lakers. The Celtics haven't won the NBA crown since 2008. Jayson Tatum led Boston with 30 points while reserve Derrick White had 22 and Jaylen Brown added 20. "We're frustrated," White said. "Everybody is motivated to get on that plane and go down there and get the win."

Miami's Kyle Lowry added 18 points and 10 assists before fouling out. "Determination. You could see it in his face, in his demeanor, in his aura." Miami's Bam Adebayo said of Lowry. "Everybody wanted this win." The Heat



BOSTON: Robert Williams III #44 of the Boston Celtics dunks the ball against the Miami Heat during Game 6 of the 2022 NBA Playoffs Eastern Conference Finals on May 27, 2022. —AFP

seized a 13-point lead in the third quarter but the hosts battled back as White sank a right corner 3-pointer with 4:43 to play, capping a 10-2 Celtics run to give Boston a 97-94 lead. Butler's 3-point play with 2:06 remaining gave Miami a 102-99 lead and P.J. Tucker followed with a steal, a rebound and three free throws to give the Heat a 105-99 lead with 1:25 to play. Tatum hit a floater for Boston but Butler answered with a long jumper over a defender as the shot clock expired to stretch Miami's lead to 107-101. Tatum sank two free throws, but Brown was called for an offensive foul on Boston's next possession and the Heat made free throws down the stretch to seal the victory. "Overall sloppy basketball on both ends," Celtics coach Ime Udoka said. "We can't have that."

'Counted us out'

Tucker said the team took some inspiration from Golden State's Draymond Green saying the Warriors would face Boston in the final. "Everybody counted us out," Adebayo said. "Everybody thought the series was already over. That was all the motivation we needed." Butler had 14 points, five rebounds, four assists and two steals in the first quarter and finished with 21 first-half points. "He came out from jump and kind of put his imprint on the game," White said. "We'll watch the film and get better." "He got it rolling. We just had no answers for him," Brown added. "We will do a better job on Sunday." That won't be easy, Tucker warned. "He has those days where he's just not going to let us lose," Tucker said of Butler. "His aggression brings everything for everybody else." —AFP

Kenya's Okutoyi aiming to be 'Serena of Africa'

NAIROBI: It has been a long and painful path for Angella Okutoyi to reach the red clay courts of Roland Garros but the 18-year-old Kenyan is in no doubt about her ambition. "The French Open is the big stage," she told AFP. "My goal is to do better than I did in Australia... and if I can win the tournament why not?" High ambitions for a young woman who ranks 66 in the world junior rankings and who has overcome the tragedy of losing her mother when she was an infant. The signs are already encouraging after she became the first Kenyan girl to win a junior Grand Slam match earlier this year when she reached the third round of the Australian Open.

"Playing at the Grand Slam, which has always been a dream for me, was a good experience and a good lesson too," said Okutoyi who draws inspiration from Serena Williams, her childhood idol whose style of play she has adopted. Her coach Francis Rogoi says Okutoyi is gifted and that when she begins her Paris campaign, she will do so armed with a powerful backhand and an aggressive baseline game, just like 23-time Grand Slam winner Williams. "I hope she's successful in reaching the next level and see if we can have a Serena from Africa," Rogoi told AFP.

Tragedy

This could, of course, be just another story about another tennis wannabe but Okutoyi's tale is different to most. No privilege and private lessons; instead, infant tragedy, hard graft and the love of a devoted grandmother who Okutoyi refers to as 'The Drive'. Angella and twin sister Roselida were born on January 29, 2004. A bittersweet day as their mother died shortly after giving birth. The two baby girls were initially given up to an orphanage who put them up for adoption, at which point their grandmother Mary Ndong'a swooped in to raise them herself.

"We were about to be adopted-me and my sister-by different families. You wouldn't have known us, and maybe I wouldn't be playing this sport," said Okutoyi. "That's why I call her my 'Drive'. I treasure her a lot and that's why she's my 'Drive'," she said. The twins moved in



NAIROBI: Kenyan tennis prodigy, Angella Okutoyi is pictured during a training session in Nairobi. —AFP

with Ndong'a, now 56, who became, to all intents and purposes, their mother. They lived together in her tiny quarters at the Nairobi private school where she worked as a cleaner and before long Okutoyi found herself drawn to the school's tennis court.

Poor families

She was just four when she first picked up a racquet but, since then, she has immersed herself in the game, practicing long hours, five days a week, and has consequently enjoyed a meteoric rise through the ranks of Kenyan tennis, climbing to the top of Africa's junior circuit. Reaching the third round in Melbourne was a massive breakthrough for the high-school student and she is hoping to follow it with good performances in Paris and then at the junior tournament at Wimbledon.

There will also be pressure. This is her last year on the junior circuit and it will only get tougher if Okutoyi, currently ranked by the WTA at 1,554 in the world, progresses to the professional ranks next year. But she has already broken down one barrier with her performance in Melbourne and the teenager is aware that, like Williams, she too can serve as a role model to future tennis stars, especially those hailing from poor families like her own. She still lives with Mary in the workers' quarters where she was raised. Her humble beginnings and the influence and example of her grandmother have helped her stay grounded, she says, allowing her to manage the pressures that come with the territory. "If I put it too much (in my head), it will distract me, and I might think I am better than the rest," she said, adding: "I am the same person I was before Australia." —AFP