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Amir congratulates citizens, expatriates on national days

People come out in force to celebrate • Kuwait raises largest flag on Oman mountain



(Left) A 2,742-sq-m Kuwaiti flag is unfurled on the summit of Oman's Jebel Shams. (Right) A girl waves the national flag as jets fly over Kuwait Towers on Friday during celebrations of the country's 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day. — Photos by KUNA/Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated yesterday both citizens and expats on the 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day of Kuwait. HH the Amir expressed appreciation and delight over the fervor shown by people for the two dear occasions and their participation in celebrations and festivals held across the country.

HH the Amir said these celebrations embodied loyalty and allegiance to the dear homeland and the Kuwaiti family through love and unity. He lauded the great efforts and effective participations of the country's ministries, official bodies and NGOs in these celebrations. He recalled the fathers who founded the country and the key role of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, namely during the Iraqi invasion.

Continued on Page 2

Fighting in Kyiv as 198 Ukrainian civilians killed

KYIV: Ukrainian forces repulsed a Russian attack on Kyiv but "sabotage groups" infiltrated the capital, officials said yesterday, as Ukraine reported 198 civilian deaths, including children, following Russia's invasion. A defiant Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed his pro-Western country would never give in to the Kremlin even as Russia said it had fired cruise missiles at military targets.

With explosions echoing around Kyiv on the third day of Russia's assault, Zelensky

spoke in a video message, wearing olive green military-style clothing and looking tired but determined. "I am here. We will not lay down any weapons. We will defend our state, because our weapons are our truth," the 44-year-old said. "Our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children and we will protect all of this."

Ignoring warnings from the West, Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale invasion that the UN refugee agency said has forced almost 116,000 people to flee to neighboring countries. Tens of thousands more are estimated to be displaced within Ukraine, with many on the move to less affected western areas of the country.

Ukrainian Health Minister Viktor Lyashko said 198 civilians, including three children, had been killed in the conflict and

1,115 wounded. In Kyiv, residents took shelter in the subway system and in cellars and basements. "We thought something like this might happen, but we were hoping until the end that it wouldn't," Irina Butyak told AFP in one shelter. "We were hoping that common sense and common decency would prevail. Well, it didn't," the 38-year-old teacher said.

Tens of thousands of refugees streamed into nearby Poland. "We don't want to be running from country to country and asking for support, but support is really needed this time," one refugee, who only gave her first name, Anna, told AFP at the train station in the Polish border city of Przemysl.

In Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron warned that the world must brace for a long war.

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KYIV: Ukrainian service members are seen at the site of a fight with Russian raiding group yesterday morning. — AFP

Ukraine crisis poses dilemma for Gulf states

DUBAI: Choosing sides in Ukraine's crisis would have once been easy for Gulf states long protected by the US, but growing ties with Moscow are forcing them to strike a balance. As the world rushed to condemn the Russian invasion of its smaller neighbor, the wealthy Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have largely kept quiet.

Middle East experts say their reticence is understandable given what's at play - energy, money and security. "It is not only the economic ties that are growing, but also the security ties of these states with Moscow," said Anne Gadel, a Gulf expert and contributor to the French think-tank Institut Montaigne.

On Friday, the UAE abstained along with China and India from a vote at the US Security Council demanding Moscow withdraw its troops. Russia as expected vetoed the resolution co-written by the US and Albania while 11 of the council's 15 members voted for it. After the vote, Emirati state news agency WAM said the UAE and US foreign ministers spoke by phone to review "global developments". No mention was made of Ukraine.

Russia's foreign ministry meanwhile announced that the UAE and Russian foreign ministers would meet tomorrow in Moscow to discuss "further expanding multifaceted Russia-UAE relations". Hours before Russia unleashed its massive ground, sea and air assault against Ukraine on Thursday, the

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Arabs fear for wheat supplies after invasion

CAIRO: Russia's invasion of Ukraine could mean less bread on the table in Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere in the Arab world where millions already struggle to survive. The region is heavily dependent on wheat supplies from the two countries which are now at war, and any shortages of the staple food have potential to bring unrest.

If those supplies are disrupted, "the

Ukraine crisis could trigger renewed protests and instability" in several Middle East and North Africa countries, the Washington-based Middle East Institute said. The generals now ruling in Khartoum after an October coup have not forgotten: In 2019 one of their own, Field Marshall Omar Al-Bashir, Sudan's longtime autocrat, was toppled by his military under pressure from mass demonstrations triggered by a tripling of the bread price.

Sudan is already facing regular anti-coup protests but seems to have taken the initiative to avoid demonstrations over bread. When Russia's invasion began on Thursday, the

Continued on Page 2

Biden picks first black woman for Supreme Court

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden lauded "uniquely accomplished" Ketanji Brown Jackson Friday as he nominated her to be the first black woman in US history to serve on the Supreme Court. Jackson was appointed to the federal bench in 2013, and was backed by three Republican senators last year when she was elevated to the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, seen as a staging ground for aspiring Supreme Court justices.

"She steps up to fill Justice (Stephen

Breyer's place on the court with a uniquely accomplished and wide ranging background," Biden said as he officially unveiled his decision at a White House appearance with the 51-year-old jurist. "As it happens, I share a birthday with the first black woman ever to be appointed as a federal judge, the Honorable Constance Baker Motley," Jackson said as she accepted the nomination.

"We were born exactly 49 years to the day apart. Today, I proudly stand on Judge Motley's shoulders, sharing not only her birthday, but also her steadfast and courageous commitment to equal justice under law." With one liberal justice replacing another the announcement will not reshape the ideological make-up of the court - but it is a huge moment for Biden personally and politically. — AFP



HALAT, Lebanon: A banner in this coastal town north of Beirut reads in Arabic "Superior quality flour from (sisterly) Ukraine" yesterday. — AFP



WASHINGTON: Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, with US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, speaks after being nominated for the US Supreme Court at the White House on Friday. — AFP

Local

Kuwaitis proud of the sacrifices of their grandfathers: Info minister

Kuwait pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai celebrates national days



DUBAI: Kuwait pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai holds festive activities to mark the country's 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day. Photos from the event — KUNA



DUBAI: Kuwait's representative and Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamad Rouh El-Din said on Friday that the 61st National Day and 31st Liberation Day of Kuwait are two dear occasions for Kuwaitis. During a speech on the country's National Days at Dubai Expo 2020, the minister said that Kuwaitis expressed pride for the sacrifices of their fathers and grandfathers that formed a roadmap throughout Kuwait's history. Kuwait has been supporting interna-

currently taking place in Dubai. The theme of Expo 2020 is "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future", which focuses on three main facets: opportunity, mobility and sustainability. The delegation began by touring the vast UAE Pavilion, which is situated at the center of the exhibition area. In a design created by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, which is inspired by the image of a falcon in mid-flight, the UAE pavilion features six different zones over a three-story structure that showcases 28 moveable wings. This pavilion succeeded in highlighting the UAE's journey of progress while remaining true to the country's culture of tradition.



Hamad Rouh El-Din

The next visit by Dr Rouh El-Din was to another North African pavilion, Egypt. Designed by Egyptian architect Hazem Hamada, the Egypt Pavilion engaged its visitors with a high-end digital journey, who were also given the opportunity to view three original antique Pharaoh statues and the chance to enjoy a 3D experience through a time machine. This celebration of a new era of opportunity, while shedding light on the future of tourism, infrastructure and education, were the mainstays of the Egypt Pavilion's marriage of past and present.

Dr Rouh El-Din and the Kuwait delegation then paid a visit to the Bahrain Pavilion, which was designed by Swiss architect Christian Kerez. Inspired by traditional weavers, the architecture features a design that mimics weaving needles, joining together different sections to create the feeling of density. Live weaving stations also feature at the pavilion, showcasing various types of traditional embroidery, such as naqda, kurar and palm weaving. Innovation also features heavily at the Bahrain Pavilion.

The next stop made by Dr Rouh El-Din and his accompanying delegation was the GCC Pavilion. Linking its member states through their common history, religion and culture, the GCC Pavilion emphasizes a unified vision for a promising future. Relying heavily on symbolism, this pavilion highlights a landscaped area with six different groups of threads, which forge together to form aesthetic shadows across the landscape. Furthermore, at the center of the pavilion, a thousand golden threads merge, woven into a giant pendulum, representing one unified Arabian Gulf.

Moving onto another GCC country, Oman, Dr Rouh El-Din and the visiting delegation enjoyed an overview

of Omani progress where frankincense was the center of attention. The Oman Pavilion, designed by F&M Middle East, created a tribute to frankincense, showing visitors the ways that it has impacted medicine, food and cosmetics. Focusing on the mystical and futuristic, the Oman Pavilion also engaged its visitors with a cutting-edge virtual reality experience.

Next stop on Dr Rouh El-Din visit to Expo 2020 was the Jordan Pavilion, which was designed by Facts And Fiction GmbH. The Jordan Pavilion invited its visitors to experience a country where modernity meet tradition, where the high-tech meets the traditional and a young and vibrant society meets the cradle of culture. The pavilion also offers its visitors a platform to explore economic investment, market access and tourism, while showcasing Jordan's breathtaking landscapes.

Last stop for the day was the Qatar Pavilion, which was designed by architect Santiago Calatrava. Positioning itself as a forward-aspiring country, the Qatar Pavilion showcased the Gulf nation's diverse economy, ranging from arts to medicine to tourism, and various investment opportunities. Dr Rouh El-Din and the visiting delegation had the chance to explore the history and progress of Qatar as depicted in the pavilion's various displays. Initially suffering a delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers kept the original name of Expo 2020: the event site was subsequently launched on October 1, 2021, and will continue through March 31, 2022. To date, ten million visitors have toured the landmark cultural forum, with more than 65 million digital visitors partaking in online tours of the various pavilions. —KUNA and Agencies



Fighting in Kyiv as 198 Ukrainian...

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"This crisis will last, this war will last and all the crises that come with it will have lasting consequences," Macron said. "We must be prepared".

After speaking to Macron, Zelensky tweeted to thank "partners" for sending weapons and equipment. Several NATO members have sent weapons and ammunition to Ukraine in recent weeks, including Britain, the United States and ex-communist countries in eastern Europe. In the latest contribution from Washington, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced \$350 million in additional military equipment.

NATO has said it is deploying its rapid response force of 40,000 troops to eastern Europe for the first time, but the Western military alliance has made clear it will not send any troops to Ukraine. Russia meanwhile accused Ukraine of prolonging the conflict by refusing to take up its offer of negotiations in neigh-

boring Belarus, where Russia has stationed thousands of troops. Zelensky said his country had "derailed" the Russian plan of overthrowing him and urged Russians to pressure Putin into stopping the conflict.

In the early hours of Saturday, AFP reporters in Kyiv heard occasional blasts of what soldiers said were artillery and Grad missiles being fired in an area northwest of the city center. There were also loud explosions in the center. Emergency services said a high-rise apartment block was hit by shelling overnight, posting a picture that showed a hole covering at least five floors blasted into the side of the building.

Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said the building had been hit by a missile. "The enemy is trying to break into the city, in particular from Gostomel, Zhytomyr, where the aggressors are neutralized," Klitschko said, referring to two settlements to the northwest and west of the city. "Now in Kyiv there are, unfortunately, sabotage groups, there were several clashes," he said.

Hours later, AFP saw a destroyed Ukrainian military truck in the city center and a civilian volunteer digging a trench for soldiers. Ukrainian army tanks were also seen maneuvering all over the center but the streets were mostly empty and the center silent except for the sound of air raid sirens and birdsong. — AFP

Arabs fear for wheat supplies...

Continued from Page 1

second-highest figure in Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council was in Moscow to discuss trade ties.

Bread is already a luxury for millions in Yemen, where a seven-year war has pushed the country to the brink of famine. "Most people can barely afford the basic foods," and the war in Ukraine will only "make things worse", Walid Salah, 35, a civil servant in the rebel-held capital Sanaa, told AFP.

Russia is the world's top wheat exporter and Ukraine the fourth, according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture. Moscow's invasion pushed the wheat price far above its previous record high in European trading to 344 euros (\$384) a ton on Thursday. David Beasley, the World Food Program's executive director, said the Ukraine-Russia area provides half the agency's grains. The war, he said, "is going to have a dramatic impact".

WFP says 12.4 million people in conflict-ravaged Syria are also struggling with food insecurity. Before its civil war began in 2011, Syria produced enough wheat to feed its population but harvests then plunged and led to increased reliance on imports. The Damascus regime is a staunch ally of Moscow which backed it militarily during the war. — AFP

Dr Rouh El-Din tours Expo pavilions

tional peace and security, and maintaining the territories, out of its strong believe that humans have right to live in peace, he pointed out.

He referred, in this context, to the naming of Kuwait as a Humanitarian Center and the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad as a Humanitarian Leader. This is the continued path of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the minister stressed.

Kuwait's pavilion, whose visitors exceeded two millions, has offered an outstanding image on various fields to deliver certain messages and goals to the world, he stated.

Kuwait pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai opened on Friday festive activities to mark the country's 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day, which attracted, and were much admired by, considerable numbers of visitors. The opening day featured patriotic songs by Kuwait TV and Kuwait Radio bands; Kuwait Opera; folklore performances of Al-Dahha, Al-Ardha and Al-Fernis; and theatrical performance by Al-Tomoooh sport club for persons with special needs. The visitors were offered token gifts and flags as tokens of appreciation.

Kuwait pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai also organized a national parade to mark the national days. The parade, led by Kuwait National Guard, started from Al-Ghaf Avenue, Dubai, towards Kuwait pavilion.

Meanwhile, Dr Rouh El-Din and his accompanying delegation paid an extensive visit to Expo 2020 which is

Next, Dr Rouh El-Din and the delegation visited the Kuwait Pavilion. Designed by Italian architect Marco Pestalozza, the Kuwait Pavilion sheds light on a sustainable future and Kuwait City's urban development. Representing a gateway to the future, the Kuwait pavilion offers visitors an immersive virtual landscape experience, inviting visitors to become part of the exhibition. Also, the people and culture of Kuwait are highlighted, where music, song and poetry add to the overall experience.

A visit to the Saudi Arabia Pavilion followed. As the second-largest pavilion at Expo 2020, the Saudi Arabia Pavilion shed light on the Kingdom's people, natural landscapes, past, present and future. Designed by Seville-based Boris Michael Associates, the pavilion flaunts an innovative and sustainable design that is LEED Platinum certified. It offers visitors an opportunity to engage with renowned Saudi Arabian hospitality, an interactive floor highlights the Kingdom's creative scene, and the Business Park invites visitors to connect with investment partners from around the world.

Dr Rouh El-Din and the accompanying delegation then proceeded to visit the Morocco Pavilion, designed by architect Tarik Oualalou who is based in both Paris and Casablanca. The pavilion sheds light on a national that is rampant with talent and opportunity, and a constant source of inspiration and innovation. It offers an immersive experience, reflecting the streets of Moroccan medinas that are committed to a sustainable future for the planet.

meters) on the summit of Oman's Jebel Shams, one of the highest mountains in the Arab world. In a statement to KUNA yesterday, head of the voluntary team KFlag Fuad Qabazard said he was proud of raising the flag on the summit, which stands at 3,028 m above the ground. He dedicated this big achievement to the Kuwaiti leadership, government and people, while thanking the Omani authorities for facilitating all measures.

In Kuwait, people enjoyed and celebrated the National and Liberation Days with exhibitions and car parades after nearly two years of restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. The government has declared a week-long holiday (including the Israa and Meraj holiday), with public institutions to reopen on March 6. The entire Arabian Gulf Road was packed with cars on both days, with revelers wearing national colors and carrying national flags. Some even got out of their cars to dance to the tune of Kuwaiti patriotic songs. The ring roads were also full of people celebrating. — Agencies

withdrawal of the United States from the region", said Gadel. Politics are paramount too. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two US allies hosting American troops, have seen their ties with Washington change to a love-hate relationship over arms deals and rights issues.

The 2018 killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the kingdom's Istanbul consulate has strained relations with Riyadh, and the UAE has threatened to cancel a mega-deal for US-made F-35 jet fighters. "Russia is seen as an ideological ally while American human rights strings attached to their support are becoming ever more of an issue," said Andreas Krieg, Middle East expert and associate professor at King's College London. "There has been an integration of grand strategy between Moscow and Abu Dhabi when it comes to the region. Both are counter-revolutionary forces and were eager to contain political Islam."

Despite growing security cooperation with Russia, which is directly involved in the Syrian and Libyan conflicts, Krieg says most GCC states will "still put their security eggs into the US basket". But "they have started to diversify relations with American competitors and adversaries in other domains". — AFP

Amir congratulates citizens, expatriates...

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HH the Amir also recalled the honorable achievements made by past leaders for the country and citizens that will be eternal. In addition, HH the Amir remembered, with pride, the martyrs who sacrificed their souls and blood for the sake of the dear homeland, praying to Allah to bestow mercy upon their souls. The Amir thanked the GCC and Arab leaders for sharing Kuwait's celebrations of the national days. He prayed to Allah to protect the dear homeland and maintain its security, safety and prosperity. Meanwhile, Kuwait set a new Guinness world record for raising the largest Kuwaiti flag (2,742 square

Ukraine crisis poses dilemma...

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UAE had "stressed the depth of friendship" with Moscow. Gulf powerhouse Saudi Arabia has not reacted to the invasion, like the UAE, Bahrain and Oman. Kuwait and Qatar have only denounced the violence, stopping short of criticizing Moscow.

For more than seven decades, the United States has played a key role in the conflict-ravaged Middle East, serving in particular as a defender of the oil-rich Gulf monarchies against potential threats such as Iran. But in recent years, Washington began limiting its military engagements in the region, even as its closest allies Saudi Arabia and the UAE have come under attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels. Saudi oil giant Aramco's facilities were hit in 2019 by the Iran-aligned insurgents.

Gulf countries "understand that they need to diversify their alliances to compensate for the perceived

Local

Kuwait celebrates national days with dazzling displays, parades

Military vehicles and air force jets join shows



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis wave national flags and a military brass band performs as they celebrate the country's 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day in Kuwait City on Friday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: People enjoyed and celebrated Kuwait's National and Liberation Days (February 25-26) with exhibitions and car parades after nearly two years of restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. "Thank God we are now almost back to living normally. We can celebrate and can gather, unlike the last two years when everybody was sad because of too many health-related restrictions," said Dina, a Lebanese expat. She was at Arabian Gulf Road yesterday with her family to celebrate.

The government has declared a weeklong holiday (including the Israa and Meraj holiday), with public institutions to reopen on March 6. The entire Gulf Road was packed with cars on both days, with revelers wearing national colors and carrying national flags. Some even got out of their cars to dance to the tune of Kuwaiti patriotic songs. The ring roads were also full of people celebrating.

"Thank you Kuwait for keeping us safe during the pandemic," said Filipino expat Loren, who was enjoying her holiday at the seaside near Marina Mall in Salmiya. "For the past 10 years that I've been in this country, I feel very lucky to be here. I am very happy to have a stable job in Kuwait," said Loren, who is a

manager at one of the biggest retail stores in Kuwait.

Mohammad Sarfaraz, a taxi driver from Pakistan, said he never stops thanking Kuwait for its generosity. "I'd like to thank Kuwait for giving me an opportunity to be part of this society for the past 15 years. I was a driver of a Kuwaiti family in 2009, but when my boss passed away, they allowed me to work as taxi driver. They transferred by visa to a taxi company and also sponsored my family to visit Kuwait in 2015," he said. Sarfaraz was ferrying revelers at the Old Souq in Salmiya. "I have more opportunities to earn money in

this holiday, so I am working hard. Maybe after the holiday, I will take a short break too," he added.

Faye, an English teacher from the Philippines, visited a military exhibition at the foot of Kuwait Towers yesterday. "I saw several tanks, navy boats, various military vehicles and trucks, fire-fighting equipment, etc. I also enjoyed traditional

People rejoice as Kuwait moves past pandemic days



dances performed in front of visitors. People here are very accommodating. I was happy to take selfies and pictures of the displays," she added. Faye also celebrated the National and Liberation Days at school with her fellow teachers and students. "Such a celebration is a necessary to remind our youth, especially Kuwaitis, on the sacrifices of their forefathers in the past. It is always good to be reminded of the past," Faye added.



KUWAIT: Kuwaitis gather at an exhibition of military equipment as they celebrate the country's 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day.



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Palestinian ministers in Gaza celebrate Kuwait National Days

GAZA: A ministerial team for the reconstruction of the southern governorates in the Palestinian government celebrated yesterday Kuwait's National Day and the 31st Liberation Day anniversaries under the auspices of Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayeh. The ceremony, which was held at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, was attended by a number of governors of the southern governorates, charitable organizations, Palestinian universities academics, and representatives of those affected by the Zionist entity's war, and Palestinians with special needs.

Palestinian Minister of Public Works and Housing Mohammad Ziara told KUNA they "are telegraphing on behalf of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayeh and the Palestinian people to the State of Kuwait represented by His Highness Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and the Kuwaiti people, wishing them the best regards on the occasion of the national holidays." On another front in Ramallah, Al-Isra Specialized Hospital in Tulkarm City, north of the West Bank, organized a free-service day to citizens marking Kuwait's national days. Speaking to KUNA, Dr Wael Al-Saifi, hospital's public relations official, said the free services covered all sections at the hospital, in addition to some available medicine given to patients. Since its establishment, the facility has been affording up to 90 percent of treatment offered to orphan children and the poor; he added, noting that Kuwait has contributed greatly to the founding of the hospital. The free-medical day coinciding with marking Kuwait's national days is a moral gratitude to the State of Kuwait that adopts and backs the Palestinian cause in international arenas and on all levels, he pointed out. "We want to share Kuwait's celebrations of its national days," he said.

Meanwhile, scientific center charitable society, a Palestinian charitable society, held a ceremony, northwest of Jerusalem (Al-Quds City), on Kuwait's national days. —KUNA

News in brief

Arab Parliament speaker hails Kuwait democracy

CAIRO: Arab Parliament Speaker Adel Al-Asoomi on Friday hailed Kuwait's democratic development, which enhanced its regional and international position. In a statement, Speaker Al-Asoomi stated that these achievements came because of the wise policy of the country's leadership, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Al-Asoomi congratulated His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem on the 61st Independence Day and the 31st Liberation Day, wishing Kuwait, its leadership and its people prosperity and security. —KUNA

US congratulates Kuwait on National, Liberation days

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken congratulated on Friday Kuwait on its 61st National Day anniversary and 31st Liberation Day anniversary. "On behalf of the government of the United States of America, it is my distinct pleasure to extend to you and the Kuwaiti people congratulations on the occasion of your National and Liberation days, February 25 and 26, respectively," Blinken said in a statement. He affirmed "the United States holds our relationship with Kuwait in the highest regard and I am pleased that we have strengthened our ties even more over the past year." "It was a pleasure to visit you in Kuwait last July and to host you in Washington, D.C. last month for the fifth round of our US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue," he noted. "Thank you again for your generous support during the evacuation of vulnerable individuals from Afghanistan, your support saved lives," he added. "I look forward to our continued cooperation to build prosperity, peace and security in the region and around the world as we enter our seventh decade of enduring partnership," he remarked. "I wish the people of Kuwait best wishes and prosperity in the coming year." —KUNA

Kuwait oil price dips \$3.90 to \$96.05pb

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti oil price plummeted by \$3.90 to \$96.05 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared with \$99.95pb the day earlier, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In the world market, the Brent crude fell by \$1.15 to \$97.93pb and West Texas Intermediate went down by \$1.22 to \$91.59. —KUNA

Kuwait calls for global cooperation to secure fair vaccine distribution

Al-Otaibi pledges continuing and constructive efforts

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait has called for international cooperation to secure fair distribution of vaccines against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to all states. Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, the State of Kuwait Permanent Representative at the United Nations, pledged continuing and constructive efforts, in coordination with partners, for contributing to the international response to the pandemic.

"We are convinced that no one is safe from this virus and the discussion today is held two years after outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that has constituted the greatest challenge facing the world since World War II," said Ambassador Al-Otaibi, addressing a senior-level session held by the UN General Assembly on means of boosting comprehensive immunization against the virus worldwide. The pandemic has taken some six million lives, infected more than 400 million people throughout the world, inflicted horrific damage and caused massive repercussions in social, economic, health and political sectors.

It is still widely spread, claiming many lives and

mutating into various clusters such as Delta and Omicron renewing hazards of the virus and adding to pressure on health systems in many states, the Kuwaiti envoy said. Development of vaccines rapidly renewed hope for stemming its spread in a better manner. However, the mechanism of distributing the vaccines to the states was unjust, widening the gap between advanced and developing countries amid forecast expansion of poverty and longer lasting effects of the pandemic. Ambassador Al-Otaibi called coordinated efforts for international response to the pandemic where it might ensure just distribution of the vaccines and pave the way for global immunization. He also urged the international community to shoulder the humanitarian and ethical responsibility and aid the developing nations at this level.

At the national level, Kuwait has succeeded in immunizing 85 percent of its population and there has been increasing desire to get the booster jab, he said, also indicating at start of a vaccination campaign for children aged between five and 11. Abroad, Kuwait has made generous financial contributions



NEW YORK: Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks at the UN. —KUNA

to agencies tasked with combating the pandemic. He reaffirmed the necessity of aiding all countries in the fight against the communicable disease and attain the objective set by the World Health Organization: vaccinating 70 percent of the world's people by the middle of 2022. —AFP



Abdullah Al-Salem Center celebrates National Days

KUWAIT: Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center hosted festive activities on Friday evening to mark Kuwait's 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day, including laser displays and parkour performances. Kuwait parkour team, led by Ali Al-Shatti, will continue offering its impressive performances until February 28 in addition to the laser displays which were much admired by the public. —KUNA



Kuwaitis buy flag-colored jewelry



KUWAIT: As Kuwait celebrates its National and Liberation Days, many people love to buy gold and silver pieces, as well as precious stones beautifully crafted with the Kuwaiti flag colors and Kuwait's official logo or map. During these national celebrations, jewelry stores compete to present different beautiful styles, creating mentally-valuable pieces that bring joy, while they are also a safe deposit for the future. —KUNA



KUWAIT: A vehicle caught fire on Salmi Road yesterday. Fire force personnel from Jahra Vocational station rushed to the spot and put out the fire. No injuries were reported.





'We cannot go home':
First Ukrainian refugees
arrive in Germany

Cuban tobacco yield up in smoke amid fertilizer shortages

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FAYZABAD: Students attend a class in the Badakshan University after Afghanistan's main universities reopened yesterday.— AFP

Few women return to Afghan universities

Women students must wear a black abaya and hijab

KABUL: Afghanistan's main universities reopened yesterday six months after the Taliban returned to power, but only a trickle of women returned to now-segregated classes. Most secondary schools for girls and all public universities were shuttered following the Taliban's August 15 takeover, sparking fears women would be barred from education-as happened during the first rule of the hardline Islamists, from 1996-2001. The Taliban insist they will allow girls and women to be educated this time around-but only in segregated classes and according to an Islamic curriculum.

Some public tertiary institutions in the south of the country resumed last month, but yesterday Kabul University, the oldest and biggest with a student body of around 25,000 last year, re-opened without fanfare-and few students in attendance. Taliban guards refused journalists access to the sprawling campus and chased away media teams lingering near the entrance. AFP, however, spoke to some students away from the gates, who expressed mixed feelings after their first day back.

"I am happy that the university resumed... we want to continue our studies," said an English major who asked to be identified only as Basira. But she said there were "some difficulties"-including students being scolded by Taliban guards for bringing their mobile phones to class. "They did not behave well with us... they were rude," she said. Another English student, Maryam, said only seven women attended her class. "Before we were 56 students, boys and girls," she said.

There was also a shortage of lecturers, she said, adding: "Maybe because some have left the country." A similar picture emerged from campuses across the country, although no students returned to class at Panjshir University, in the heartland of a nascent resistance to the Taliban's rule. "I do not know

if they will come tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or not," said Professor Noor-ur-Rehman Afzali. Panjshir was the last province to fall to the Taliban last year, and Jaber Jibrin, a faculty head, said several classrooms destroyed in that fighting had still not been repaired. The Taliban have said previously that women students must wear a black abaya over their bodies and hijab on their heads, but stopped short of insisting on the all-covering burqa that was compulsory during their previous rule.

Several students, however, appeared dressed no differently yesterday than they would have before the Taliban takeover, with a simple shawl covering their heads. "I have never worn any hijab before... it's new for me," said Sohaila Rostami, a biology student in her last

semester at Bamiyam University. "I used to wear jeans and other normal clothes. It will be difficult for me to observe hijab," she told AFP. In Herat, the ancient Silk Road city near the Iranian border and once one of the Islamic world's most important intellectual centers, students also complained about a lack of tutors.

"Some of our professors have also left the country, but we are happy that the university gates are open," said Parisa Narwan, studying arts. Tens of thousands of Afghans fled the country as the Taliban stormed back to power-among them teachers and lecturers who had been vociferously critical of the hardline Islamist group. No country has yet recognized the new regime, which has imposed several restrictions on women-including banning them from many government jobs. In Kabul, student Haseenat said campus life for women was now very different to before. "We are told not to go out of our classes," she told AFP. "There is no cafeteria anymore... we are not allowed to go to the university's courtyard."— AFP



'We are not allowed to go to the university's courtyard'

Britain's William and Kate tweet Ukraine support

LONDON: Prince William and his wife Kate yesterday sent a personal message of support to "all of Ukraine's people" in a rare geopolitical intervention for senior members of Britain's royal family. The couple tweeted support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in a tweet signed off with their initials.

"In October 2020 we had the privilege to meet President Zelensky and the First Lady to learn of their hope and optimism for Ukraine's future," they said. "Today we stand with the President and all of Ukraine's people as they bravely fight for that future W & C." — AFP

Mothers and fathers protest to support Sudan's anti-coup youth

KHARTOUM: A demonstration of "mothers and fathers" took to the streets of the Sudanese capital Khartoum yesterday to support the young anti-coup protesters who have for months rallied against the military. "We are demonstrating today to tell our sons and daughters that they are not alone," Faiza Hussein, one of the protesters, told AFP. She added that they are also calling on the authorities to "stop killing our children".

At least 83 people have been killed and thousands injured in unrest that has gripped the country since an October 25 military coup led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, according to independent medics. "We are here to sup-

port the youth in their revolution, and to demand an end to the killings," said Hassan Ali, 63. A United Nations expert on Thursday urged Sudanese forces to stop firing live ammunition and tear gas canisters at protesters. "Firing live ammunition on the people is a huge violation against human rights," said UN expert Adama Dieng during a visit to Khartoum.

Sudanese authorities have said they arrested several police and soldiers who fired at demonstrators with Kalashnikov rifles, disobeying orders. The October coup derailed a power-sharing agreement between the army and civilians negotiated following the 2019 ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir.



KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters rally against the October military coup which has led to scores of arrests, in the capital Khartoum. — AFP

Regular protests have continued across the country, rejecting the ruling military authority and calling for justice for the more than 250 people killed since

Bashir was ousted. They have also called for the release of detained activists, who according to Dieng "have never met their lawyers".—AFP

Greeks protest at soaring cost of living

ATHENS: Thousands of Greeks yesterday joined union protests in several cities against a steep rise in the cost of living as the government vowed to boost emergency support for households. In Athens, police said some 10,000 demonstrators led by Communist-affiliated union PAME gathered outside parliament to protest spiking inflation and a new labor law increasing working hour flexibility. "We are a river of anger and outrage," said steel unionist Panagiotis Doukas. "We claim our right to a respectable life... we say a thunder-

ous 'no' to the anti-popular policies that have torn apart our lives," he said.

Greek inflation in January surged to 6.2 percent in an annual comparison amid fears Russia's invasion of Ukraine will further push up energy and food prices. According to official data, electricity prices in January jumped by 56 percent, fuel by 21.6 percent and natural gas by a whopping 156 percent. The cost of living "could on average increase by over two percent in 2022," Panagiotis Petrakis, a professor of economics at the University of Athens, told AFP.

The government has already spent 44 billion euros (\$50 billion) in supporting businesses and low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic. Late Friday, Finance Minister Christos Staikouras said Greece would conclude an early repayment of bailout

loans from the International Monetary Fund and use the interest rate savings "to support households and businesses". The last tranche of IMF loans extended to Greece during the 2010-2018 debt crisis, worth 1.85 billion euros, is to be repaid by April, a source with knowledge of the issue told AFP this week. Greece is aiming for 4.5-percent economic growth this year and expects additional revenue from the vital tourism industry. Tourism accounts for around a quarter of the Greek economy. Receipts in 2021 stood at over 10 billion euros.

But Greece is also saddled with an unemployment rate of around 13 percent, one of the highest in the eurozone, a legacy of the near-decade debt crisis. The pandemic struck just as Greece was beginning to recover from the crisis that saw it lose a quarter of

national output. In 2020, the Greek economy shrank nine percent. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Greece are estimated at 28.9 percent, just behind fellow EU laggards Bulgaria and Romania according to the Hellenic Anti-Poverty Network group.

The group found that in 2020, 44.6 percent of households struggled to pay rent or mortgage installments, while 16.7 percent had inadequate heating. According to Nikos Vettas, general director of the industry think-tank IOVE, the Greek government faces economic challenges despite a strong showing in tourism and exports in 2021. The main opposition Syriza party is demanding additional social welfare after criticizing the government for allocating six billion euros to a recent purchase of French warplanes and frigates.— AFP

International

Cuban tobacco yield up in smoke amid fertilizer shortages

Harvest falls from 32,000 tons to 25,800 and will likely reach 22,000 tons

CUBA: Yurisniel Cabrera, 35, is a fourth-generation tobacco farmer, eking out a meager living from the leaves used to make Cuba's famed cigars. Clients can fork out more than \$10 for a single cigar, but for his months of labor, Cabrera earned only a few hundred US dollars from last year's harvest. This year, the outlook is even bleaker. Sanctions-stricken and facing its worst economic crisis in nearly three decades, Cuba is running low on fertilizers and pesticides. The harvest "is not of a good enough quality," Cabrera sighed as he showed AFP around his crop amid the rounded hills dubbed mogotes that dot the fertile Vinales valley in western Cuba.

"It lacked fertilizer and pesticide," he said as he slipped a pile of leaves draped over his arm onto a "cuje," the wooden lathe used to dry the harvest in a rustic, wooden "tobacco house." Like other farmers in Pinar del Rio province, where 65 percent of Cuba's tobacco is produced, Cabrera sells 95 percent of his yield to the Tabacuba state agency. What remains is for private use.

State sets the price

In Cuba, the government provides pesticides and fertilizers to state-run cooperatives, and sets the price at which farmers can obtain them. Tabacuba determines the price paid for the farmers' tobacco, based on the quality of the leaves. "I have to buy all the product from them (the authori-

ties)," explained farmer Livan Aguiar, 49, from the settlement of San Juan and Martinez, near Vinales. "They give me the fertilizer, the fungicide... at the end of the harvest they charge me for everything," he said while cutting tobacco on the land he uses on a state usufruct. Like Cabrera, Aguiar is concerned about the impact the lack of fertilizer will have on his yield and income this season.

Tabacuba executive Pavel Noe Caseres explained that importing agricultural chemicals had been "complicated" this season, due to logistical bottlenecks caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and ongoing US sanctions. The harvest has fallen from 32,000 tons in 2017 to 25,800 in 2020 and will likely reach only 22,000 tons this season, he said. The impact would mainly be on domestic consumers, as the country has enough tobacco in store to produce export cigars for two years, added Caseres. Tobacco is Cuba's main agricultural export.

Cabrera and his family sowed 25,000 plants for the season that started last October and ends in May. From it, he expects to get little over 550 kilograms (about 1,200 pounds) of tobacco leaf—almost half of last year's yield. In 2021, he made just over 80,000 pesos—about \$3,320 at the official exchange rate but only about \$800 on the black market where most Cuban transactions take place. This year it will be even less. So Cabrera and his family will look to the corn and other foods they grow on the side for survival. Like his father,



VINALES: A farmer works at a tobacco plantation in Cuba. —AFP

grandfather and great-grandfather before him, Cabrera lovingly cures the tobacco leaves, once dried, in a special concoction that includes guava

leaf, honey and rum mixed into water. It is a long process, requiring mastery, for which he reaps little financial reward. —AFP

UN to agree on plan for 'historic' plastics treaty

NAIROBI: More than 100 nations convening in Nairobi next week are expected to take the first steps toward establishing a historic global treaty to tackle the plastic crisis afflicting the planet. Plastic has been found in Arctic sea ice, the bellies of whales and Earth's atmosphere, and governments have been under increasing pressure to unite in action against the global scourge. Negotiators are hammering out the framework for a legally binding plastic treaty that diplomats say is the most ambitious environmental pact since the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

"This is a big moment. This is one for the history books," Inger Andersen, head of the UN Environment Program (UNEP), told AFP this week. The exact scope of the treaty remains to be defined. There are competing proposals being drafted ahead of a three-day UN environment summit starting Monday in Nairobi. World leaders and environment ministers meeting in-person and virtually are expected to kickstart the treaty process by appointing a negotiating committee to finalize the policy details over the next two years.

But more than 50 countries, along with scientists, businesses and environment groups, have publicly called for tough new regulations on industry to curb the torrent of plastic entering the environment. This could include caps on the production of new plastic—which is made from oil and gas, and forecast to double by 2040 — redesigning products to make recycling easier or less harmful, and phasing out single-use items.

'Treaty with teeth'

Many countries, including major plastic producers like the United States and China, have expressed general support for a treaty, but stopped short of endorsing any specific measures. But there is broad consensus that countries acting alone cannot fix the problem, and a coordinated global response is needed. Since the 1950s, the rate of plastic production has grown faster than any other material, vastly outpacing national efforts to keep the environment clean. Today, approximately 300 million tons of plastic waste—equivalent to the weight of the human population—are produced every year.

Less than 10 percent is recycled, with most ending up in landfill or the oceans. By some estimates, a garbage truck's worth of plastic is dumped in the sea every minute, choking marine life and befouling coastlines around the globe. Microscopic particles of plastic can also enter the food chain, eventually joining the human diet. "It is not something that stops at the border. As we know from plastics in the ocean... your trash becomes my trash, and my trash becomes your trash," said Andersen.

In October, dozens of major corporations including Coca-Cola and Unilever said a plastics treaty with binding targets was "crucial to set a high common standard of action for all countries to abide by." Environment groups remain wary and want concrete targets and enforcement mechanisms enshrined in any treaty to ensure accountability. "We are looking at something that is legally binding and has consequences, and not just a treaty that people can sign onto... but doesn't have the teeth to bite back," said Erastus Ooko from Greenpeace Africa.

'Ready for change'

Some of the world's largest plastics manufacturers have also expressed support for a treaty, but say banning certain materials would create supply chain disruptions and hinder improvements to recycling. Environment groups have warned that plastic giants would try to steer talks in Nairobi away from firm commitments intended to push companies into making less plastic.

Two of the treaty proposals adopt a "source to sea" approach: targeting not just trash in oceans and landfill, but also pollution caused by manufacturing new plastic from fossil fuels. These proposals—one sponsored by Rwanda and Peru, and the other by Japan—have broad support and are being merged to reach consensus, said sources with close knowledge of the negotiations in Nairobi. A third proposal from India—which called for voluntary measures—does not have wide support. "I think the world is ready for a change in the way we relate to plastic," said Marco Lambertini, director general of WWF.—AFP

Deadly rains, floods hit Australia

SYDNEY: Torrential downpours lashed eastern Australia yesterday, raising deadly floodwaters to decades-long highs, swamping homes and sweeping away cars. Police in the eastern state of Queensland said they had found the body of a 37-year-old man, raising the flooding death toll to five people since early this week. At least one person is still missing. Images of southeast Queensland broadcast on Australian media showed homes and roads flooded, areas of land transformed into lakes and a large chunk of a concrete pier floating down the fast-running Brisbane River. The water snatched the car of a team of four emergency services workers who were heading to rescue a family from their flooded home overnight, said state police disaster coordinator Steve Gollschewski.

"The vehicle in which they were travelling was swept off the road into floodwaters. Three of our members were rescued. One of those members is deceased," Gollschewski told a news conference. Elsewhere, another man's body was found overnight. "In some

parts of southeast Queensland, this is the biggest event that they will see in a number of decades," said state police and emergency services minister Mark Ryan. "And the rain has not stopped—in fact, there are some parts where it is intensifying." The Queensland town of Gympie was facing a "hell of a lot of water" as the Mary River rose, Gympie Mayor Glen Hartwig was quoted as saying by national broadcaster ABC. In the town's Royal Hotel, "without a submarine or a snorkel, you will not be having a beer," Hartwig said. "It's floor-to-ceiling and over the roof in some areas."

'Dangerous'

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said the Mary River could rise above 21 meters (69 feet) at Gympie. It may exceed levels last seen there in February 1999, the bureau of meteorology said. As a precaution, Queensland would be issuing evacuation alerts, notably targeting about 700 residents in the Gympie area, the premier said. "If we don't do this now people will become isolated and trapped," she warned. The premier said her "heart goes out" to the volunteer emergency services worker, 62-year-old Merryl Dray, who died "trying to save her community". Emergency services had responded to more than 1,800 calls for help in 24 hours in southeast



AUSTRALIA: Jai Connors fishes in rising floodwater from the swollen Bremer river in front of home in West Ipswich, Australia's Queensland state yesterday. —AFP

Queensland, officials said.

Rainfall in some areas of the state had exceeded records going back decades, said senior Queensland meteorologist David Grant. He predicted further rain on Sunday as the weather system moved away more slowly than had been anticipated. "There is now going to be an increased risk of dangerous and life-threatening flash flooding, and even the potential for localized landslides," he told a news conference. Heavy rain

also hit the state capital Brisbane. "Essentially we've seen a month's worth of rainfall fall in one day for just Brisbane alone," Grant said. Rescuers undertook 132 rescues in swift water conditions in 24 hours, said Greg Leach, Queensland's commissioner for fire and emergency services. "Our catchments are completely saturated. Our rivers are rising. We have flash flooding. Now is not the time to be out in southeast Queensland if you don't have to be," Leach said.—AFP

Los Angeles counts its growing homeless population

LOS ANGELES: Tents, makeshift shelters and dilapidated campervans line the streets of Skid Row as Mike Murase and his team tally the exploding population of homeless people in Los Angeles. In the United States' second biggest city, the unhoused huddle by small fires, trying to keep warm on one of the coldest nights of the year. Homelessness is "an intractable, stubborn issue that the politicians and agency leaders have not had the will to try to solve," 75-year-old Murase tells AFP. Murase and his colleagues criss-cross the dozen-or-so roads they have been assigned as part of a three-day effort to count the number of people living on the streets.

Figures from 2020 — the last time the survey was carried out—showed Los Angeles city alone had more than 66,000 homeless people, up more than 13 percent from the year before. Everyone expects this year's number to be much higher. "During Covid there were so many jobs that were lost, you know, restaurant workers or laborers," says Murase. "A lot of these people were unable to pay rent for maybe two, three months. They get kicked out and they have no family or other relatives to go to and they end up on the street. I think there is a misconception that they're mostly criminals, or addicts, or mentally ill people." There's a large number of people with those conditions, but there are (also) families, children.

Pak-Afghan border still closed 2 days after deadly clash

CHAMAN, Pakistan: Hundreds of people were stranded yesterday at a key border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan, days after fighting between security forces left at least three dead.

Tourists shocked

Visitors to Los Angeles often express shock at the sheer number of people living on the streets of one of the wealthiest cities in the wealthiest state of the wealthiest nation on the planet. Tents and tarpaulin shelters clump next to Hollywood tourist spots, or string out along embankments next to the city's freeways. Rusting mobile homes with broken windows line the roads of Venice Beach, where multi-million dollar houses glower down at them. Obviously ill people wander through traffic, railing at unseen demons, or picking at their grimy clothes as they mutter into greasy beards. Others rummage through trash cans, or lie dazed on thoroughfares, the smell of urine a fug that pedestrians pick their way distastefully around. Some of the unhoused are new to the streets, victims of the pandemic economic crush, but others have been there for years.

"I've lived downtown for about like seven, eight years. And it's always been an issue seeing people on the street," says Kimberly Briggs, who is volunteering alongside Murase. "I just want to participate in something that helps bring resolution to this problem, because there is suffering on the streets and housing is a human right." The count is a federal government requirement that will help to determine grants to the local organizations trying to fix the unfixable.

Volunteers are instructed not to interact with people; rather they must simply document what they see. The survey Murase and Briggs are doing takes them between warehouses ripe with spices whose heady scents mingle with the smell of cannabis. Many of the streets appear deserted, though there is evidence of people: here, the carapace of a campervan; there, plastic sheets



LOS ANGELES: A homeless encampment is pictured on the streets of Los Angeles, California. —AFP

stretched between shopping carts to form a rudimentary tent.

A closer look at a darkened area reveals a human form lying against a brick wall, almost camouflaged by the head-to-toe blanket that covers him or her. Briggs carefully logs their presence in a special app on her phone, and the team walks on. An occasional "good evening" comes from some of those trying to settle in for the night, but most—like the man who sits blankly in his wheelchair—ignore the census-takers. Homelessness comes easy in the United States, where the welfare safety nets of other developed countries are largely absent, and the uninsured or under-insured can be a hospital bill away from a missing rent check and the resulting eviction. In California that problem is exacerbated by skyrocketing real estate prices that have pushed the average purchase price of a home to around \$700,000 — twice the national figure.—AFP

gious leaders has been formed to hold talks with the Taliban," he added. An Afghan official said talks so far had been fruitless. "They are trying to speak again... but if nothing happens then the issue will be discussed on a higher level," the Kandahar governor's spokesman, Mahmoud Azaam, told AFP.

An AFP reporter saw hundreds of people waiting at Chaman on the Pakistan side for the border to reopen. Thousands usually cross every day, including traders, Afghans seeking medical treatment in Pakistan, and people visiting relatives.—AFP

International

'We cannot go home': Ukrainian refugees arrive in Germany

'We have had about 75 Ukrainians today, but we're expecting more'

BERLIN: Svetlana Z. knew it was time to flee when she noticed that planes were no longer taking off or landing at the airport near their house in the north-eastern Ukrainian town of Kharkiv. "It was intuition. When the planes stopped flying, we knew it was the start of something bad," she told AFP, holding her two-and-a-half-year-old son close while the family of three waited for Berlin authorities to process their registration. That fateful day-Tuesday-they packed up a few bags of essentials, and piled into their "old car" and headed westwards.

Less than 48 hours later, Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. "There was no accommodation in the west, in Lviv," Svetlana said, so they kept driving, first crossing into Poland before finally arriving in Berlin on Friday. Asked why they did not remain in Poland which is closer to home, she burst into tears, saying: "We cannot go home." They are in constant contact with loved ones back in Ukraine, but "there is only bad news now".

Her family counts among dozens of first refugees arriving in Europe's biggest economy from Ukraine. Germany, which in 2015 took in more than a million migrants-many fleeing war in Syria and Iraq-has pledged to "provide massive help" should there be a large-scale influx in neighboring nations of Ukrainian refugees.

'Palpable bewilderment'

So far the numbers of new arrivals are small. "We have had about 75 Ukrainians today. But we're expecting far more in the coming days," Sascha Langenbach, spokesman for Berlin city's refugee affairs office, told AFP. "They haven't been so emotional such that we always see tears, but their bewilderment at what is happening in their home-

land is almost palpable," he said. At the Berlin reception centre, officials had readied 1,300 beds, with capacity to be doubled in the next days. Staffing has also been boosted with Ukrainian or Russian speakers. Small groups of people seeking aid were arriving, some accompanied by relatives or friends living in Berlin, others like Svetlana's family had found their way themselves.

The usual procedure is for officials to register the asylum seekers and then allocate them beds for the first few nights at the reception centre, before a more permanent home is found for them. But officials at the Berlin centre were advising Ukrainians who have relatives or friends in town to stay with them at least through the weekend as they expect the government to decide on a simplified asylum process for Ukrainians in the next days. The eased procedure should allow Ukrainian asylum seekers to find work quickly, or to head directly to other parts of Germany where they may have relatives, rather than be bound to remain in the city where they first file for asylum. "That would make it far easier for them to find their feet here," said Langenbach, adding that his office was expecting a decision "after the weekend".

'No one asked them'

Tattoo artist Dmitry Chevnev, 39, was among those who have opted to hold off from registering officially pending the decision. Chevnev had found himself stranded in the German capital. "I arrived two weeks ago to visit friends, and now I can't go home," he said. His wife and their four-year-old are in Russia visiting his mother-in-law, he said, adding that he had come to the registration centre to find out what he could do to bring them over. Stanislav Shalamai, 26, meanwhile was relieved to be given a bed for the night at the centre.



BERLIN: A Ukrainian couple with a young child, from the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, proceed to their temporary lodging at a refugee center in Berlin on Friday. —AFP

He had left Kyiv on February 15 as war had been predicted to begin around then. "I was nervous about that so I took my stuff and left." Carrying a duffelbag and a duvet, he took a bus from Kyiv to Warsaw before getting on another bus to Berlin. Shalamai said he still found it hard to believe the turn of events. "40 million Ukrainians live there, no one asked them what they want and some other

army just came and started shooting at people and killing people," he said.

Shalamai said he had asked his parents to flee with him, but "they said we were born here, we lived here all our life, and we just don't want to leave." "I don't know what is waiting for me here... I don't know what will be in Ukraine. I will have to see," Shalamai said. —AFP

'Crime and catastrophe': Russian stars say no to war

PARIS: A number of prominent Russians are echoing a chorus of global celebrities condemning Moscow's war on Ukraine, with some already beginning to suffer the consequences for defying the Kremlin line. When Russia annexed the Ukrainian Black Sea peninsula of Crimea in 2014, hundreds of artists signed a petition organized by the ministry of culture to back the move. But this time, the consensus appears more shaky: Since President Vladimir Putin launched war on Ukraine, big Russian cities have, unusually, become the scene of rare protests and police retaliating with mass arrests.

"Fear and pain. No to war," wrote Ivan Urgant, the usually smiley king of the late night TV chat shows in Russia on Instagram with an all-black picture. Russia's most popular rapper Oxxxymiron, in an angry video message released on his social media accounts, declared he was "against this war that Russia is unleashing against Ukraine". "I think it is a catastrophe and a crime," he said as he strode through his home city of Saint Petersburg. Russian comedian Maxim Galkin, also known for being the husband of the Soviet and Russian pop icon Alla Pugacheva wrote on Instagram: "How is all this possible? There cannot be a just war. No to war!".

'Black Thursday'

The concerns have spread to the media, with correspondent Elena Chernenko of the Kommersant daily—often regarded as a mouthpiece of the Russian foreign ministry—organizing an anti-war petition already signed by over 100 media colleagues. "History has seen many Black Thursdays. But today is darker than the others,"

Russia attack conjures up fears of new Europe 'iron curtain'

PARIS: Russia's attack on Ukraine could herald a Cold War revival in Europe with two blocs armed to the teeth pointing nuclear weapons at each other across an iron curtain, politicians and experts say. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's statement that Moscow's assault on his country was "the sound of a new iron curtain lowering" has resonated in Western halls of power where many had assumed that Europe's post-war division into hostile camps led by the US and Russia was consigned to the history books. From Hitler's defeat in 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Europe was divided into two camps with the dividing line running through Germany. The so-called iron curtain, a term coined by British wartime leader Winston Churchill, separated the western liberal, capitalist democracies from the communist countries in the east, each part of zones of influence that were mostly accepted by the other side.

'Shift borders'

But after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many of Moscow's former satellites turned to the West, joining NATO and the European Union if they could—like Poland and Romania—or at least liberalizing their economies and political systems, like Ukraine. Former German chancellor Angela Merkel, who grew up in communist east Germany, warned that Russian President Vladimir Putin is on a quest to roll back that trend and re-establish Moscow's sphere of influence. "Russia's war of aggression marks a profound turning point in European history after the end of the Cold War," Merkel said Friday.

'All kinds of repercussions'

Western experts have little doubt that victory in Ukraine would see Putin tightening his grip not just on Kyiv, but also on neighboring Belarus, which has already served as a launch pad for Russia's attack.

"The war in Ukraine will have all kinds of repercussions on the line that runs from Baltic to the Black Sea," said Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier at the Thomas More institute think tank. Belarus would "become a satellite again", he told AFP, and Russian pressure would grow on the Baltic countries and Poland. Scholz called on Germany's allies to prevent the conflict from

Russia's top ranked chess player, the chess grandmaster Yan Nepomniachtchi, wrote on Twitter. But such outspokenness is not without risks in today's Russia.

Urgant's show will not air as usual Friday due to scheduling changes prompted by the political situation, a spokesperson for his Channel One told the Interfax news agency. Meanwhile Chernenko wrote on Telegram that she had been expelled from the Russian foreign ministry correspondent pool on the grounds of a "lack of professionalism". She appealed to the ministry not to sanction other colleagues who signed the petition.

The prominent Russian voices, which mostly stop short of attacking Putin personally, join the more predictable chorus of international celebrities roundly condemning the Russian leader. "What most of us learned as kids on the playground: You don't stand by while a big kid beats up a little kid," wrote the novelist Stephen King.

US actor and director Sean Penn went a step further by travelling to Kyiv to make a documentary about the Russian invasion. "The director came to Kyiv specifically to record all the events taking place in Ukraine and as a documentary filmmaker to tell the world the truth about Russia's invasion of our country," said a post on the presidential office's Facebook page, showing a video of him meeting President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"I stand with Ukraine," wrote on Twitter the actor Ashton Kutcher, whose wife, the actress Mila Kunis, was born in the western Ukrainian city of Chernivtsi. Meanwhile, Russians who fail to distance themselves from Putin's attack on Ukraine are at risk of being ostracised from the Western arts world that once lionized them. Acclaimed Russian conductor Valery Gergiev, the chief of the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg and known for his warm ties with the Kremlin, was Thursday suddenly dropped from concerts where he was due to lead the Vienna Philharmonic at New York's Carnegie Hall.

Her successor, Olaf Scholz, echoed such concerns when he called the invasion of Ukraine "an attempt to forcibly shift borders within Europe".

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken accused Putin point-blank of wanting to "reconstitute the Soviet empire" or at least "reassert a sphere of influence". French President Emmanuel Macron also seemed to be looking at the Russian offensive's long-term impact when he described the war as a "turning point in the history of Europe and our country" with "deep and lasting consequences for our lives".

Russia taking "Ukraine off the map of nations", as French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian fears it will, would dramatically lengthen the border NATO countries share with Russia, with a big rise in potential flashpoints—and fewer buffers. Already the United States and other NATO members are sending reinforcements to the alliance's frontline. Once Washington stations the promised 7,000 extra soldiers, the US will have 90,000 troops in total deployed in Europe. Among European nations promising more efforts, France has said it would accelerate its troop deployment in Romania, while Italy is to send 3,400 soldiers to its most exposed NATO allies.



BARCELONA: Demonstrators hold a sign reading "Stop his war" during a protest against Russia's military operation in Ukraine yesterday. —AFP

Ex leaders and acting icon

And expressing sympathy for Moscow's motives also risks landing Western politicians in trouble. Former French prime minister Francois Fillon, already in hot water for joining the board of Russian petrochemical giant Sibur, faced the wrath of his own right-wing colleagues for saying the West's refusal to take into account Russian concerns on NATO expansion had "caused a dangerous confrontation that could have been avoided". German former chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, controversially chairman of the board of directors of Russian state oil giant Rosneft, condemned the war but also suggested there had been "mistakes-on both sides" made in the relationship between Russia and the West in recent years. Meanwhile, France is awaiting the reaction to the invasion of legendary actor Gerard Depardieu, who took Russian nationality in 2013 and is known for his friendship with Putin. Depardieu opened an Instagram account earlier this month with a picture of himself embracing Putin and said on French television earlier this month: "Leave Vladimir alone." —AFP



KYIV: Ukrainian service members look for and collect unexploded shells after a fighting with Russian raiding group in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv yesterday according to Ukrainian service personnel at the scene. —AFP

spilling over into other countries "with everything at our disposal" and warned Putin not to underestimate NATO's determination to defend its members.

France meanwhile expressed concerns that Russian tanks may also roll into Moldova and Georgia, two other former Soviet republics where separatists declared unrecognized statelets. As tensions rise, the nuclear arms threat—a key ingredient of post-war Europe's Cold War order—is also making a return. Le Drian has reminded Putin that "the Atlantic alliance is also a nuclear alliance", while the Russian leader threatened retaliation "like you have never seen in history" for anyone interfering with the war in Ukraine—which many understand to mean nuclear reprisal.

Both Russia and the US have thousands of nuclear warheads at their disposal, with France and Britain adding to the West's atomic capabilities. Ukraine, which emerged from the Cold War with sizeable Soviet-era nuclear weapons stocks of its own, gave up its arsenal in the 1990s. —AFP

Message from Ukrainian Embassy

In regards of your recent publication (<https://www.kuwaittimes.com/comedian-turned-president-stars-in-ukraine-russian-war/>) under the title "Comedian-turned-president stars in Ukraine-Russian war" Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait states the following:

Today the cities and towns of Ukraine, along the state border and on the administrative line with the temporarily occupied Crimea are under the intensive shelling. We have already registered casualties among the civilian population. The lives of more than 40 million Ukrainian citizens living peacefully on their land are under the threat. 600,000 square kilometers of the European continent, governed by the principles of democracy, human rights and peaceful development, could be ruined.

It is high time to stand with Ukraine and disseminate true information. Manipulation, fakes or double standards add fuel to the simmering information war. President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky is Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. He conducts his duties in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. Our common goal is to stop Russian full-scale invasion.

We call on the international community, all the civilized world to:

- Make strong statements in support of Ukraine and condemn the criminal actions of the Russian Federation.
- Immediately disconnect Russia from SWIFT.
- Introduce an economic blockade.
- Freeze all bank accounts of Russian figures immediately - both individuals and business entities.
- Block all Russian interests in your country as soon as possible.
- Provide Ukraine with all possible means of defense and other assistance, up to the deployment of military contingents to deter the Russian aggressor.
- Open borders for the organized movement of vulnerable groups of Ukrainian civil population, primarily for children and elderly. Tomorrow might be late. Act NOW.

Russia bans 'invasion' and 'assault' in media

MOSCOW: Russia's communications regulator yesterday ordered independent media to remove reports describing Moscow's attack on Ukraine as an 'assault, invasion, or declaration of war' or face being blocked and fined. As Russian forces moved into Kyiv, Moscow's defense ministry also said that Russian media should stick to the official version of events. In a statement, the communications watchdog accused a number of independent media outlets of spreading 'unreliable socially significant untrue information' about the shelling of Ukrainian cities by the Russian army and civilian deaths. These included television channel Dozhd and the country's top independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, whose editor Dmitry Muratov was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year. On Thursday, Russian leader Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale invasion of Ukraine that according to Kyiv has already killed 198 people including three children and sparked fears of a greater conflict in Europe. —AFP

Business

France pushes to bar Russia from SWIFT as Germany brakes

Not so SWIFT: EU energy concerns spark Russia sanctions rift

PARIS: French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire on Friday pushed for Russia to be excluded from the global SWIFT inter-bank system over its attack on Ukraine, supported by other EU nations but facing a more cautious Germany.

"Some (European Union) member states have shown reservations, France is not one of these states," Le Maire told reporters after a meeting of EU finance ministers in Paris-while describing the move as a "financial nuclear weapon".

He added that SWIFT exclusion would be weighed "not in the coming days or weeks, but in the coming hours", with technical advice from the European Commission. While Le Maire received public backing for the move from other nations including Austria, German Finance Minister Christian Lindner resisted the high-pressure timetable without ruling out an exclusion altogether.

"I advised that we should also look into instruments that go beyond even the latest sanctions package, that includes SWIFT," Lindner told reporters in Paris, while adding that he "can't say anything about the timeframe".

"If we come to this exclusion, will that then be the trigger that causes Russia to halt its gas deliveries, because they can no longer be paid for?" he asked. But Lindner added that "for someone to ask the question about consequences does not mean that they are

not ready to bear them".

Russian gas makes up a higher share of energy supplies in Germany and other parts of Europe than in France, although Paris has itself vowed to protect citizens from upward pressure on prices due to the Russian attack. Le Maire and Lindner had earlier praised the joint EU response to Moscow, saying that sanctions already decided would "isolate Russia financially" and "cut all links between Russia and the global financial system".

Lindner insisted that "we already have a complete blockade of Russian banks, which means business dealings with Russia are as good as stopped."

Reacting Thursday to sanctions decided by the EU, Britain, the United States and other Western nations, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said "the pressure on Russia must increase" from what has already been announced.

"Not all possibilities for sanctions have been exhausted yet," he added. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba had been more explicit Thursday, writing on Twitter that "who now doubts whether Russia should be banned from SWIFT has to understand that the blood of innocent Ukrainian men, women and children will be on their hands too."

Hard choices

SWIFT's messaging system allows banks to communicate rapidly and

securely about transactions, and cutting Russia off would cripple its ability to trade with most of the world.

Iran has been disconnected from the system in the past over its nuclear program, while Moscow has been developing domestic financial infrastructure to counter just such a threat, including the SPFS system for bank transfers and the Mir card payments system. Cutting off Russia could complicate remaining trade with Europe, including natural gas imports vital to the continent's energy supply as well as oil shipments.

Berlin this week said it would halt certification of a new pipeline bringing gas from Russia known as Nord Stream 2, but an existing direct link remains in operation and payments continue to flow.

Asked about other reported exemptions from the economic measures against Russia, including for Italian luxury goods and Belgian diamonds, Lindner said that "it would not be rational to consider measures that in the long run would weaken our ability to exert political influence."

"The aim is above all to affect Russia and aim for effects on Russia".

The West has agreed an onslaught of sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but resistance from key EU nations fearful of severing their power sources has resulted in them holding off on deploying the "financial nuclear weapon" of banishing Moscow from the



DORTMUND, Germany: People protest with a placard 'SWIFT out for Russia' against Russia's invasion of Ukraine in Dortmund, western Germany, on Friday. — AFP

SWIFT banking transfer system.

Ukraine has expressly called on Western allies to expel Moscow from the system that banks rely on to transfer money. But US President Joe Biden revealed this week that while it remains an option, "right now that's not the position that the rest of Europe wishes to take". Former European Council President Donald Tusk

lashed out at EU capitals over their failure to agree on the toughest sanctions such as cutting Russian banks off from SWIFT, exposing a rift within the bloc over its response. "In this war, everything is real: Putin's madness and cruelty, Ukrainian victims, bombs falling on Kyiv. Only your sanctions are pretended (sic)," Tusk tweeted. — AFP

Ukraine crisis challenges oil industry caution

LONDON: As commodity prices soar, the Ukraine crisis has prompted demands from petroleum lobbies for a reboot of US energy policy to promote domestic oil and gas production.

But recent history suggests Wall Street may be an even bigger barrier than Washington to increased exploration and production. As oil prices have risen over the last year-including Thursday's brief surge above \$100 a barrel-companies ranging from giants like Chevron to mid-sized players such as Devon Energy have chosen to only lift capital investment modestly.

That approach has reflected the clear preference within the investment community for producers to steer extra cash to debt reduction and shareholder givebacks, while also ramping up low-carbon investment initiatives. Companies have also been cautious in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainty over the recovery in energy demand. Peter McNally, analyst at Third Bridge, predicted companies would not rush to shift strategies over the latest spike in commodity prices.

"Everyone has been telling these companies not to drill so much, whether it's the shareholders, (socially minded) investors or President (Joe) Biden," he said. "The industry has twice been at price points like this over the last year and it hasn't ended well."

Dan Pickering of Houston-based Pickering Energy Partners thinks the political and investor tone towards energy could become "less adversarial and more supportive" in light of Ukraine. "Climate goals won't

go away, but those long-term initiatives will wind up more balanced against short-term necessities," he said.

As the world's third biggest producer of oil and the source of as much as 40 percent of Europe's natural gas, Russia's centrality to the global economy as an energy producer has been a key factor in the West's response to the invasion of Ukraine. On Thursday, the White House announced a barrage of new penalties on Russia, including sanctions on four major Russian banks and export controls to impede Russia's high-tech industry. The measures, though, stopped short of moving directly to impede Russia's energy production. But Thursday's rise in oil and natural gas prices from already elevated levels pointed to the unease surrounding Russia's output, a dynamic that also boosted shares of Chemiere Energy, a producer of liquefied natural gas that could be used to supplement European stockpiles. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Gas prices reach over \$5.00 a gallon at a petrol station in Los Angeles, California on Friday. — AFP

S&P and Fitch downgrade Ukraine's debt over crisis

WASHINGTON: S&P Global Ratings downgraded Ukraine's long-term debt rating yesterday, hours after a similar move by Fitch, with both citing the impact of the ongoing Russian invasion. S&P downgraded its rating from B to B-, with a negative outlook, noting potential disruptions to key sectors such as agricultural exports and the country's gas pipeline network.

"The Russian decision to launch a military attack on the country adds significant negative risks to its economic prospects, jeopardizing the service of the debt," the credit rating agency said in a statement.

Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Thursday that has so far killed scores of people, forced more than 50,000 to flee in just 48 hours and sparked fears of a new Cold War in Europe. Fitch on Friday cut the rating on Ukrainian government debt to "CCC" from "B", saying the invasion had created a "severe negative shock".

"The military invasion by Russia has resulted in heightened risks to Ukraine's external and public finances, macro-financial stability and political stability," Fitch said, noting the "high uncertainty" about the length of the conflict. Moody's also issued a warning that it could downgrade both Ukraine and Russia's debt ratings over the war.

"These events represent a significant further elevation of the geopolitical risks that Moody's had previously highlighted, which is being accompanied by additional and more severe sanctions on Russia, potentially including those that could impact sovereign debt repayment," that agency said. — AFP

IMF, WB warn of global impacts from Ukraine war

WASHINGTON: The leaders of the World Bank and IMF signaled Thursday they were ready to help Ukraine, while warning that Russia's invasion will have repercussions for the global economic recovery.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said she was "deeply concerned" about the fighting's impact on the people of Ukraine, and cautioned in a tweet that the conflict "adds significant economic risk for the region & the world." The International Monetary Fund continues to assess the economic impact, but will "stand ready to support our members as needed," she said.

The Washington-based crisis lender is in the process of deploying \$2.2 billion in assistance to Ukraine under a loan program set to end in June.

Georgieva has said the fund could pro-

vide aid to other countries impacted by any spillover effects of the conflict, if needed. World Bank President David Malpass said in a statement the Washington-based development lender "is horrified by the shocking violence and loss of life," and warned that "the devastating developments in Ukraine will have far-reaching economic and social impacts."

"We stand ready to provide immediate support to Ukraine and are preparing options for such support, including fast-disbursing financing," Malpass said, adding that the World Bank and IMF were coordinating to monitor the impacts of the Russian aggression.

The snowballing conflict already has sent oil prices soaring to their highest level since 2014, adding to worrying global inflation pressures. In January, the IMF cut its world GDP forecast for 2022 to 4.4 percent, half a point lower than its previous estimate in October, due to "impediments" caused by the latest coronavirus outbreak. US President Joe Biden on Thursday announced severe new sanctions on Moscow, including freezing assets of major banks and cutting off high tech exports to

the country, in coordination with Europe.

However, analysts note that Moscow has prepared for years to withstand such sanctions, building up a war chest of cash and gold, and has very low debt. "It's not a coincidence. I think it's very much part of what we call fortress Russia strategy," said Elina Ribakova of the Institute of International Finance, a global banking association. "It was a very deliberate shift in macroeconomic policy to accommodate geopolitical ambitions," she told AFP. "They have a piggy bank that can protect them."

The conflict could also change the Federal Reserve's calculus when it comes to fighting inflation in the United States, a central bank official said Thursday.

The Fed next month is expected to hike rates for the first time since Covid-19 broke out, but it might have to move more aggressively if the Ukraine crisis disrupts commodities and raises prices.

Loretta Mester, president of the Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank, said the US central bank will monitor the conflict's impact on the world's largest economy. "The implications of the unfolding situation

Fuel prices raised in Sri Lanka as energy crisis worsens

COLOMBO: One of Sri Lanka's biggest fuel suppliers put up its prices by as much as 12 percent yesterday, as the cash-strapped island's energy crisis worsened. Lanka IOC, a fuel retailer which accounts for a third of the market, said it was increas-

ing prices for diesel-commonly used by public transport-by 12 percent, and petrol up 11 percent.

The increases came after a seven percent price rise three weeks ago and will add to the upward pressure on inflation, already at a record high. The island is in the grips of an economic crisis after the tourism sector, a key foreign-exchange earner, collapsed in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. The government imposed a broad import ban in March 2020 in an effort to save foreign currency.

The country is now suffering widespread shortages, including fuel, electricity, automotive parts and cement, with supermarkets

forced to ration staple foods including rice, sugar and milk powder.

The shortages pushed food inflation to 25 percent last month with overall inflation at 16.8 percent.

There was no immediate energy price revision by the state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC), but most of its pumps have been out of fuel for days. Energy minister Udaya Gammanpila announced this week that he expected fuel shortages to ease in "days", but warned that a sharp price increase was necessary to retain the viability of the loss-making CPC.

Gammanpila said the CPC continued to haemorrhage cash and was already carrying



GLASGOW: In this file photo, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva speaks during a panel discussion at the COP26 UN Climate Summit in Glasgow. — AFP

in Ukraine for the medium-run economic outlook in the US will also be a consideration in determining the appropriate pace at which to remove accommodation," she said in a speech. — AFP

debts exceeding \$3.5 billion. The CPC loss for last year was \$450 million, he added. "Earlier, we were short of dollars to import oil. Now we don't have the rupees to buy the dollars," Gammanpila said.

Several thermal power stations, meanwhile, have closed with the electricity utility extending daily power cuts to five-and-a-half-hours a day from Friday. Three international rating agencies have downgraded the island since late last year on fears it may not be able to service its \$35 billion sovereign debt. Sri Lanka has also sought more loans from Beijing to help repay its existing Chinese debt, which accounts for about 10 percent of the country's external borrowings. — AFP

US offshore wind power lease sale nets record \$4.3bn

NEW YORK: Energy companies bid a record \$4.37 billion Friday for leases to develop wind power off the US east coast, authorities said, after sales key to America's renewable electricity ambitions.

The six sites are in an area called the New York Bight and total 488,000 acres (197,500 hectares), making it the biggest US renewable power auction ever. Development of all six tracts could generate as much as seven

gigawatts of wind energy, enough to power some two million homes, officials said.

"The investments we are seeing today will play an important role in delivering on the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to tackle the climate crisis," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement. Bidders seeking leases to operate and install turbines in these areas quickly exceeded previous levels and resulted in the

"nation's highest-grossing competitive offshore energy lease sale in history, including oil and gas," the Interior Department added. In the last auction of offshore areas in 2018, the lots had gone for about \$1,040 per acre, but this time they went for nearly \$9,000 per acre after three days and 64 rounds of bidding. Bidding started at \$48.8 million, with the largest lot being snapped up by Bight Wind Holdings for \$1.1 billion. — AFP



Business

Africa faces herculean job not to become world's plastic 'dustbin'

UN members to take stock on Earth's environmental woes

LAGOS: What can be done to prevent Africa from becoming the world's biggest dumping ground for plastic? That's one of the big questions facing United Nations members next week at a stock-taking on Earth's environmental woes.

From Antananarivo to Dakar via Nairobi and Conakry, African cities are scarred by huge landfills where plastic waste is measured in the thousands of tons. The dumps are smelly and dangerous, releasing smoke and toxic particles. They are also a place where impoverished men, women and children pick through the filth to find enough to survive. Blown by the wind or swept downstream in rivers, plastic waste pollutes the sea, forests and fields, threatening wildlife and eventually humans too, because microscopic particles enter the food chain.

"The plastic bags are real killers," said Hama Abdoulaye, a shepherd living near Niamey, the capital of the Sahel state of Niger. "The animals swallow plastic when they graze on the grass, and die slowly."

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which hosts the three-day UN Environment Assembly opening in Nairobi on Monday, says plastic pollution in Africa is accelerating, driven in part by poor rubbish collection and lack of recycling facilities.

The problem poses "a significant threat for the environment and the economies of the continent," it said in a recent report. Some 300 million tons of plastic waste—the equivalent weight of the planet's human population—are produced each year. But globally less than 10 percent is recycled, a figure that anecdotally is far smaller in Africa, although reliable statistics for the continent are rare. "If nothing is done in a few years, Africa will become a dustbin of plastic bags and waste," said Ousmane Danbadij, head of an NGO called the Niger Network for Water and Sanitation.

In 2018, China decided to ban the import of plastic waste, a move followed by other Asian countries such as the Philippines and Malaysia. This has raised fears of a knock-on effect—that wealthy economies will increasingly turn to Africa to dispose of their plastic rubbish. Africa is already a long-established destination for other haz-

ardous products and materials such as batteries or used electrical and electronic components, particularly Ghana and Nigeria.

"There is a great risk of seeing all the waste from industrialized countries dumped here in Africa," said Yves Ikobo, head of a grassroots organization in DR Congo called Planete Verte RDC.

In Nairobi, African countries will try to reach a common position on banning the import of plastic waste into the continent, with a view to talks for an international agreement against plastic pollution.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, most of the states of sub-Saharan Africa have gradually adopted legislation prohibiting production, import, marketing, use and storage of plastic bags and packaging.

But the laws are routinely flouted or poorly applied. In a letter to AFP, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said it was "finalizing a draft regulation" on harmonizing national rules among its 15 members.

However, member states "have not yet agreed... on a deadline for the import of plastics," it admitted.

"There is a lack of commitment from many states in Africa," said John Gakwavu, head of a Rwandan environmental conservation NGO. Danbadij, of Niger Network, agreed. "We can't do anything against the proliferation (of plastic waste) because politicians are not really committed to the fight," he said.

Employment

But the lack of commitment is not just a question of weak governance. It is also linked to the economic and social impact of the plastics sector, which is a big employer in several countries. "I don't think African countries will take exactly the same position" in Nairobi, said Nhlanhla Sibisi of Greenpeace Africa, based in Johannesburg. South Africa is a case in point.

Around 65,000 people are employed in the synthetic material business in the continent's biggest economy—a huge plus in a country where 65 percent of young people are unemployed—and the sector is a major tax contributor. South African Environment



LAGOS: In this file photo, a woman pushes a sack containing recycled plastic bottles past an area where plastic waste is being used to reclaim a swamp so that the land can be developed for housing in the Mosafejo area of Lagos. — AFP

Minister Barbara Creecy recently warned that any international agreement must factor in "differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities."

This formulation is routinely heard at UN climate conferences, when developing countries say they should not be asked to shoulder the same burden as rich ones. "It will be very difficult for our countries to unite in banning the entry of waste," said Ikobo. "It is also, for them, a means of bringing in finance, of capital. Hence the importance for us to continue to apply pressure so that we do not sacrifice the future of the continent."

Sorted imports

But there are other voices who say that importing plastic waste is acceptable, provided conditions are met. Richard Kainika, secretary general of the Association of Kenyan Waste Recyclers, said he had "no problem" so long as the waste was "well sorted and classified." "Recycling supports job creation and also conserves the environment," he said.

Meanwhile, grassroots work on the environment—something that was absent for so long in Africa—is picking up. In some locations, citizens are working to pick up plastic in the streets and on the beaches, and some

cautious projects in recycling have started up. Bright stars include Libreville and Abidjan where, thanks to a collaboration with UNESCO and a Colombian company, a factory for recycling plastic into bricks opened in 2020 with a view to building hundreds of schools in Ivory Coast.

By themselves, these initiatives will not solve the far bigger problem of massive and reckless dumping of plastic. But they do sow the seeds of awareness, which in turn leads to pressure on governments to act. Could they be the first small steps that save the continent from drowning in plastic? — AFP

Aircraft lead boom in big-ticket US manufacturing goods

WASHINGTON: US manufactured goods orders increased far more than expected in January, according to government data released Friday, driven by a big increase in aircraft sales.

The Commerce Department reported durable goods sales rose 1.6 percent last month, while December's 0.9 percent slump in sales was revised sharply upwards to show a 1.2 percent gain. Much of the increase was led by transportation equipment where orders rose 3.4 percent overall, with sales of non-defense aircraft such as Boeing's jets increasing 15.6 percent. "Solid goods demand and plenty of backorders will keep manufacturing on a very healthy course even as spending tilts in favor of in-person services," Oren Klachkin of

Oxford Economics said.

"And we should see better supply-side news as shipping bottlenecks slowly clear, input shortages diminish, and Americans return to the job market," though he warned the war in Ukraine could stress supply chains anew. Excluding transportation, overall orders rose 0.7 percent, slightly weaker than December's growth. However, sales of motor vehicles and parts dropped 0.4 percent last month after rising in December, as assembly lines continue to grapple with shortages of semiconductors crucial to making vehicles.

Defense aircraft and parts fell 41.1 percent, while communication equipment sales decreased 6.6 percent. Machinery orders rose 2.3 percent, and computers and related prod-

ucts climbed 2.2 percent, according to the data.

Americans saw their incomes climb slightly in the first month of 2022, but the gain was overtaken by rising prices, which increased at their fastest rate in 40 years, according to government data released Friday. Rising energy prices continue to be a key factor driving inflation and global oil prices have been moving steadily higher in recent days following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which could disrupt supply. The end of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments provided to American families during the pandemic was expected to result in lower personal income in January, but instead incomes rose \$9 billion, or less than 0.1 percent, the Commerce Department reported. — AFP



DALLAS: In this file, an American Airlines Boeing 737 at Dallas/Fort Worth International airport in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

WTO chief warns of food price rise amid Ukraine crisis

GENEVA: WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala warned Friday about the "economic impacts" of the war in Ukraine, a major wheat exporter, which will hurt consumers around the world.

"There's going to be a big impact with respect to wheat prices and prices of bread for ordinary people as well," she said at a virtual event with IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva. Ngozi noted that Ukraine "is one of the largest wheat exporters of the world."

Georgieva echoed her previous warnings about the "significant economic risk" of the conflict for the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, saying "the impact is going to go beyond Ukraine."

She highlighted the added pressure on inflation which is likely to accelerate amid rising prices for energy and wheat. Oil prices on Thursday briefly topped \$100 for the first time since 2014.

The United States and Europe slapped sanctions on Moscow, targeting the financial sector but largely sparing the oil and agriculture sectors for now in an effort to mitigate the impact on their own people.

The sanctions "add to the economic impact of this crisis, and will transmit primarily through energy prices, as well as grain prices, adding to what has been a growing concern of inflation and how it can be countered," the IMF chief said. The conflict adds to the "high uncertainty" about the global economy that also is reflected in financial markets, and undermines confidence in other emerging markets causing an exodus of capital at a time when those countries need more funding.

"We see outflows from emerging markets when we need exactly the opposite," she said.

Georgieva, who is Bulgarian, said she had a personal connection to the crisis, as her brother is married to a Ukrainian and they are in a city near the border with Russia. "I know right now it's so difficult to see a pathway to peace, but peace must be pursued and we must find a way to bring that peace that people are so desperate for." — AFP

Japan to sanction chip exports to Russia over Ukraine

TOKYO: Japan will impose sanctions on Russia targeting semiconductor exports and financial institutions, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Friday after G7 leaders agreed to punish Moscow economically for invading Ukraine. The announcement came after Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale ground invasion and air assault on Thursday.

Kishida said the world's third-largest economy planned "asset freezes and the suspension of visa issuance for Russian individuals and organizations" as well as asset freezes "targeting Russian financial institutions." "Thirdly, we will sanction exports to Russia of military-related organizations, and exports to Russia of general-purpose goods such as semiconductors and items on a restricted list based on international agreements,"

he told reporters. Kishida did not detail the scale of the sanctions or which individuals and institutions would be targeted, though local media said Bank Rossiya, Promsvyazbank and Russia's economic development bank VEB would be hit. Semiconductors are essential components in products from cars to gaming consoles, and are in short supply worldwide.

The United States has also announced export controls on sensitive components that US President Joe Biden said will "cut off more than half of Russia's high-tech imports."

Japan is a key US ally and member of the Group of Seven, which held virtual talks overnight and agreed "to move forward on devastating packages of sanctions and other economic measures to hold Russia to account", Biden said. On Wednesday, Tokyo announced a ban on the issuing and trade of Russian government bonds in Japan after Moscow ordered troops into two separatist-controlled Ukrainian regions.

Russia's ambassador to Tokyo said Friday that the "counterproductive measures" would meet with a "serious response" from Moscow, without offering details. "There will be a response from us; I suppose



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida speaks during a press conference at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo. — AFP

there will be a serious response from us," Mikhail Galuzin told reporters, describing the sanctions as being fuelled by "really baseless pretexts." Japan and Russia have complex relations and did not sign a peace treaty after World War II because of a lingering dispute over four islands claimed by Moscow in the closing days of the conflict. — AFP

ECB 'ready to act' if needed in Russia-Ukraine crisis

BRUSSELS: The European Central Bank is ready to support price and financial stability in the eurozone if needed during the Russia-Ukraine crisis, its chief Christine Lagarde said Friday. "The ECB stands ready to take whatever action is necessary within its responsibilities to ensure price stability and financial stability in the euro area," Lagarde told reporters in Paris after meetings with finance ministers from the whole EU and the 19-nation single currency bloc. The central bank had been weighing a response to surging inflation that could include a reduction in its massive easy-money policies intro-

duced before and during the coronavirus pandemic, including ultra-low interest rates and bond-buying.

But Russia's attack on its neighbor has shaken economic confidence, throwing growth into doubt while also driving up prices for energy resources like gas and oil—with uncertain consequences for inflation.

"It is premature to assess the economic impact of the current conflict because the situation is evolving every hour," Lagarde said. "We will evaluate the impact of rising energy prices which are likely in the short term to increase inflation," she added. — AFP

West urges Libyans to keep oil firm out of politics

TRIPOLI: Five Western nations urged Libyans on Friday not to drag the National Oil Corporation into political disputes that could threaten the country's fragile peace.

The statement came with the NOC's chief and the interim oil minister in a standoff. "All actors" should "respect the unity, integrity, and independence" of the NOC, said the statement from the French, British, German, Italian and US embassies.

They also warned against "acts that undermine" the firm or "may pose a threat to the peace, security and stability" of the North African country.

The NOC is vital to the economy of a country sitting on Africa's biggest oil reserves, and is one of the few institutions

to have stayed in one piece despite a decade of violence that for several years left Libya with two governments. Unlike many other Libyan state bodies, the NOC has also largely managed to remain neutral in the face of political wrangling.

The statement did not directly accuse anyone of trying to politicize the firm, but it came after months of tensions between NOC head Mustafa Sanalla and Mohammed Aoun, oil minister in the country's interim government. Aoun, whose position did not exist until interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah was appointed last year, has on several occasions attempted to have Sanalla removed from his post. — AFP

PATTINSON SUITS UP FOR MACABRE NEW 'BATMAN'



From left, US film producer Dylan Clark, British actor Andy Serkis, British actor Robert Pattinson, US actress Zoe Kravitz, US actor Paul Dano, US actor Jeffrey Wright and US film director Matt Reeves pose on the red carpet upon arrival for a special screening for the movie "The Batman" at the BFI IMAX, in London.



British actor Robert Pattinson (left) and US actress Zoe Kravitz pose on the red carpet upon arrival for a special screening for the movie "The Batman". —AFP photos

Robert Pattinson had never been interested in playing a superhero—until Ben Affleck quit his role as Batman, leaving the famous cape unexpectedly up for grabs. Having spent the past decade mainly working on critically acclaimed art-house movies, former "Twilight" actor Pattinson requested a meeting with the filmmakers entrusted with Warner Bros. to revitalize the beloved franchise. "He sought me out... and somewhere in that meeting, he brought up Batman," producer Dylan Clark told AFP.

Although Pattinson, now 35, appeared to feel "a little bit suspiciously" about fronting a "giant big studio movie" again, he was "genuinely interested in the character of Batman and Bruce Wayne," said Clark. "And he has that jawline, so that was very helpful!" added Clark. The result is "The Batman," out in US theaters on March 4, starring Pattinson and directed by Clark's "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes" collaborator Matt Reeves.

It finds Bruce Wayne in only his second year as Batman, when his nocturnal detective work has not yet earned him the trust of Gotham's police or pub-

lic. Pattinson's vigilante is still figuring out his tactics and his motivations for stalking the dystopian city's criminals, and his famous villain-busting gadgets are still rough prototypes.

Even compared to Christopher Nolan's gritty trilogy starring Christian Bale, "The Batman" is notable for its macabre, nourish tone. Batman himself cuts a forlorn, almost depressive figure, partially inspired by Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain, whose music also features prominently in the soundtrack. Pattinson, fresh from a supporting role in Nolan's mega-budget sci-fi film "Tenet," "wanted to play a part that was physical," recalled Clark. "What he didn't know was that Matt's script was going to take that character on an emotional-physical ride, and that he was going to really have to put himself through the wringer."

'Disgruntled'

This Batman, Clark added, "is a dark hero and he can sometimes come across as an antihero. Vengeance definitely fuels his drive." The film finds Batman on the heels of the Riddler (Paul Dano) — a

serial killer in the sinister style of the real-life Zodiac Killer, or the recent Netflix true-crime series "Mindhunter."

The Riddler claims to be impelled by a sense of justice against Gotham's corrupt elite, and his crimes—broadcast on social media—attract a cult-like following among the city's disaffected and disenfranchised. "Matt wrote this script two years before we went into production (in 2020). I think it was just looking at our world and our landscape and the things that were going on," said Clark.

"The best part about Gotham is it's a mirror to our societies. And I think it was a representation of these people that are feeling on the fringes, and they're disgruntled." While Clark insists "we're certainly not trying to be political" or "sensational," the movie carries the message that "the world needs faith in their elected officials."

'Terrifying'

Pattinson takes over the role from Affleck, whose appearances as Batman in two DC Comics-based ensemble superhero movies—"Batman v Superman:

Dawn of Justice" and "Justice League"—were poorly received by fans. Affleck had written, and was also due to direct, a standalone Batman movie, but ultimately withdrew entirely from the franchise at a turbulent time in his personal life, including renewed struggles with alcoholism and his divorce from Jennifer Garner. "We had come in at a time of transition," said Clark.

"DC had to have some transition. And Ben, I think, was looking at his life, and reflected on where he wanted to be, and made that decision on his own." Recasting Batman allowed the filmmakers to attempt a "fresh new take" on a franchise that has existed in some form for eight decades. "Matt's idea was 'Let's try to introduce this new Batman in a place where we have never seen before,'" said Clark.

"It's the most exciting proposition but it's also one of the most terrifying," he added. "You have to set out with great ambition, because the title, the character, the history is so large." The demand is, "You'd better try to make a great Batman or we're going to hate you." —AFP

LONDON'S ROYAL OPERA CANCELS BOLSHOI BALLET

London's Royal Opera House said on Friday it was cancelling a season of performances by Moscow's famed Bolshoi Ballet amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. "A summer season of the Bolshoi Ballet at the Royal Opera House had been in the final stages of planning," it said in a statement.

"Unfortunately, under the current circumstances, the season cannot now go ahead," the opera house said, becoming the latest Western institution to cancel its collaboration with Russia. In Germany, acclaimed Russian conductor Valery Gergiev has been told to speak out against President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine or risk losing his job as chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic. Even the Eurovision Song Contest has said that no Russians will be permitted to take part in this year's contest following the invasion of Ukraine. —AFP



Sean Penn visits Ukraine to make documentary on Russian invasion

US actor and director Sean Penn is in Kyiv making a documentary about Russia's invasion, the Ukrainian president's office said Thursday. The double Oscar-winner was photographed attending a government press conference in Kyiv, and could be seen meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky in a video posted to the Ukrainian president's official Instagram account. "The director came to Kyiv specifically to record all the events taking place in Ukraine and as a documentary filmmaker to tell the world the truth about Russia's invasion of our country," said a post in Ukrainian on the presidential office's Facebook page.

"Today, Sean Penn is among those who support Ukraine while being in Ukraine. Our country is grateful to him for such a display of courage and honesty." The post added that "Penn demonstrates the kind of courage that many others, including Western politicians, lack." Penn, who previously visited Ukraine and met with military staff in November, spoke with journalists and soldiers and "saw how we defend our country," the president's office said.

The 61-year-old star of "Milk" and "Mystic River" is making a documentary for Vice Studios, according to NBC News. Neither Vice nor Penn's representatives immediately responded to AFP's requests for comment. His latest visit comes as invading Russian forces pressed deep into Ukraine, with battles raging on the outskirts of Kyiv, and missiles and shells raining down on multiple Ukrainian cities.

Penn has previously attracted controversy as a result of his foray into politics and current affairs, especially after he and Mexican-American actress Kate del Castillo interviewed Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman while he was on the run. In 2018, Penn was reported to be in Turkey making an as-yet-unreleased documentary about the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's consulate. —AFP

SIDEWALK IS NEW CATWALK OUTSIDE MILAN FASHION SHOWS



Models present creations during the Versace Women Fall/Winter 2022-2023 collection as part of the Milan Fashion Week. —AFP photos

A cry goes up from the crowd, a sea of craning necks and suddenly hundreds of cellphones go up in the air clicking photos. An influencer has just arrived at a fashion show. This is the scene that has played out day after day at Milan Fashion Week, where live shows began Wednesday, all accompanied by crowds of fashion hopefuls, fans and photographers hoping to capture a perfect Instagram shot of their favorite influencer. At Versace on Friday night, hundreds of fans crushed against a barrier to catch a glimpse of someone-anyone-photo-worthy to later post on social media. Every few minutes, dozens of fans would dash to another area of the barricade at the sound of a vehicle. "We just saw a black car come in, but we saw nothing," said Riccardo Capobianco, 24, in

the crowd with his friend Irina. "We have no idea what's happening." Ditto with Sarah Pilot, 22, an American student surrounded by her girlfriends. "We're kind of laughing at ourselves watching," she admitted sheepishly. A scream went up in the crowd, but cut off quickly, as a new group of people entering the show came into view. "Are those just average people with tick-ets?" one of the girls asked.

Nobody becomes somebody

Outside Prada, Gucci, Moschino, Max Mara and more, the sidewalk is the new catwalk for fashion wannabes, the Instagram stars they worship and photographers from all across the globe—mostly freelancers or amateurs—who capture it all. But who are these people, this reporter asked, as the umpteenth preening

starlet flipped her hair, pursed her lips and jutted out a hip for anyone who pulled out a camera. "They're all Instagram fashionistas," explained London photographer Ash Mahmood, 26, outside Max Mara. "They're nobody turned into somebody. That's how it works." The amateur photographers hope their subjects—with their thousands even millions of followers—will repost their photos, gaining exposure.

But the exercise isn't even about fashion, or beauty for that matter, but recognisability, they acknowledged. "A photo of just anyone isn't worth anything," said Marco Tadini, 60, one of the sidewalk's professionals. "You can be gorgeous but it doesn't count a bit." Two American fashion students looking bemused at Fendi said it was their first time outside a show.

New Yorker Taylor May, 20, said she was used to seeing "a lot of weird fashion" back at home so was curious to see what was on display in Milan—namely neon colors and maxi skirts. So far the pair hadn't recognized anyone entering the fashion show. "We're lost but we can see who's getting their picture taken," said her friend Kia Patterson, 21, from Missouri. That didn't mean all the fashion was good, May cautioned. "One of the outfits, I was like 'Nooooo'..." she said. Back outside Versace, the squeals from the fans and the mad rushes at the barricades to catch a glimpse of arriving guests were starting to get old for Sara Pelizzoli, 22, and her friend Paola Cecinati, 21. "They're a little fanatic, they could calm down a little bit," Pelizzoli said. Milan Fashion Week wraps up tomorrow. —AFP

Sports

Klopp urges Liverpool to seize their chance in Cup final against Chelsea

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp wants Liverpool to take a step towards immortality when they target the first trophy in their historic quadruple bid in today's League Cup final against Chelsea. Klopp's side are chasing silverware in all four major competitions after closing the gap on Premier League leaders Manchester City to three points. The Reds have made it to their first domestic cup final since 2016, are on course for the Champions League quarterfinals after a last 16 first leg win at Inter Milan and host Norwich in the FA Cup fifth round on Wednesday.

Klopp has already delivered Champions League glory in 2019 and a long-awaited Premier League title in 2020, but the German knows only sustained success will see his group ranked alongside the club's 1970s and 1980s legends. "We all know that in the moment the people are really happy," Klopp said. "But in 20 years if you want to talk about this team, I would not be surprised if people would then say if we don't win anything anymore, 'Yeah they were good, but they should have won more'."

"That's why we should try now to win a few things. And the next chance, the best chance we have this weekend, is against Chelsea when it's

really tricky." Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson believes victory at Wembley would be the perfect springboard for even greater success in the final weeks of the season. No English club has ever won the top four trophies available in a single campaign and Henderson said: "It is a big moment. To get a trophy so early on in the season can give the squad a big boost."

Henderson is the only survivor from Liverpool's last domestic final victory in 2012 when he helped his team beat Cardiff on penalties to clinch the League Cup. "We want to use it as a platform to give us a big confidence boost going towards the business end of the season," he added.

'No hard feelings'

Liverpool forward Roberto Firmino has been ruled out after missing the last two games with a groin injury, but Diogo Jota could feature following ankle ligament damage. Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel's biggest decision once again involves Romelu Lukaku after he dropped the troubled Belgian striker for the midweek Champions League win against Lille.

Lukaku has scored just 10 goals since his club

record £97 million (\$131 million) move from Inter Milan last year and expressed unhappiness with the way he was being used by Tuchel earlier this season. The 28-year-old had only seven touches in his most recent appearance against Crystal Palace, the lowest by a Premier League player since 2003-04, with Kai Havertz scoring in an impressive display as his replacement against Lille.

Publicly at least, Tuchel is putting Lukaku's recent struggles down to mental and physical tiredness. "He is an important player, there is a lot of focus on him, but if you allow yourself to zoom out a little bit you can see he played a lot of matches from the start for us," Tuchel said. "Once you play for Chelsea you accept the team goes first. That's why there are no hard feelings. We can only achieve our goals together." Tuchel could start England right-back Reece James, who has been sidelined since December with a hamstring injury, and is debating whether Edouard Mendy or Kepa Arrizabalaga will feature in goal.

"Kepa did fantastic in the period where we had to be without Edou. I cannot get sentimental about it. I have to do what is best for the team," Tuchel said. Chelsea have proved masters of cup competi-



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp reacts during an English Premier League match between Liverpool and Leeds at Anfield stadium on Feb 23, 2022. —AFP

tions since Tuchel took charge in January 2021, winning last season's Champions League, while lifting the Club World Cup and European Super Cup this term. The Blues will be eyeing their first League Cup silverware since 2015, having lost the 2019 final to Manchester City. —AFP

Inter draw at Genoa to let Milan off hook

MILAN: Inter Milan failed to capitalize on AC Milan's home draw against Udinese on Friday with a goalless draw at Genoa which allowed their local rivals to stay top of Serie A. Champions Inter would have moved level on 57 points with Milan had they won at relegation strugglers Genoa but could not make the most of long spells of dominance at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris and stay two points off the lead.

Napoli can now reclaim the summit on goal difference with a win at Champions League-chasing Lazio on Sunday night before they host Milan next weekend. Champions Inter have a game in hand on the two contenders to their title but have failed to win in their last four league matches in a mini-slump which has also seen them all-but eliminated from the Champions League by Liverpool. "Regardless of what Milan did, today was two points lost," Inter's Danilo D'Ambrosio told DAZN.

The Milan giants will face off in the first leg of their Italian Cup semi-final on Tuesday while Napoli will have a whole week to prepare for

another huge match after falling to a sobering Europa League defeat by Barcelona. Inter had enough chances to take the points on Friday but again couldn't find the finishing touch - a common thread in a worrying run of form for Simone Inzaghi's side - despite having 21 shots against a spirited Genoa team backed by a passionate home following.

"When you have a lot of chances you have to put the ball in the goal," added D'Ambrosio. "But it's a team game, it's not just a problem with the forwards because defenders and wingers had chances to score too. We need to be more clinical regardless of what position we play."

They came closest when D'Ambrosio headed Hakan Calhanoglu's 62nd-minute corner off the bar, one of a host of opportunities on a breathless night in which Calhanoglu and Edin Dzeko, among others, were off target. Leo Ostigard was immense at the back for Genoa, who stay in the bottom three on 17 points after their fifth straight draw, four away from Venezia who sit just outside the relegation zone.

Milan's handball anger

Stefano Pioli could not believe that Destiny Udogie's leveler was allowed to stand and earn Udinese their 1-1 draw at Milan. Udogie said himself after the game that his muted celebration at scoring his first goal as a professional footballer at the San Siro of all places was

"After Friday night's incredible win we want to settle for nothing but the PSL trophy," said Shaheen. Sultans are led inspirationally by Mohammad Rizwan, declared Twenty20 international player of the 2021 by the International Cricket Council last month. Rizwan hoped his team can repeat their last year's triumph in the final held in Abu Dhabi.

"It has been an amazing tournament for us and I, as captain, could not have asked more from my players," said Rizwan. Both the teams are power-packed in batting as well as in bowling. Qalandars have Fakhar Zaman as opener who has so far scored a league record of 585 at a strike rate of 154.35. Rizwan is Sultan's top run-getter with 532 runs while his opening partner Shan Masood has 459.

Sultans also have power hitters in Western Australian Tim David and former South African Rilee Rossouw. Their attack has Lahore born former South African Imran Tahir, Shahawaz Dahani and Khushdil Shah who all have 16 wickets in the tournament. Shaheen is the spearhead of Qalandars' attack with 17 wickets while newcomer slinger Zaman Khan (16) and Pakistan international Haris Rauf has 15 wickets.



GENOA: Genoa's Norwegian defender Leo Ostigard (left) jumps for the ball with Inter Milan's Italian defender Danilo D'Ambrosio during their Serie A match at the Luigi Ferraris Stadium on Friday. —AFP

because he "wasn't sure" whether he had handled. And Pioli vented his frustration at the decision after footage appeared to show the Italy Under-21 international touching the ball in with his arm.

"That equalizer should have been disallowed. Udogie clearly touches the ball with his arm," he said to DAZN. "We didn't play particularly well but VAR should have seen it, it's a clear error. "It's not the first time that we've been penalized (by a refereeing decision). Maybe Udinese would have equalized later, but this isn't OK." —AFP



LAHORE: Lahore Qalandars' Phil Salt (left) runs out Islamabad United Liam Dawson (right) during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 eliminator 2 cricket match at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium on Friday. —AFP

Qalandars tried valiantly to bring in their ace Afghan spinner Rashid Khan from Bangladesh in a chartered flight to play on Sunday, but gave up as logistics were a big problem. Kings and Quetta Gladiators - both former champions - bowed out in the first round in this edition. —AFP

Spurs crush Leeds to keep top-four hopes alive

LEEDS: Tottenham hammered Leeds 4-0 yesterday to put a smile back on the face of Antonio Conte and plunge Marcelo Bielsa's team deeper into trouble towards the foot of the Premier League. The visitors, who had lost four of their previous five league matches, were 3-0 up at half-time after goals from Matt Doherty, new recruit Dejan Kulusevski and Harry Kane. A late strike from Son Heung-min following a pinpoint pass from Kane completed the rout at Elland Road. The win lifts Tottenham to seventh in the Premier League, four points behind fourth-placed Manchester United with a game in hand as they bid to qualify for next season's Champions League.

It also brightened the mood of Spurs boss Conte, who insisted on Friday he was committed to his job after comments following their midweek loss at Burnley had cast doubt on his future at the club. Leeds enjoyed the bulk of possession in the first half and had an early chance to take the lead but Pascal Struijk's header flew just wide. Spurs took the lead in the 10th minute with a breakaway goal.

Harry Winks set Ryan Sessegnon free on the left and his center was perfect for Doherty to arrive at the far post and slam home. Five minutes later it was 2-0. Kulusevski did not appear to pose a danger when he had a ball by the corner flag but he wriggled free, exchanged passes with Doherty and beat Illan Meslier at his near post.

The home side went agonizingly close when defender Robin Koch hit the post with a left footed shot from the center of the box. But Spurs, looking sharp on the break, were 3-0 up in the 27th when Kane passed the ball into the net from a tight angle following a delightful ball over the top from Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg.

Kane and Son

Tottenham were again more dangerous side after the break and went close to extending their lead on multiple occasions. Leeds should have pulled one back with about 15 minutes to go when Hugo Lloris flew out of his goal but fluffed his clearance. Stuart Dallas dribbled towards an open goal but took far too long and his eventual shot was blocked.

Son made it 4-0 in the 85th minute, finishing smartly after a pin-point pass from Kane. It meant Kane and Son have combined for a Premier League goal for the 37th time, overtaking Chelsea's Didier Drogba and Frank Lampard as the pair who have assisted one another for the most goals in the competition's history. —AFP

Lahore target Multan for elusive PSL title

LAHORE: Lahore Qalandars seek the elusive Pakistan Super League title as they take on in-form defending champions Multan Sultans in the final in Lahore today. The Shaheen Shah Afridi-led Qalandars are the only team in the six-team league who have not won the competition title since the Twenty20 league started in 2016. They lost to Karachi Kings in the only final they played in 2020.

But the task for Qalandars is tough as they face a rampaging Sultan side that won nine of their ten first round matches. Qalandars were the only side to beat them in the first round but Sultans avenged that defeat by trouncing them in the qualifiers by 28 runs on Wednesday. Shaheen, whose side edged out Islamabad United by six runs in a last-over thriller in the second eliminator on Friday, vowed his team will not settle for anything less than winning the trophy.

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Rawda	22517733
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Adaliya	22517144
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Khalidiya	24848075
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Kaifan	24849807
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shamiya	24848913
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Shuwaikh	24814507
Adan Hospital	23940620	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Nuzha	22526804
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Qadsiya	22515088
		Dasmah	22532265
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I, Jijumon M, Indian National residing in Riggae, Kuwait (Passport number L1 388559 issued in Cochin - Kerala) Ettiyappanvila

Kizhakkethil, Mavelikara P O, Alappuzha (Dist), Kerala. Hereby declare that my daughter name shown as JAANAKI JUJUMON in passport number S3691407 issued in Kuwait on 21/02/2018 and also in birth certificate. I further declare that I have to change my daughter name as JAANAKI (Given Name) JUJU (Surname). In future her name will be known as JAANAKI JUJU. (C 1424) 23-2-2022

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EMERGENCY
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Russia counts sporting cost of invasion

- Poland refuses to play World Cup playoff against Russia
- Champions League final stripped from Saint Petersburg

- Russian Grand Prix cancelled in wake of Ukraine crisis
- Russian athletes Rublev, Ovechkin, Sivakov say 'no to war'



ZAGREB: Dinamo Zagreb supporters hold a banner in support of Ukraine during the UEFA Europa League football second leg match between Dinamo Zagreb and Sevilla FC at the Maksimir stadium on Feb 24, 2022. —AFP

PARIS: Russia's invasion of Ukraine resulted in serious sporting consequences as UEFA stripped Saint-Petersburg of hosting the Champions League final and Formula One cancelled the Russian Grand Prix. The conflict entered a second day after Russian President Vladimir Putin defied Western warnings to unleash a full-scale invasion that has claimed dozens of lives and displaced at least 100,000 people.

However, after sports bodies had spent Thursday condemning the invasion, on Friday some transformed their words into actions. UEFA were first off the blocks awarding Paris the Champions League final on May 28 - to be played at the Stade France - at the expense of Saint Petersburg's Gazprom Arena. The Russian government responded by calling the decision by UEFA "a shame".

UEFA made no reference to its relationship with Gazprom, the Russian state energy giant that is a key sponsor of European football's governing body. UEFA also announced that Russian and Ukrainian clubs and national teams competing in international competitions must play home matches at neutral venues "until further notice". Spartak Moscow, in the Europa

League, are the only club from either Russia or Ukraine still involved in European competition this season.

A few hours later, Formula One announced the Russian Grand Prix, scheduled for Sept 25, had been cancelled. Pressure had grown on the organizers after reigning champion Max Verstappen and four-time champion Sebastian Vettel said they would not go to Sochi. The Black Sea resort was due to host the race for the last time before it heads to Saint Petersburg next year. The invasion could also cost the Haas team dearly as Dmitry Mazepin, the father of their Russian driver Nikita, is the non-executive director of their title sponsor Uralkali and close ally of Putin.

The American team had decided not to sport the Russian colors of their sponsor in testing in Barcelona on Friday. Team principal Guenther Steiner, who maintained that the team was "financially OK", said a decision would be announced next week on the future of Haas's long-term collaboration with Uralkali. Steiner acknowledged that 22-year-old Mazepin's career with the team "must be resolved" but said "it's not all up to us". "There are governments involved and I have no power over that," said Steiner.

'It is a horror'

The International Olympic Committee also demanded action. Angered by the breach of the "Olympic Truce" they urged all international federations to cancel any events they had coming up in Russia and Belarus. "The IOC EB (executive board) today urges all international sports federations to relocate or cancel their sports events currently planned in Russia or Belarus," read the IOC statement. "They should take the breach of the Olympic Truce by the Russian and Belarusian governments into account and give the safety and security of the athletes absolute priority."

The IOC - who were joined by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in condemning the invasion - also said on Friday the respective national flags of Russia and Belarus should not be flown at sports events. The IOC pointed out that all 193 UN member states had agreed last December to a global truce beginning seven days before the start of the Winter Olympics in Beijing on February 4 and ending seven days after the closing of the Paralympic Games on March 13.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian athletes plying

their trades abroad, also felt the impact. Goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, who plays for Spanish football giants Real Madrid, was said by head coach Carlo Ancelotti to be "down in the dumps as he is anxious with his mother and friends living in Kyiv". Ancelotti said they would do all they could to lift the 23-year-old's spirits. "My grandfather experienced World War I, my father lived through World War II, and they told me lots of stories about them," said Ancelotti on Friday. "It (war) is a horror, full stop."

His comments will have resonated with Russian tennis world number seven Andrey Rublev, who made his views clear after reaching the Dubai ATP final. The Russian No. 2 seed signed the camera lens on court with the message, "No war please." Russian NHL ice hockey star Alex Ovechkin pleaded for peace: "Please no more war ... we must live in peace," he said after training in Philadelphia. His compatriot Pavel Sivakov, who rides for the elite Ineos cycling team, echoed Ovechkin's sentiments: "I am totally against the war. The majority of Russians only want peace and never asked for this to happen." —AFP

Nadal beats Medvedev again to reach Acapulco ATP final

ACAPULCO: Rafael Nadal beat Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 6-3 on Friday to reach the final of the ATP Mexico Open and insure the Russian will not celebrate his rise to number one with the Acapulco trophy. Medvedev was unable to avenge his loss to Nadal in the Australian Open final, where the Spaniard rallied from two sets down to triumph in five and claim a record-setting 21st Grand Slam singles title.

But the 26-year-old Russian departs Mexico knowing he'll move to number one in the world on Monday. He was assured of reaching the summit when Serbian star Novak Djokovic fell in the quarter-finals at Dubai on Thursday. Nadal pushed his perfect 2022 record to 14-0, but it wasn't as simple as the scoreline might suggest.

He powered through the first set without facing a break point and broke Medvedev in the opening game of the second. But the 35-year-old world number five found himself in trouble in the fourth game, fighting off four break points to preserve his advantage. Medvedev pushed him again in a marathon sixth game but failed to convert any of his seven break chances.

"I played some amazing points on the break points," said Nadal, who used everything in his arsenal to fend off Medvedev - from his classic powerful forehands to aggressive forays to the net. The second set was very emotional," Nadal said. "Daniil was playing very aggressive - drop shots, winners. It was a very difficult set. I feel lucky to win that set, because he had a lot of chances." Serving to extend the match at 5-3, Medvedev took a 40-0 lead before a spate of errors, including his seventh double fault of the contest, gave Nadal an opening and allowed him to wrap it up on his second match point. In the final, Nadal was to face Cameron Norrie, who pushed his winning streak to eight straight matches with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece.

Britain's 12th-ranked Norrie, who lifted the trophy at Delray Beach last week, broke in the ninth game of each set and calmly served them out. Tsitsipas, who reached the Rotterdam final earlier this month, had not dropped a set all week until he ran into the in-form Briton - who faced just one break point in the match. Nadal has won all three of his career meetings with Norrie - at the Australian Open, Barcelona and Roland Garros in 2021. —AFP



ACAPULCO: Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev during their Mexico ATP Open 500 men's singles semifinal at the Arena GNP on Friday. —AFP

Harden shines in debut, Clippers edge Lakers

LOS ANGELES: James Harden did not disappoint in his highly anticipated debut with the Philadelphia 76ers, scoring 27 points and handing out 12 assists in the Sixers' 133-102 rout of the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves on Friday. Harden, the league's 2018 Most Valuable Player, was playing his first game with his new team since arriving in Philadelphia from the Brooklyn Nets in a blockbuster trade for Ben Simmons at the trade deadline on February 10.

Recently sidelined by a hamstring injury, Harden made up for lost time with an impressive offensive display that included a trademark step-back three-pointer late in the first half on which he drew a foul from Minnesota's Jarred Vanderbilt and converted the free throw to complete the four-point play. He converted another four-point play in the fourth quarter to push the Sixers' lead to 24 points, getting a hug from new teammate Joel Embiid.

Even before the contest, Embiid had plenty of good things to say about Philadelphia's prized acquisition. "He's a great person, a great personality," Embiid said. "Always smiling. Fun to be around. His presence - on the team, and on the floor - has really changed us a lot since he got here." Embiid was even happier after playing his first game alongside Harden. "He was making plays for all of us," Embiid said. "That was probably as wide-open as I've been in my entire career. The shot-making ability, shot creation, you should've seen my face ... We've never had this, nothing close to this."

Harden, a three-time NBA scoring champion, said he would be happy to be cast in the role of playmaker alongside MVP candidate Embiid if that is what will help the 76ers win. "I am willing to do whatever," Harden said. "We have one common goal. I have nothing to prove individually. As a unit, I think



MINNEAPOLIS: James Harden of the Philadelphia 76ers dribbles the ball against the Minnesota Timberwolves at Target Center on Friday. —AFP

we have something to prove." Embiid led the 76ers with 34 points and 10 rebounds and Tyrese Maxey added 28 points for Philadelphia, who are third in the East and hoping Harden's arrival can help them challenge for the top spot now shared by the Miami Heat and Chicago Bulls. The Heat kept pace with the Bulls with a 115-100 vic-

tory over the Knicks in New York.

Tyler Herro scored 25 points and Jimmy Butler added 23 as the Heat withstood a career-high 46 points from Knicks forward RJ Barrett at Madison Square Garden. Kyle Lowry contributed 19 points for Miami, who had 16 points and 16 rebounds from Bam Adebayo. Barrett, back after missing four games with a sprained left ankle, made six three-pointers and pulled down nine rebounds.

But star forward Julius Randle struggled again, connecting on just two of 15 shots from the floor on the way to 11 points with eight rebounds and eight assists. The Knicks dropped their fourth straight, the defeat coming after they announced that Derrick Rose's return from ankle surgery would be delayed after he underwent a follow-up procedure on Friday.

Pelicans shock Suns

Elsewhere, the Los Angeles Lakers let another victory slip away late, falling to their LA rivals the Clippers 105-102. The LeBron James-led Lakers, who have won just three of their last 10 games, rallied from a 16-point deficit and trailed by one with four seconds remaining when Carmelo Anthony missed a deep three-pointer. James missed a potential game-tying three-pointer as time expired, finishing with 21 points and 11 rebounds to see his streak of games with at least 25 points end at 23.

In the surprise of the night, CJ McCollum scored 32 points to lead the New Orleans Pelicans to a 117-102 victory over the league-leading Phoenix Suns. Brandon Ingram added 28 points for New Orleans and Jonas Valanciunas had 18 points and 17 rebounds as the Pelicans ended the Suns' eight-game winning streak.

In Salt Lake City, Utah's Donovan Mitchell hit a career-high seven three-pointers on the way to 33 points in the Jazz's 114-109 victory over the Dallas Mavericks. San Antonio guard Dejounte Murray, coming off his first NBA All-Star Game appearance, produced a triple-double of 31 points, 13 rebounds and 14 assists to help the Spurs hold off the Washington Wizards 157-153 in double overtime. —AFP