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Ukraine to meet Russia as Putin puts nuclear defenses on alert

Ukrainian army secures Kharkiv • Hundreds of thousands flee



KHARKIV, Ukraine: A Russian armored personnel carrier (APC) burns during a fight with Ukrainian armed forces yesterday. — AFP

KHARKIV, Ukraine: Ukraine said yesterday it had agreed to talks with Russia after four days of conflict, as Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his defense chiefs to put nuclear “deterrence forces” on alert. The conflict has already killed dozens of civilians, forced hundreds of thousands to flee and turned Moscow into a global pariah. President Volodymyr Zelensky’s office said a Ukrainian delegation would meet the Russian one at the border with Belarus, which has allowed Russian troops passage to attack Ukraine.

The meeting is set to take place near Chernobyl – the site of the world’s worst nuclear disaster. “The politicians agreed that the Ukrainian delegation would meet the Russian one without preconditions,” Zelensky’s office said in a statement after the president spoke to his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko. Ukrainian forces earlier said they had fought off a Russian incursion into Ukraine’s second biggest city, Kharkiv, on day four of Russia’s invasion.

As Western countries lined up to send arms into Ukraine and impose ever more stringent sanctions, Putin ordered his defense chiefs to put the country’s nuclear “deterrence forces” on high alert. Putin accused Western countries of taking “unfriendly” steps against his country. Ukraine has reported 198

civilian deaths, including three children, since the invasion began. The UN has put the civilian toll at 64. “The past night in Ukraine was brutal,” Zelensky said. “They fight against everyone. They fight against all living things – against kindergartens, against residential buildings and even against ambulances.”

Several European countries meanwhile banned Russian airlines from their airspace on Sunday and many pledged arms for Ukraine but made it clear that they will not intervene militarily. In his traditional Sunday message to the faithful in St Peter’s Square, Pope Francis called for weapons to “fall silent” in the country and for the opening of humanitarian corridors. A day after Berlin said it would send anti-tank weapons and Stinger missiles to Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the world was in a “new era” and warned of further sanctions.

Machine gun fire and explosions were heard in Kharkiv earlier yesterday and AFP later saw the wreckage of a Russian armored vehicle smoldering and several others abandoned. “Kharkiv is fully under our control,” the head of the regional administration, Oleg Sinegov, said on Telegram, adding that the army was expelling Russian forces during a “clean-up” operation.

Continued on Page 2

MoH commends GCC cooperation in curbing COVID

KUWAIT: Cooperation amongst members of the GCC had resulted in the success of efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), a Kuwaiti health official said yesterday. In a statement to KUNA, Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad indicated that national pandemic indicators show that the fourth wave of the coronavirus has been subsiding, noting that this success was attributed to the efforts of national staff as well as their cooperation with fellow medical personnel in the GCC.

Dr Sanad noted that the ministry had always seen “the light at the end of the dark tunnel” when it came to the pandemic, saying that the MoH and its partners throughout the Gulf region worked hard to protect society from the threat of coronavirus. The entire GCC medical community will continue to cooperate in the foreseeable future to fend off any challenges facing the people of the region, he affirmed, stressing that the medical sectors in Kuwait and the Gulf region had proven their worth during the course of the pandemic.

Dr Sanad also announced the new schedules of work at coronavirus vaccination centers during the celebrations marking the country’s National Day and Independence Day from Feb 27 to March 3. Kuwait Vaccination Center at Mishref fairground will be open for people aged above 40 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm without the requirement of a prior appointment, Dr Sanad said in a press release. Primary healthcare centers, namely the centers of Shaab, Salwa, Omariya, Masayel and Naem, will be open between 3:00 pm and 9:00 pm, he added.

The health ministry yesterday said 607 more people tested positive for COVID-19 over the past 24 hours, taking the country’s caseload to 619,310. Some 1,788 more people recovered from the virus to take total recoveries to 60,6657, according to Dr Sanad, adding that the recovery to positive case ratio stands at 98 percent. One fatality linked to the virus took the country’s death toll from the pandemic to 2,537, while 212 people are hospitalized with the virus, 62 of whom need intensive care. Some 22,447 swab tests were conducted over the past day, taking total tests to 7,626,573. — KUNA

Arab students in Ukraine desperate to go home

TUNIS: Thousands of young Arabs who took up studies in Ukraine, often fleeing violence back home, are appealing to be rescued from a new nightmare – Russia’s full scale invasion of the country. More than 10,000 Arab students attend university in Ukraine, drawn to the former Soviet republic by a low cost of living and, for many, the lure of relative safety compared with their own troubled homelands.

Kuwait looks to sustainability at Expo festivities

DUBAI: Kuwait celebrated its 61st National Day at Expo 2020 Dubai with a flag-raising ceremony, speeches and cultural performances at the Al Wasl Stage of Nations, emphasising its ‘New Kuwait’ 2035 vision for a sustainable future. Khalifa Shaheen Al-Marar, UAE Minister of State welcomed Dr Ahmad Rouh El-Din, Kuwait’s Minister of Information and Culture.

Marar said: “We congratulate the government and people of Kuwait on their 61st National Day and laud their

distinguished participation in Expo 2020 Dubai – one that showcases the capabilities of a country which combines the past and present to form a long-term vision for its future. The pavilion introduces visitors to the nature and spirit of Kuwait, highlighting its government’s commitment to sustainability in line with Kuwait Vision 2035.”

Rouh El-Din said: “The Kuwait pavilion reflects the civilization of the country under the theme ‘New Opportunities for Sustainability’. With over two million visits to the pavilion so far, people have had the opportunity to learn about the history of Kuwait, and its present, which is full of urban development, as well as its Vision 2035 for the future, especially in the fields of sustainable ideas and alternative energy sources.” (See Page 3)

Trump praises Putin, revives election lies

ORLANDO: Donald Trump emerged from political exile Saturday to blast President Joe Biden and NATO over the Ukraine crisis and reprise his false claims of a stolen 2020 election in a speech to grassroots Republicans. Speaking at the annual

Many have criticized their governments for failing to take concrete measures to repatriate them, and sought refuge in basements or the metro system. Few dared to cross the border into neighboring Poland or Romania in search of sanctuary. “We left Iraq to escape war... but it’s the same thing in Ukraine (now),” Ali Mohammed, an Iraqi student told AFP by telephone from the western city of Chernivtsi.

Mohammed said he has been calling the Iraqi embassy in Kyiv around a dozen times a day since Russia launched the invasion but no one has picked up. “We are demanding to go home. We are waiting to be rescued,” he said. According to an Iraqi government official, there are 5,500 Iraqis in Ukraine, 450 of them students.

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DNIPRO, Ukraine: Henry and Robert, Kuwait-based Egyptian brothers studying in Ukraine, wait to board a bus heading to Romania. (See Page 2)



DUBAI: Dr Hamad Ahmad Rouh El-Din and Khalifa Shaheen Al-Marar with other dignitaries watch a performance at the Kuwait pavilion at the Dubai Expo 2020 during Kuwait’s National Day celebrations.

Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida, the former president spent 86 minutes reprising many of his favorite applause lines, assailing the “radical left” and its “witch hunt” against him.

As massive explosions lit up the sky over Ukraine’s capital Kyiv, Trump blamed Russia’s invasion of its neighbor on Biden’s “weakness” and lavished praise on President Vladimir Putin’s intellect. “As everyone understands, this horrific disaster would never have happened if our election was not rigged,” he said, to rapt applause.

Continued on Page 2



ORLANDO: Former US President Donald Trump speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference 2022 (CPAC) on Saturday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait-based Egyptian students narrate horrific ordeal in Ukraine

Thousands of Arab students remain stranded after Russian invasion

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Robert Abdulmalek and Henry Salah are two Kuwait-based Egyptian brothers among thousands of Arab students in Ukraine who are stranded after Russia invaded the country. Robert and Henry are in Dnipro, around 390 km southeast of the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. Their location is far from the main battlefields, but the sounds of sirens, bombs and fighter jets can be heard almost 24/7 since the start of invasion.

"I haven't slept for the past three days. I am afraid they might drop a missile on our dormitory. It is an horrifying experience and I want to get out of this place as soon as possible," said Robert, who spoke to Kuwait Times via Facebook from Dnipro while waiting with Henry for a bus to leave Ukraine. "We are currently waiting for a bus to take us out

from here to Romania. This is my longest day ever and my first time to leave my dorm after news about the Russian invasion spread all over Ukraine. We are terri-



'Very unfortunate chapter in the history of Ukraine'

fied and in a state of shock. We want to go home," he said.

The buses to Romania were arranged through the embassies of other countries. More than 10,000 Arab students attend university in Ukraine, lured by the

relatively safe environment compared with their own troubled homelands. "I heard the trip will take us up to 12 hours. May God bless us and keep us safe," Robert said.

Henry said they were preparing for an evacuation for the past two weeks. "We received very minimal help from the Egyptian Embassy. They are far from here, in Kyiv, and they are also probably busy doing their own evacuations. So we coordinated with other Arab students to get out of here," Henry said. "If we successfully cross the border to Romania, we can manage to find our way home to Kuwait. Our father will arrange tickets to Kuwait from Romania. We want to leave because there's no food left in grocery stores and people are panicking," he added.

Robert and Henry came to Ukraine barely five months for higher studies. "I



DNIPRO, Ukraine: Henry and Robert Abdelmalek at Dnipro waiting to board a bus heading to Romania. Arab students in Ukraine are fleeing from neighboring Romania to escape the ongoing war in Ukraine.

like it here in Dnipro as a student. The city was very quiet and peaceful until the Russian invasion. God bless the people of Ukraine for this very unfortunate chapter in the history of their

beloved country. We will return soon, inshallah," Henry said. Dnipro is a major educational center in Ukraine and home to two of Ukraine's top 10 universities.

Fire Force official visits exhibition of fire-fighting equipment

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of Kuwait Fire Force's Control Sector Maj Gen Jamal Badr Nasser visited the exhibition of equipment of the Kuwait Fire Force near the Kuwait Towers on the occasion of the national celebrations to review the efforts made by the force to educate citizens and residents by displaying the latest advanced mechanisms and equipment used by firefighters to pro-

tect life and property.

General Coordinator of the National Celebrations Preparation Team Brig Gen Muhammad Haider Ali also paid an inspection visit to fire stations in charge of securing the national celebrations on Arabian Gulf Road and conveyed to them the greetings and appreciation of the Chief of Kuwait Fire Force Lt Gen Khaled Rakan Al-Mekrad, stressing that their presence to secure the national celebrations is appreciated. Haider was briefed on the tasks assigned to the checkpoints and the plan prepared by the central operations department to control traffic jams. Haider was accompanied on the tour by Director of Public Relations and Media Col Muhammad Badr Ibrahim.



KUWAIT: Maj Gen Jamal Badr inspects firefighting equipment exhibition near Kuwait Towers



Ukraine to meet Russia as Putin...

Continued from Page 1

Moscow also claimed it was "entirely" besieging the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson and the city of Berdiansk in the southeast. Both are located close the Crimea peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Ukrainian officials also said that a gas pipeline in eastern Kharkiv and an oil depot near the capital Kyiv were targeted by Russian forces overnight. Ukraine said it was fighting off Russian forces in several other points and that 4,300 Russian troops had been killed.

None of the claims could be independently verified. In Kyiv, many residents spent another night in shelters or cellars as Ukrainian forces said they were fighting off Russian "sabotage groups", but yesterday was relatively calm compared to previous days. The city is under a blanket curfew until today morning though some residents ventured out regardless. Out for a walk in a park, 41-year-old Flora Stepanova said staying at home watching the news all the time "will drive you crazy".

On Saturday, Russia ordered its forces to advance further into Ukraine "from all directions" but soldiers have encountered fierce resistance from Ukrainian troops. Western sources said the intensity of the resistance seems to have surprised Moscow. Ukraine's army said it held the line against an assault on Kyiv, but

was using the curfew to fight Russian "sabotage groups" that had infiltrated the city. Yesterday, Ukraine's general staff urged any foreigners to come to Ukraine "and fight side-by-side with Ukrainians against Russian war criminals".

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) says more than 368,000 people have fled to neighboring countries, while more than 160,000 are estimated to be displaced within Ukraine. Pope Francis called for the "urgent" opening of humanitarian corridors for Ukraine to allow even more to leave. AFP saw stationary queues of cars stretching for dozens of kilometers on the roads to Ukraine's border crossings with Poland. "Attacks were everywhere," said Diana, 37, who fled the Ukrainian capital. "My mother is still in Kyiv."

Poland, Germany and Austria have said Ukrainians can ride for free on their trains until further notice. In Romania, which also neighbors Ukraine, Olga, 36, was among hundreds to have crossed the Danube river with her three young children to safety. "My husband came with us as far as the border, before returning to Kyiv to fight," she said.

Responding to the invasion, the West said it would remove some Russian banks from the SWIFT bank messaging system, and froze central bank assets - hitting some of Russia's global trade. A senior US official said the measures would turn Russia into a "pariah", adding that a task force would hunt down Russian oligarchs' assets. The conflict has rattled particularly former Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe who fear their post Cold War democratic gains could be threatened by Russian aggression.—AFP



KHARKIV, Ukraine: An Ukrainian Territorial Defence fighter examines a destroyed Russian infantry mobility vehicle GAZ Tigr after a fight in Kharkiv yesterday. — AFP

Arab students in Ukraine desperate...

Continued from Page 1

Syrian Raed Al-Moudaress, 24, echoed him. "I arrived in Odessa only six months ago, hoping to open a new page far away from war," he told AFP by telephone. "I am lost. I don't know what to do," he said, adding he is spending most of his time hiding in a basement. Among Arab countries, Morocco has the largest number of students in Ukraine, with around 8,000 enrolled in universities, followed by Egypt with more than 3,000.

"We demand solutions. The authorities must find us a solution," to get back home to Morocco, Majda tweeted when the invasion began on Thursday. "What are you waiting for? This is World War III," she said, addressing authorities in her country, who announced measures the following day.

Hundreds of students from Lebanon, gripped by a financial crisis the World Bank says is one of the world's worst in modern times, are also trapped in the country. "The (Beirut) authorities have not

issued guidelines" for our evacuation, said Samir, 25. "I left Lebanon because of the financial crisis, sold my car and took my small savings to study in Ukraine," he told AFP from Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv, near the Russian border.

Ali Chreim, a restaurant owner from Kyiv who heads the Lebanese expat community in Ukraine, said he has been helping a group of young Lebanese women, who have sought shelter in the capital's metro, by sending them food. Before the invasion, 1,300 Lebanese students were studying in the country. Half managed to flee by their own means, but the rest are stuck, Chreim said. Beirut set up a hotline but it only functions "intermittently", he added.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib said the government was drawing up plans to help nationals trapped in Ukraine. Planes will be sent to neighboring Poland and Romania at a "date to be announced later", he said. Other countries like Egypt have also pledged to organize repatriation flights from neighboring countries. But for Tunisia which does not have an embassy in Ukraine, getting in touch with its 1,700 citizens there is complicated.

Authorities said they had been in contact with international organizations such as the Red Cross to organize departures. — AFP

Trump praises Putin, revives...

Continued from Page 1

NATO, he said, was "looking the opposite of smart" for hitting Russia with sanctions rather than resolving to "blow (Russia) to pieces - at least psychologically". "The problem is not that Putin is smart, which of course he's smart," he went on. "But the real problem is that our leaders are so dumb."

After a year largely out of the public eye, Trump's ecstatic reception left little doubt that the Republican Party remains in thrall to the twice-impeached, single-term president. There were chants of "four more years" from the sea of supporters in red "Make America Great Again" hats, who clapped on cue as Trump railed against "woke tyranny" and "cancel culture".

The crowd reserved their largest cheers for the 75-year-old headliner's dismissal of Democrats' claims to be the party of democracy as "bulls***" - and for his claim that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg "used to come to the White House and

kiss my a**". There were nods to a possible 2024 run - "we did it twice and we'll do it again," he claimed, falsely recasting his 2020 defeat to Biden as a victory - although he left the crowd guessing about whether he will personally challenge Biden to a rematch.

CPAC, the country's largest conservative gathering, usually offers a valuable insight into the direction the Republicans plan to take over the coming months. Trump had been expected to lay out a forward-looking "vision for America", according to organizers, as the Republicans look to take back control of Congress in November's midterm elections. Instead, he dwelt at length on his 2020 election loss and his false claims that he was robbed by widespread voter fraud, urging the crowd to "fight like hell" or face their country being destroyed.

It was similar to the rhetoric that inspired a mob of his supporters to storm the US Capitol on Jan 6 2021, for which he was punished with his second impeachment. His remarks came as Russian rockets began pounding the outskirts of Kyiv in an escalating crisis that ended up emerging as a major topic of discussion at CPAC. Trump called besieged President Volodymyr Zelensky "a brave man", falsely claiming that the Ukrainian leader had exonerated him over the scandal that led to his first impeachment. — AFP

Local



DUBAI: Dr Hamad Ahmad Rouh El-Din and Khalifa Shaheen Al-Marar with other dignitaries arrive at the Kuwait Pavilion at the Dubai Expo 2020 during Kuwait's National Day celebrations.

Kuwait emphasizes its 'Vision 2035' for a sustainable future

Kuwait celebrates National Day at Expo 2020 Dubai

DUBAI: Kuwait celebrated its 61st National Day at Expo 2020 Dubai on Friday with a flag-raising ceremony, speeches and cultural performances at the Al-Wasl Stage of Nations, emphasizing its Vision 2035 for a sustainable future.

Khalifa Shaheen Al-Marar, UAE Minister of State welcomed Dr Hamad Ahmad Rouh El-Din, Kuwait's Minister of Information and Culture. Al-Marar said: "We congratulate the government and people of Kuwait on their 61st National Day and laud their distinguished participation in Expo 2020 Dubai - one that showcases the capabilities of a country which combines the past and present to form a long-term vision for its future. The pavilion introduces visitors to the nature and spirit of Kuwait, highlighting its government's commitment to sustainability in line with Kuwait Vision 2035.

"The relations between our two countries have witnessed significant developments in various fields through diverse partnerships in areas of common interest, and we are keen to continue working with Kuwait towards a more prosperous future."

Rouh El-Din said: "Selecting Dubai to host Expo 2020 - the first time the event is held in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia - simply signals how the world trusts the UAE to manage international events, despite the economic, social and health challenges

caused by the global pandemic.

"The Kuwait pavilion reflects the civilization of the country under the theme 'New Opportunities for Sustainability'. With over two million visits to the pavilion so far, people have had the opportunity to



Kuwait pavilion reflects civilization of the country: Rouh El-Din

learn about the history of Kuwait, and its present, which is full of urban development, as well as its Vision 2035 for the future, especially in the fields of sustainable ideas and alternative energy sources."

Kuwait's National TV band joined Amani, the first female opera singer from the Arabian Gulf, in an

upbeat performance at Al-Wasl dome. Amani sings in Italian, Russian, German, French and English effortlessly, and has sung at prestigious international venues, such as Cairo Opera House.

Located in the Sustainability District, the Kuwait pavilion shares the ethos that as a population that has thrived for centuries amid the desert's unforgiving sands, Kuwaitis are profoundly in tune with the need to preserve scarce natural resources. The pavilion focuses on all aspects of sustainability - from efficient new transport networks to futuristic smart homes.

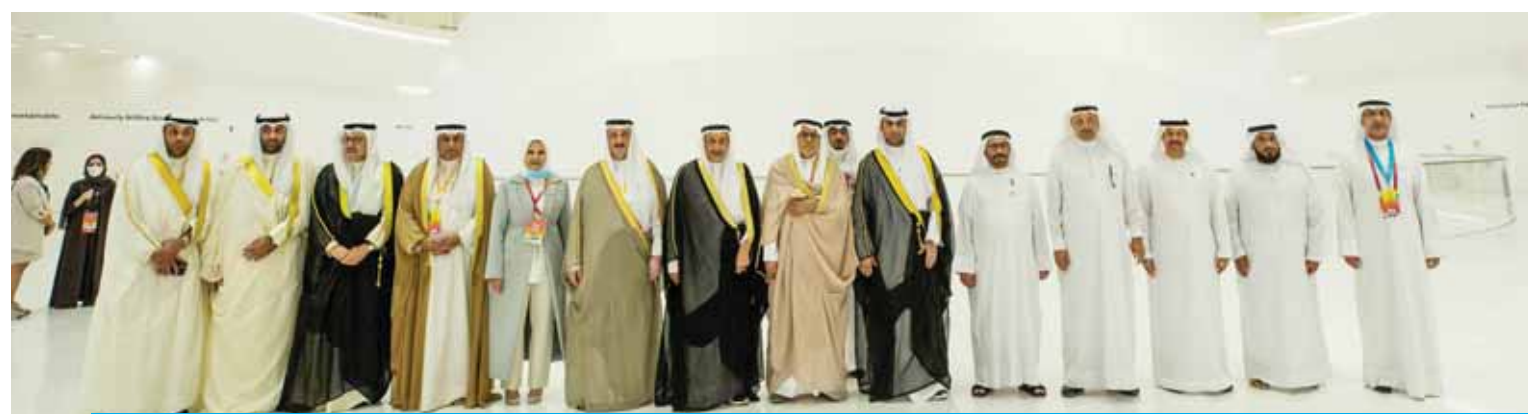
Visitors can also explore the 'Spring of Life', an architectural feature inspired by the country's vision for sustainability, or marvel at The Envelope, a facade that shimmers and reflects sunlight, embodying Kuwait's nature and energy. There are also authentic Kuwaiti dishes rich with flavor, aromas and spices to enjoy.

National and Honor Days at Expo 2020 Dubai are moments to celebrate each of our 200-plus International Participants, shining a light on their culture and achievements, and showcasing their pavilions and programming.

Running until 31 March, Expo 2020 has invited visitors from across the planet to join the making of a new world in a six-month celebration of human creativity, innovation, progress and culture.



DUBAI: Dr Hamad Ahmad Rouh El-Din delivers his speech



DUBAI: A group picture with Minister of Information and Culture Dr Hamd Ahmad Rouh El-Din (sixth right), UAE Minister of State Khalifa Shaheen Al-Marar (fifth right), and Executive Director Commissioner, General Office, Expo 2020 Dubai, Najeeb Mohammed Al-Ali (fourth right), during Kuwait National Day at the UAE pavilion, Expo 2020 Dubai. — Photo by Expo 2020 Dubai



DUBAI: Kuwait bespoke show immersive projection at Al-Wasl



DUBAI: Cultural performance during the National Day celebration.



DUBAI: The Information minister at the Kuwait Pavilion



DUBAI: Cultural performance during Kuwait National Day Ceremony at Al-Wasl

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comAdvisory to
Kuwaitis in
Ukraine

KUWAIT: The Consular Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry urged Kuwaitis in Ukraine who are planning to leave to a neighboring country to contact the Kuwaiti embassy in their intended destination on the following numbers: Kuwaiti embassy in Romania: 0040725922222 - 0040746151512; embassy in Hungary: 0036308980000 - 0036301670000; embassy in Poland: 0048795542647 - 0048664555444; and embassy in Slovakia: 00421908732868 - 00421918953442. The Department assured that the Kuwaiti embassies are ready to do all in power to help nationals and remove any obstacles they may face. —KUNA

News in brief

Kuwaitis in Indonesia
cautioned after quake

KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwait's embassy in Indonesia on Saturday urged nationals to exercise a high degree of caution a day after a magnitude 6.2 earthquake jolted the western coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island, leaving seven people dead and 85 others wounded. Kuwaiti nationals were told to dial the hotline +62815151511 for any assistance needed, according to an embassy statement. Lying in a seismic zone where tectonic plates rub up against each other, Indonesia suffers from frequent tremors on a yearly basis. —KUNA

Social Reform Society sends
270 aid trucks to countries

ANKARA: The Social Reform Society, an affiliate of the Kuwaiti Mercy International Association, Saturday announced sending 270 relief assistance trucks to 23 countries in coincidence with marking Kuwait's National Days. Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Dr Adnan Al-Hadad, senior official at the society, said the association ended the distribution of aid in Turkey, Djibouti, Albania, Lebanon and Philippines, adding that up to 600,000 people benefited from the aid. The aid includes food and relief items, and medicine as well as others, in accordance with the needs of the beneficiaries in those states, he noted. He thanked Kuwait's benefactors and ambassadors, and representatives of the diplomatic missions for their positive participation in, and reaction to, the campaign to assist the needy. —KUNA

Kuwait body trains youth
in science, technology

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Youth Public Authority launched the second season of (Wadi Al-Shabab) project, aiming to develop the skills of youth in science and technology. The project provides specialized training courses in technology, including (IoT), which teaches youth the basics of the internet, building smart houses and artificial intelligence, the authority said in a statement yesterday. The project will also include courses on solar energy, designing web pages for beginners, HTML, language, building robots and laser machines, it added. —KUNA

Jordan celebrates
National Days

AMMAN: A number of governorates and cities in Jordan marked Friday the 61st National Day and the 31st Liberation Day of Kuwait, in a scene that shows the deep-rooted brotherly ties between the two countries. Some buildings in Amman were decorated with lights portraying Kuwait's flag and Jordan's institutions, via visual panels, murals and electronic posters, sent greetings and congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people on the two joyful occasions. —KUNA

Kuwaitis recall sacrifices on
31st Liberation anniversary

Late Sheikh Jaber lauded for exemplary leadership



KUWAIT: In this file photo taken on February 26, 1991, Kuwaiti resistance fighters celebrate with a member of the US Marine Special forces (center) after the Marines entered the small town of Sabahiah, 9 miles from the capital of Kuwait City. —AFP file photo

KUWAIT: People of Kuwait recall the country's liberation from the Iraqi occupation on the occasion of the country's 31st Liberation Day. They remember the great sacrifices made by the patriots for freedom of the homeland. Although, Kuwait's invasion on August 2, 1990, was quite a brutal one, the Kuwaiti people rebuffed the aggression affirming their solidarity with the legitimate leadership that had been headed by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for defending the homeland's sovereignty and freedom.

The late Amir, despite enormous challenges at the time, masterminded a national campaign to rally international support for the just Kuwaiti cause. In his historic address to the United Nations, Sheikh Jaber had stated, "I have come with a message from people who love and have worked for peace, aiding those in need and reconciling adversaries." Their security and stability have been jeopardized due to their belief in the ideal message of our religion Islam that is also stipulated by international charters." I came with a message of people whose territories were a minaret for peaceful co-existence and brotherhood and nowadays they lost their land but refused to surrender to the occupation no matter how brutal and repressive it may be."

Sheikh Jaber had succeeded in drawing solidarity from various states and organizations, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), that proved to be the core for diplomatic efforts against the aggression, demanding unconditional withdrawal of the occupiers. GCC foreign ministers held an emergency meeting in Cairo on August 3, 1990, and lobbied for holding an extraordinary Arab summit in the Egyptian capital on August 10. Thanks to efforts by GCC countries, other brotherly and friendly states, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issued a series of resolution namely resolution 660 that condemned the aggression demanding

unconditional pullout of the occupiers and resolution 678 that supported necessary means to implement the relevant resolutions, restore regional security and peace in addition to several others that called for wiping out the repercussions of the aggression. Moreover, the brotherly and friendly countries put military and material resources at the disposal of liberating Kuwait. Worth recalling was also the crucial role played by late Father Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah who commanded the liberation heroes and facilitated



settlement of the Amir Sheikh Jaber in Saudi Arabia where he set up a government in exile securing honorable livelihood for Kuwaitis in and outside Kuwait as well as supporting the national resistance.

For his part, the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah employed his diplomatic expertise for securing international sympathy that led to driving the aggressors out of the country. Furthermore, the Kuwaitis recall, on the occasion, the pivotal role played by the late



KUWAIT: Late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrives in Kuwait following the Liberation of Kuwait from the occupation forces. —KUNA file photo

Saudi King Fahad Bin Abdulaziz who hosted the Kuwaitis in his country and contributed with material and military support. Other GCC states had followed suit supporting the Kuwaitis during the hard times and rejecting the flagrant aggression on their homeland. The late US President George Bush senior had instantly declared siding with Kuwait in the face of the aggression and Washington lobbied for holding an emergency session of the UNSC during which resolution 660 was adopted, demanding withdrawal of the aggressors from Kuwait. On January 19, 1990, Bush persuaded the US Senate of the necessity to employ military force for liberating Kuwait, declaring a war on the Iraqi occupiers and the commitment to free the country. Although the Kuwaiti people were deeply bruised with the aggression, a campaign was launched in 1993 to aid the Iraqi people. The Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS) upon instructions by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad dispatched aid to the Iraqi refugees in Iran as of April 1995, choosing to side with the stricken Iraqi people from humanitarian considerations and sentiments. Additionally, Kuwait in the wake of the fall of the defunct Iraqi regime provided relief supplies, in 2003, to the Iraqi refugees and the displaced elsewhere. In July 2016, Kuwait pledged \$176 million worth of aid for Iraq at an international donors' conference. Kuwait, after it was designated as "the center for humanitarian action" by the UN, hosted, in February 2018, an international convention for supporting Iraq's reconstruction. Stakeholders pledged \$30 billion in aid to help the Iraqis who had suffered from a series of wars. The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad visited Iraq on June 19, 2019, seeking to preserve brotherly ties and fold files of sticking issues, an approach maintained by the current Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —KUNA



KUWAIT: In this file photo taken on February 28, 1991, a member of the Kuwaiti resistance raises his rifle and the national flag in celebration as Kuwaitis filled the streets after US President George Bush's announcement of a ceasefire. —AFP file photo



KUWAIT: In this file photo taken on February 28, 1991, people with rifles and Kuwaiti national flags celebrate in the streets of Kuwait City. —AFP file photo

Kuwaiti artists
display works at
Aswan Women
Film Festival

CAIRO: Three Kuwaiti female artists and writers displayed at an international event in Egypt, yesterday their successful ventures in fields of choice, articulating that their experiences of womanhood shaped their careers and heavily influenced their work. This came in symposium organized by Nut Forum as part of Aswan International Women Film Festival. The symposium, moderated by Narmeen Amer, revolves around the challenges women in creative fields face.

Artist Thuraya Al-Baqsam commented that her work in writing and the arts is largely influenced by her experiences in various countries, including the soviet school of thought and African culture. Al-Baqsam added that her career in writing started when she was a child and gradually evolved into

having her own column in Al-Qabas local newspaper. On her experience during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Al-Baqsam stated that she managed to draw 85 symbolic paintings but seized to produce any artistic work following the imprisonment of her husband by the invading army.

Al-Baqsam also mentioned that she has been working on art exhibition that includes one thousand paintings but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two times winner of State's Admiration and Encouragement award, Amal Al-Randi, talked of her experience in writing, stating that she first began her career in children literature with a collection of short stories depicting gender equality. Al-Randi stated that she is thoroughly invested in the female experience and women issues as she uses her writings to explore familial roles and propose solutions to social issues. She also utilizes her platform to handle topics of tolerance and equality, and delivers her message in a manner that is accessible and attractive to children. Al-Randi mentioned her initiative of interactive storytelling with the participation of a number of children literature writers, which both parents and children can enjoy. On her part, interior engineer Hadeel Al-Saleh, shed light on the challenges and



CAIRO: Kuwaiti female artists during the symposium. —KUNA

setbacks she faced in order attain the doctorate degree in her field of and fulfill her dream of becoming a professor.

Al-Saleh shared that not surrendering and challenging oneself is key to accomplishing life goals, commenting that this is the life lesson she learned along the way. —KUNA



North Korea fires ballistic missile, restarting weapons tests blitz

Too little too late? West finally coughs up arms for Ukraine



PARIS: Protesters gather Place de la Republique during a rally against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

‘Russia out!’ Worldwide protests in solidarity with Ukraine

More than 3,000 people gathered in the French city of Strasbourg

ROME: Pro-Ukraine demonstrations erupted across the world on Saturday, as thousands took to the streets from London to New York to Tehran to denounce Russia's assault on its neighbor. Moscow's invasion has sparked global outcry and prompted punishing sanctions from the West, some directed against Russian President Vladimir Putin himself. On Saturday, rallies were held in cities across the world to join the chorus of condemnation and urge an end to the bloodshed.

In Switzerland, thousands of people gathered across the country, including about 1,000 outside the United Nations' European headquarters in Geneva. Demonstrators draped in Ukraine's national colors of blue and yellow flocked to the "Broken Chair"—a large sculpture symbolizing the civilian victims of war. The protesters demanded tougher actions from the government, which has so far avoided imposing strict measures, choosing instead to stick closer to its traditional "neutral" stance. Swiss-based Russians joined in to show their opposition to the war, holding signs saying "I am Russian".

More than 3,000 people gathered in the French city of Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe human rights organization, bearing placards calling Putin a killer and urging an end to the fighting. "Putin and his entire clique will have to pay the price for this aggression and face an international court," said Borys Tarasyuk, Ukraine's permanent representative to the Council of Europe.

In France, there were protests in Paris, Montpellier and Marseille. In Russia's neighbor Finland, thousands of people gathered in the capital Helsinki shouting "Russia out, down with Putin!" Around 3,000 people gathered in Vienna, with homemade placards bearing slogans such as including "Stop the War" and speeches from Austria's Ukrainian community. More than 1,000 demonstrators answered the call of trade unions and NGOs in central Rome, huddling around a podium bearing the words "Against War".

'Powerlessness'

Thousands of people had taken part in a torch-lit procession to the Colosseum, one of the Italian capital's major landmarks, on Friday evening. Putin was the march's main target as banners caricatured him as an assassin with bloodstained hands and compared him to Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler with the words: "Can you recognize when history repeats itself?" "We've always been close to the Ukrainian people," Maria Sergi, a 40-year-old Russian-born Italian, told AFP. "Our feeling of powerlessness is huge."

Around a thousand anti-war demonstrators turned out to protest in Barcelona Saturday, said

local police. Dimitri, a Russian designer living in Barcelona, said he feared sanctions would set Russia's development back. "We're all going to suffer," the 37-year-old told AFP. In Britain, hundreds of protesters headed to Russia's embassy in London, with some defacing a street sign called "St Petersburg Place" opposite the embassy with fake blood. And around 50 people in Tehran assembled by Kyiv's embassy to Iran, an AFP correspondent saw, some holding candles and Ukrainian flags and chanting against the war and Putin. Protests were also reported in Israel, Estonia and New York on Saturday.

'Glory to Ukraine, glory to its heroes'

'Ukraine is bleeding'

In Georgia, almost 30,000 people hit the streets of Tbilisi Friday night, waving Ukrainian and Georgian flags and singing both countries' national anthems. Russia's attack on Ukraine resonates strongly in Georgia, a fellow ex-Soviet republic that suffered a devastating Russian invasion in 2008.

"We have sympathy for the Ukrainians, perhaps more than other countries, because we've experienced Russia's barbaric aggression on our soil," Niko Tvaurei, a 32-year-old taxi driver, told AFP.

Teacher Meri Tordia added: "Ukraine is bleeding, the world watches and talks about sanctions that won't stop Putin." More than 2,000 protesters gathered outside the Russian embassy in Greece's capital Athens on Friday evening following an appeal by the traditionally pro-Russian Communist and left-wing Syriza parties and more demonstrations followed on Saturday.

'Anger'

The shockwaves from Moscow's invasion of its neighbor have reverberated beyond Europe. In Argentina, Ukrainians and Argentines with Ukrainian ancestry were among the almost 2,000 people who descended on Russia's embassy in Buenos Aires on Friday. They chanted "Glory to Ukraine, glory to its heroes" and the national anthems of Argentina and Ukraine. Among the crowd was Tetiana Abramchenko, who moved to Argentina with her daughter in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

"My overriding feeling is anger," the 40-year-old told AFP as she fought back tears. "The last thing I imagined was Russians coming to kill my people." In Canada, dozens of demonstrators braved a snowstorm in Montreal to protest outside Russia's consulate on Friday afternoon. "I am against this war. I hope this is the beginning of the end of this regime," said Russian Elena Lelievre, a 37-year-old engineer — AFP



VATICAN: Pope Francis waves his hand to the crowd as he delivers his Angelus prayer from the window of his study overlooking St Peter's Square at the Vatican yesterday. — AFP

Pope calls for guns to 'fall silent' in Ukraine

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis yesterday called for an end to fighting in Ukraine on the fourth day of a Russian invasion of the country. "Let the weapons fall silent," he said. "God is with those who seek peace, not those resorting to violence." The Argentine pontiff also called for the "urgent" opening of humanitarian corridors to allow civilians to escape the onslaught.

"I am thinking of the elderly, of all those at the moment seeking refuge, of mothers fleeing with their children," he said. "They are brothers and sisters for whom it is urgent to open up humanitarian corridors and who must be welcomed."

The UN refugee agency UNHCR says more than 368,000 people have fled Ukraine since Russia invaded on Thursday. Many of those escaping to neighboring countries have crossed over into Poland, where the authorities have counted some 156,000 crossing since that date. Others have also headed to Moldavia, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. — AFP

Japanese billionaire Mikitani donates \$8.7m to Ukraine

TOKYO: Japanese billionaire Hiroshi "Mickey" Mikitani said yesterday he will donate \$8.7 million to the government of Ukraine, calling Russia's invasion "a challenge to democracy". The founder of e-commerce giant Rakuten said in a letter addressed to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky that the donation of 1 billion yen (\$8.7 million) will go toward "humanitarian activities to help people in Ukraine who are victims of the vio-

lence". Mikitani said he visited Kyiv in 2019 and met with Zelensky.

"My thoughts are with you and Ukraine people," Mikitani said in his letter. "I believe that the trampling of a peaceful and democratic Ukraine by unjustified force is a challenge to democracy. "I sincerely hope that Russia and Ukraine can resolve this issue peacefully and that Ukraine people can have peace again as soon as possible," he wrote.

Russia's invasion has prompted broad financial sanctions from major democracies while individuals and organizations across the world have solicited donations to help Ukraine. The Japanese government has also announced sanctions on Moscow including freezing assets and banning key exports such as semiconductors to organisations related to the Russian military. — AFP



TOKYO: Rakuten group's CEO Hiroshi Mikitani delivers a speech during a Rakuten Mobile press conference in Tokyo. — AFP

Chad peace talks in Qatar delayed

DOHA: Talks between Chad's military-led government and armed rebel groups was due to start yesterday in Qatar have been postponed, African diplomats and officials said. The talks were aimed at paving the way for an "inclusive national dialogue" and elections which the leader of the Chadian junta Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno has promised by October. Deby took over as head of a Transitional Military Council (TMC) in the poor landlocked central African country after his father, Idriss Deby Itno, who had ruled Chad for three decades, was killed in fighting with rebels in April last year.

African diplomats in Doha said Sunday's talks in Qatar had been delayed because preparations for the meeting had not been completed. "Some delegations are here. The talks did not start today but could start in coming days," a source with knowledge of the meeting told AFP on condition of anonymity as no-one was authorized to speak publicly. Chadian sources close to the negotiations told AFP in N'Djamena that the junta was insisting on inviting more than 80 members of the 23 armed rebel groups—a request initially denied by Qatar. Other sources, also speaking on condition of anonymity, blamed the delay on difficulties for would-be participants—some of whom live in Libya or Sudan—to obtain travel documents.

After taking power in last April, Deby, 37, dissolved Chad's parliament and repealed the constitu-

tion, but he promised "free and transparent" elections within 18 months. However, a national forum designed to chart the country's future has been put back from February to May. Preliminary talks have also been held up several times amidst recriminations between the government and opposition. In mid-February, Chad's military junta accused prominent rebel leader Timan Erdimi, who heads the powerful Union of Resistance Forces, of seeking to bring in Russian mercenaries to derail the reconciliation process. Erdimi, who was one of the fiercest opponents of Deby's father, was contacted by AFP at the time but refused to comment on the allegation. The African Union, European Union and France, the former colonial power, have supported the junta leader but insisted he must keep to his promised timetable to hold elections. —AFP

International

North Korea fires ballistic missile, restarting weapons tests blitz

The missile has a range of 300 km and an altitude of 620 km

SEOUL: North Korea fired a ballistic missile yesterday, Seoul said, resuming a weapons-testing blitz after a month-long lull during the Beijing Winter Olympics, with the world's attention now focused on Ukraine. Yesterday's launch is Pyongyang's eighth so far this year, including test-firing its most powerful missile since high-profile negotiations between leader Kim Jong Un and then US president Donald Trump collapsed in 2017. Diplomacy has languished ever since. And despite biting international sanctions, Pyongyang has doubled down on military development, threatening last month to abandon a self-imposed moratorium on firing long-range and nuclear weapons.

Analysts had widely predicted Pyongyang would seek to capitalize on US distraction over Russia's Thursday invasion of Ukraine with new tests. South Korea's military said yesterday it had detected a ballistic missile fired towards the Sea of Japan at 07:52 local time (2252 GMT Saturday) from Pyongyang. "The latest ballistic missile has a range of around 300 kilometers and an altitude of around 620 kilometers," it added. Japan also confirmed the launch.

South Korea's presidential Blue House expressed "deep concern and grave regret", and criticized the timing "when the world is making efforts to resolve the Ukraine war". South Korea has said it will join international economic sanctions against Russia and, as a key US security ally, is closely watching Washington's response to Moscow's aggression. Pyongyang, on the other hand, is "seizing the opportunity" to conduct weapons tests while "the US interest shifted to Europe over the Ukraine crisis and the UN Security Council unable to function," Shin Beom-chul, a researcher at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy, told AFP.

North Korea sees this as a perfect moment to

"continue its development of necessary weapons and to strengthen its nuclear arsenal", with a view to being recognized as a nuclear power, he added. Ukraine, which emerged from the Cold War with sizeable Soviet-era nuclear weapons stocks of its own, gave up its arsenal in the 1990s. North Korea this weekend accused the United States of being the "root cause of the Ukraine crisis" saying in a statement on the Foreign Ministry website that Washington "meddled" in the internal affairs of other countries when it suited them but condemned legitimate "self-defensive measures".

Missiles 'top priority'

North Korea is reeling economically from biting sanctions over its weapons programs and a lengthy coronavirus blockade, but continuing its "ambitious schedule of military modernization" is a top priority, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. "The Kim regime's strength and legitimacy have become tied to testing ever better missiles," he added in emailed comments. The pause in testing during the Beijing Winter Olympics was seen as a mark of deference to key diplomatically and economic benefactor China.

The latest launch also comes as South Korea gears up to elect its next president on March 9. Outgoing South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who repeatedly pursued peace talks with the North during his five-year term, has warned that the situation could easily escalate. "If North Korea's series of missile launches goes as far as scrapping a moratorium on long-range missile tests, the Korean Peninsula may instantly fall back into the state of crisis we faced five years ago," he said in a written interview with international press, including AFP, this month. Under Trump's successor Joe Biden, the United States has repeatedly declared its willing-



SEOUL: People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

ness to meet North Korean representatives. Pyongyang has dismissed the offer.

Domestically, North Korea is preparing to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the birth of late founder Kim Il Sung in April, which experts say Pyongyang could use to carry out a major weapons test. Recent satellite images suggest that the North may be preparing a military parade to

showcase its weapons to mark the key anniversary. "North Korea will be prudent about testing an intercontinental ballistic missile since it's the last remaining card that can put pressure on the United States," Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean Studies at Ewha Womans University, told AFP. "Such a card is only meaningful when you're holding it in your hand." —AFP

Nations approve major UN report on climate impacts

PARIS: Nearly 200 nations approved a major UN climate change report detailing the accelerating impacts of global warming yesterday, at the end of a sometimes fraught two-week meeting overshadowed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirmed that debates had concluded over the report's crucial "Summary for Policymakers", a 40-page overview distilling the thousands of pages of scientific research, which has been reviewed line-by-line and will be made public on February 28.

Species extinction, ecosystem collapse, mosquito-borne disease, deadly heat, water shortages, and reduced crop yields are already measurably worse due to global heating. Just in the last year, the world has seen a cascade of unprecedented floods, heatwaves and wildfires across four continents. All these impacts will accelerate in the coming decades even if the carbon pollution driving climate change is rapidly brought to heel, the report is expected to warn, according to an early draft seen by AFP in 2021.

It will also underscore the urgent need for "adaptation"—a term that refers to preparations for devastating consequences that can no longer be avoided. In some cases this means that adapting to intolerably hot days, flash flooding and storm surges has become a matter of life and death. The 2015 Paris deal calls for capping global warming at "well below" 2C, and ideally 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

In August 2021, another IPCC report on the physical science of human-caused climate change found that global heating is virtually certain to pass 1.5C, probably within a decade. Earth's surface has warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius since the 19th century. "We cannot escape the climate crisis," said Mohamed Adow, the head of think tank Power Shift Africa. He said the IPCC report would be useful for people to understand "the scale of the suffering we will endure" if humanity does not drastically cut greenhouse gas pollution as well as adapting to the challenges to come. "The backbone of climate action is science and the science is clear. It's telling us how dire our situation is. What is lacking is action from governments," he told AFP. —AFP

12,000 displaced by floods in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: About 12,000 people in Malaysia have been evacuated from their homes, officials said yesterday, after heavy rains caused flooding in the country's northern states. The Tropical Southeast Asian nation was hit by bouts of bad weather over the weekend, as continuous rain swamped towns on the peninsula's east coast. Malaysia often sees stormy weather at this time of year, with seasonal flooding regularly causing mass evacuations. Official data showed 11,831 people housed in flood relief centers in the northern states of Kelantan and Terengganu as of

Brazil tourism sector tries to rise from pandemic ashes

RIO DE JANEIRO: With the glittering parades, towering floats and sultry samba postponed by the omicron variant, Brazil will have a carnival week without much carnival this year-bad news for a tourism industry already battered by the pandemic. In a world without Covid-19, this would have been the week a deluge of tourists-more than 2.1 million in 2020 — descended on Rio de Janeiro for a free-for-all of street parties and spectacular, all-night parades. Instead, industry experts predict Rio and other tourist destinations to be relatively low-key, with a smaller number of visitors-mainly Brazilians traveling domestically. That is adding to the agony of a tourism industry only just starting to recover from near-collapse in 2020.

"It's been very traumatic," said Alexandre Sampaio, head of hotel and restaurant federation FBHA, citing official figures showing the tourism industry's revenues plunged 35 percent in 2020. The industry rebounded only partially in 2021, growing around 20 percent. Carnival week will still have concerts, parties and balls in Rio-limited to 70 percent capacity, with vaccine and mask requirements. But omicron led authorities to cancel

Mexico's avocado hub held hostage by drug violence

AGUILILLA: As Super Bowl fans devoured tons of guacamole in the United States, soldiers in the world's biggest avocado-producing region in Mexico were deactivating makeshift landmines left by warring drug traffickers. At the same time, officials scrambled to end a suspension of Mexican avocado exports to the United States prompted by threats against a US inspector in the western state of Michoacan. The Super Bowl party was soon over and on February 18 Washington announced that Mexican shipments of the fruit beloved for its creamy green flesh would resume after a week-long halt.

But in Michoacan the battle continues for control of the region's agricultural riches, which organized crime groups fight for a slice of through robbery, kidnapping and extortion. In the town of Aguililla, birthplace of Nemesis

4.30 pm local time (GMT 0830) yesterday

Addressing the recent flooding, Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said authorities were being mobilized to evacuate victims. "Many of those affected are being rescued and are taken to safer places," he said in a Facebook post. The Meteorological Department warned that bad weather was to continue in these states, with heavy rain also expected in much of the peninsula as well as in parts of Borneo island. A warning was also issued for strong winds and stormy seas, particularly in the South China Sea and the northern tip of the Malacca Straits. This recent downpour comes after heavy monsoon rains from mid-December to early January led to some of the country's worst flooding in decades. About 50 people were killed and 125,000 people were forced from their homes then, with authorities recording over \$1.45 billion in damages. —AFP

carnival street parties for the second straight year, and postpone the famed samba school parade competition until April.

"We'll see some revenues" from the rescheduled parades, "but it won't come anywhere near pre-pandemic levels," said Fabio Bentes, an economist at the National Confederation of Trade in Goods, Services and Tourism (CNC). Bentes predicts carnival-week revenues one-third below pre-pandemic levels. His research indicates the tourism industry, which accounted for 7.7 percent of Brazil's economy before the pandemic — 551.5 billion reais (\$110 billion) in direct and indirect revenues in 2019 — has lost \$94.1 billion in the past two years, and more than 340,000 jobs.

'Call of the journey'

Brazil is a bucket-list destination for many people, with the Amazon rainforest, the Pantanal wetlands, the colorful colonial capital of Salvador, the stunning waterfalls of Iguacu and myriad other must-sees-not to mention Rio and carnival. But the country has been hit hard by the pandemic, with nearly 650,000 deaths-second only to the United States. The numbers have improved with more than 70 percent of the population now fully vaccinated. But visitors have been slow to return.

Flavio Miranda is waiting for business at the base of Corcovado mountain, where Rio's iconic Christ the Redeemer statue spreads his arms over the city. Miranda, a 52-year-old driver from a nearby favela,

"El Mencho" Oseguera, head of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, bullet-pocked houses sit next to abandoned crops and hidden explosive devices. Oseguera, 55, is one of the United States' most-wanted fugitives with a \$10 million bounty on his head. With sales worth \$2.8 billion dollars to Mexico in 2021, the avocado is highly prized by his powerful cartel and the rival Los Viagras, who are also fighting over drug smuggling routes. In February alone, when consumption of guacamole soars during the National Football League championship, 140,000 tons of avocado are expected to have been shipped from Mexico to the United States. The introduction of new unspecified measures to ensure the safety of US inspectors allowed exports to resume from Michoacan, the only Mexican state with approval to ship avocados to the US market.

Longing for peace

In early February, before the incident with the inspector, the Mexican army entered Aguililla without the use of force. Since then, the military has patrolled several towns in Michoacan



ARIO DE ROSALES, Mexico: Employees work at an avocados packing plant in the municipality of Ario de Rosales, Michoacan state, Mexico. —AFP

that bear the scars left by traffickers: bullet holes, barricades and graffiti with the acronym "CJNG" on walls. The criminals also left behind makeshift landmines, a new tactic that reflects an escalation in the drug-related violence blamed for most of the roughly 2,700

murders in Michoacan in 2021. In mid-February, one of the devices killed a 79-year-old man. Around 250 mines have been located since soldiers were deployed to the area, the military told AFP during a demonstration of their work to defuse them. —AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: Aerial view of the Marques de Sapucaí sambadrome at the city center of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. —AFP

sells tours of the city's attractions. He spent eight months without work when the pandemic arrived, relying on food handouts to feed his family of four. Tourists "are returning, but it's slow," he told AFP, saying his income is down about 80 percent. "This place used to be bursting with tourists. Now there are hardly any." Nearby, Miguel Viana, a 27-year-old engineer on vacation from Portugal, was on his way to visit the statue. "The call of the journey was stronger than the pandemic," he said with a laugh. But he is among the few. International tourist numbers remain at just five to seven percent of pre-pandemic levels, Sampaio estimates. —AFP

US announces \$54m in aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: The United States said yesterday it is sending nearly \$54 million in new humanitarian aid to Ukraine as it grapples with the Russian invasion. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US is focused on Ukraine's "urgent humanitarian needs as an important part of our response to Russia's premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified attack." This new assistance to be channeled through NGOs includes "provision of food, safe drinking water, shelter, emergency health care, winterization and protection," Blinken said in a statement.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR says that since Russia first attacked Thursday, more than 368,000 people have fled Ukraine to neighboring countries, while over 160,000 are estimated to be displaced within Ukraine. Blinken said the new assistance will also help aid groups maintain contact between family members who have been separated by the war, "hopefully leading to reunification in some cases." Blinken commended neighboring countries for taking in fleeing Ukrainians "and we are engaging diplomatically to support their efforts to keep their borders open and assist those seeking international protection." The United States has now provided Ukraine with nearly \$405 million in aid since Russia first invaded Ukraine in 2014 and seized the Crimean peninsula, the statement said. —AFP

International

Too little too late? West finally coughs up arms for Ukraine

‘Weapons and equipment from our partners are on the way to Ukraine’

PARIS: Mocked in some quarters for what sometimes seemed token efforts to support Ukraine's military in the face of the Russian threat, the West is starting to finally step up supplies of military equipment after the invasion. With Ukrainian forces putting up real resistance against the Russian advance, Western officials say there is a genuine interest in ensuring President Vladimir Putin pays the maximum price for the invasion. Germany in particular was criticized this month ahead of the invasion for only stumping up some 5,000 helmets to send to Ukraine, a gesture the mayor of Kyiv, former world boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, said had left him "speechless".

"What will they send us next? Pillows?" he asked the Bild daily. When diplomatic efforts were still alive, France and other Western states were wary of arms deliveries they feared could provoke Putin. Since Putin unleashed the attack on Ukraine on February 24, however, everything has changed. Germany said Saturday its army would transfer 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger-class surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine, a U-turn from its longstanding policy of banning weapon exports to conflict zones. France was also carrying out deliveries of defensive weapons to Kyiv, according to its military. Ukraine's embassy in Paris said it had in particular requested anti-aircraft hardware. And later Saturday, the French president's office announced Paris would be sending: fuel and more military equipment to Ukraine as well as applying tougher economic sanctions.

'Anti-war coalition'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Saturday that "partners" were sending weapons to help Kyiv fight Russian troops, adding that he had spoken by phone with French leader Emmanuel Macron. "Weapons and equipment from our part-

ners are on the way to Ukraine," he wrote on Twitter. "The anti-war coalition is working!" After the German announcement he tweeted: "Keep it up!" On Saturday, Belgium announced it was providing 2,000 machine guns and 3,800 tons of fuel to the Ukrainian army.

The Dutch defense ministry said it had delivered sniper rifles and helmets, while 200 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles would be on their way as "soon as possible". The Czech Republic meanwhile is delivering 30,000 pistols, 7,000 assault rifles, 3,000 machine guns, several dozen sniper guns and about a million cartridges. The United States is providing Ukraine with \$350 million in additional military equipment to fight off Russia's "brutal and unprovoked assault", Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Saturday. Britain has said it is ready to provide Ukraine with additional military support, including lethal defensive weapons. But with military analysts saying Moscow has not even used half of the some 180,000 troops massed on the Ukrainian border in Russia and its ally Belarus, it remains unclear whether this sudden surge of help can make a difference.

'No time to lose'

The Russian defense ministry said Saturday the army had been given orders to broaden its offensive in Ukraine "from all directions" after Kyiv refused to hold talks in Belarus. The problem is that few "genuinely believed" in a Russian invasion on all of Ukrainian territory—"not even Zelensky", said General Vincent Desportes, a former director of France's prestigious Ecole de guerre, which trains top officers. Now, "everyone is doing what they can" but "no one has billions of extra armaments. All European armies are under-equipped", he told AFP.

"When you send 2,000 machine guns, you take



UKRAINE: Ukraine's Military Forces servicemen sit in the back of military truck in the Donetsk region town of Avdiivka, on the eastern Ukraine front-line with Russia-backed separatists. —AFP

them from your own stock. European armies are poor armies," Desportes said. Western diplomats at NATO headquarters in Brussels say that even in the face of the Russian military there is an interest in slowing down the advance and making the invasion as costly for Putin as possible. But after agreeing what to send to Ukraine there also remains the challenge of being able to get the equipment into the country and being able distribute it.

A French presidential official, who asked not to

be named, said Paris was hoping a combination of Ukrainian resistance and sanctions against Russia could help force a ceasefire. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki lambasted the lack of Western help until now. Ukrainians, he said, "are also fighting for us. For our freedom, our sovereignty. So that we aren't next in line". "Russia wants to destroy our world as we know it. We have to act now. We have no time to lose," he added. —AFP

Romania becomes refuge for Ukrainians on NATO's frontline

ISACCEA, Roumanie: Stepping off a ferry onto Romanian soil, Olga was relieved to have whisked her three children across the Danube river to safety after Russia invaded her country Ukraine. "My husband came with us as far as the border, before returning to Kyiv to fight," said the 36-year-old marketing employee, who did not give her surname. The young Ukrainian was one of hundreds arriving at the border crossing in the town of Isaccea on the Romanian side of the river on Saturday. Romania, a former member of the communist bloc now part of NATO and the European Union, fears it could find itself on the frontline against Russia if Moscow overruns neighboring Ukraine.

Since the beginning of Russia's invasion on Thursday, Romanian border guards have counted more than 25,000 Ukrainians crossing into the country. In the small riverside port of Isaccea, Olga said she intended to spend a few days in Romania, before making her way on to next-door Bulgaria. Not far off, 40-year-old lawyer Andrey said he feared he had been forced to flee his country for good. "We will never be able to return to Ukraine," he said bitterly.

after crossing the river with his wife and three children. He said his family had already been forced to flee their home in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region due to the conflict there in 2014, finding refuge in the Ukrainian port city of Odesa. But now they had been uprooted all over again.

Russians offshore

Romania, which shares some 650 km (400 miles) of border with Ukraine, feels for the moment that its NATO membership will protect it from any more serious military consequences. "Given the regional security dynamic, there is a minimal possibility of the country becoming the target of a conventional offensive action by Russia," the Chief of Defense Staff General Daniel Petrescu said on Saturday. But, over the past months of growing tensions in the region, Romania has repeatedly demanded reinforcements be sent to NATO's eastern flank. Its allies have responded.

The United States has sent a squadron of Stryker armored vehicles and some 1,000 troops in recent weeks to a Romanian base near the Black Sea, adding to the 900 personnel already stationed in the country. And over the past month, six Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft from German's airforce have joined four similar planes Italy dispatched before the crisis.

France's army chief of staff said on Friday that 500 soldiers would be dispatched to the eastern European country. The situation has been complicated by Russia's seizure from Ukraine on Thursday of



ISACCEA, Romania: People coming from Ukraine descend from a ferry boat to enter Romania after crossing the Danube river at the Isaccea-Orlivka border crossing between Romania and Ukraine as Ukrainians flee their country following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

S Snake Island, an uninhabited but strategic rocky outcrop in the Black Sea just 45 km (27 miles) from Romania's coastline. Bucharest and Kyiv both claimed the island, before the International Court of Justice awarded it to Ukraine in 2009. "We will have to get used to living with the Russians on our border," Defence Minister Vasile Dancu said on Friday, following the island's capture. "But these are NATO borders. Romania will not be alone in handling this, it will have support if necessary." —AFP

Over 100,000 attend Ukraine solidarity march in Berlin

BERLIN: More than 100,000 people attended a Ukraine solidarity march in Berlin yesterday, police said, with many protesters dressed in the blue and yellow colors of the Ukraine flag. Police estimated the turnout at "at least a low six-number figure", while organizers of the march said half a million had turned up. Bearing posters like "no World War 3", "Stop the killer", or "Berlin at 640 km from the frontlines", the protesters massed at the Brandenburg Gate, a stone's throw away from the imposing Russian embassy on Unter den Linden.

"It is important to me for Germany to show that it is standing for democracy in Europe," said Hans Georg Kieler, 49, who had turned out at the demonstration. He voiced approval for Germany's decision to begin delivering armaments to Ukraine, but said he thought "we could have helped Ukraine more". Ukrainian Valeria Moiseeva, 35, was also at the march. "I am personally disappointed by Russia, I hate Russia, I hate all Russians," she said, adding that her mother was now sitting in a cellar in Kyiv in fear of bombs. She said she had to be at the demonstration because "I can't do more than that." —AFP



BERLIN: Protesters crowd around the victory column and close to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin to demonstrate for peace in Ukraine yesterday. —AFP

Russian official apologizes for war in Ukraine at UN climate meet

PARIS: The Russian head of delegation at a major UN climate conference apologized for his country's invasion of Ukraine yesterday, which he said lacked justification, according to several sources who heard him speak at the virtual meeting. The surprise intervention from Russia's Oleg Anisimov at the

closed-door meeting followed an electrifying live statement from his Ukrainian counterpart, Svitlana Krakovska, who spoke passionately about her country's plight. "Let me present an apology on behalf of all Russians not able to prevent this conflict," Anisimov said at the closing plenary of the virtual, 195-nation

forum, according to three sources who heard him speak.

Delegates and observers to the sometimes fraught meetings, which had been scheduled to end Friday, were stunned by the back-to-back statements yesterday, according to half-a-dozen participants. Those who see what is happening, he added speaking in Russian, "fail to find any justification for the attack on Ukraine". The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provided simultaneous translation of his comments into English.

AFP did not have access to the original statement in Russian. Ukraine's Krakovska, who has tried to continue working despite the assault on her country, addressed the conference yesterday morning.

"We will not surrender in Ukraine, and we hope the world will not surrender in building a climate resilient future," she said in English, according to multiple sources. "Human-induced climate change and the war on Ukraine have the same roots-fossil fuels-and our dependence on them," she added. "Everyone 'in

the room' was really moved," said one source, referring to online chats and informal conversations. The statement by Anisimov—who expressed "huge admiration" for the Ukrainian delegation—came as a particular surprise.

"He knows that there is a risk for him, it was a very sincere message," said another participant. When asked by AFP to comment, Anisimov said that his statements "expressed my personal opinion and attitude," and should not be taken as an "official statement of the Russian delegation". —AFP

Algeria say ready to supply EU with extra gas amid Ukraine crisis

ALGIERS: Algeria's state energy firm is ready to supply Europe with more gas in view of a possible decline due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, its CEO said yesterday. Sonatrach CEO Toufik Hakkar said the firm was ready to pump additional gas to the EU from its surplus via the Tansmed pipeline linking Algeria to Italy. Sonatrach is "a reliable gas supplier for the European market and is willing to support its long term partners in the event of difficult situations," Hakkar was quoted as saying in the daily Liberte. Hakkar nonetheless said this would be contingent on the availability of a surplus of gas or liquefied natural gas (LNG) once the national demand and "contractual engagements" are met.

He pointed to an "unused capacity" in the Transmed pipeline that could be used to "increase the supplies to the European market". The Tansmed pipeline, jointly operated with Italy's ENI, has a capacity of some 32 million cubic meters per year-four times that of the Medgaz pipeline to Spain. The top executive added that Sonatrach could expand its supplies to countries not currently served by existing pipelines via LNG tankers. Hakkar said Europe is the "natural market of choice" for Algerian gas, which accounts for about 11 percent of Europe's gas imports.

Former Algerian energy minister Abdelmajid Attar meanwhile told AFP that "Algeria exports a maximum of 22 billion cubic meters (of gas) via the Transmed pipeline", leaving a capacity of 10 billion cubic meters. He nonetheless noted that Algeria alone will not be able to "compensate for the decline in Russian gas supply", noting that it can offer a maximum of two or three million additional cubic metres.

Attar, who also previously served as Sonatrach's CEO, added that LNG can also be transported via tankers, noting that existing liquefaction plants are only operating at 50-60 percent capacity. The former minister said that in the medium term, "in four or five months, Algeria can send larger quantities", however noting that the country must first "develop new reserves" of shale gas. Sonatrach announced in January that it would invest \$40 billion into oil exploration, production and refinement, as well as gas prospecting and extraction, between 2022 and 2026. —AFP

Business

West seeks to cripple Russian banks, currency in sanctions

The allies cut selected banks from the SWIFT system



MOSCOW: The United States and Western allies sought to cripple Russia's banking sector and currency Saturday with an extraordinary set of sanctions punishing Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

WASHINGTON: The United States and Western allies sought to cripple Russia's banking sector and currency Saturday with an extraordinary set of sanctions punishing Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Taking measures unprecedented against a country of Russia's size and international stature, the allies cut selected banks from the SWIFT system, rendering them isolated from the rest of the world. They hobbled the Russian central bank's ability to use reserves to support the already sinking ruble, which a senior US official said will now "go into freefall."

And they warned that a task force will "hunt down" the "yachts, jets, fancy cars and luxury homes" owned around the world by oligarchs in President Vladimir Putin's ultra-wealthy inner circle, the US official said. The measures were backed by the United States, Canada, the European Commission, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. In a symbolic gesture likely to resonate in Moscow, which has been counting on European divisions to dilute Western fury over its Ukraine invasion, the stunning news was first delivered from Europe.

Far exceeding others imposed against Russia during Putin's two decades' long grip on power, the sanctions came as the Russian military stepped up its bloody, multi-pronged assault against Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. Putin says the invasion is meant to restore control over a country that was long dominated by Russia but now wants to join Western institutions.

The group of world powers said in a statement it was "resolved to continue imposing costs on Russia

that will further isolate Russia from the international financial system and our economies."

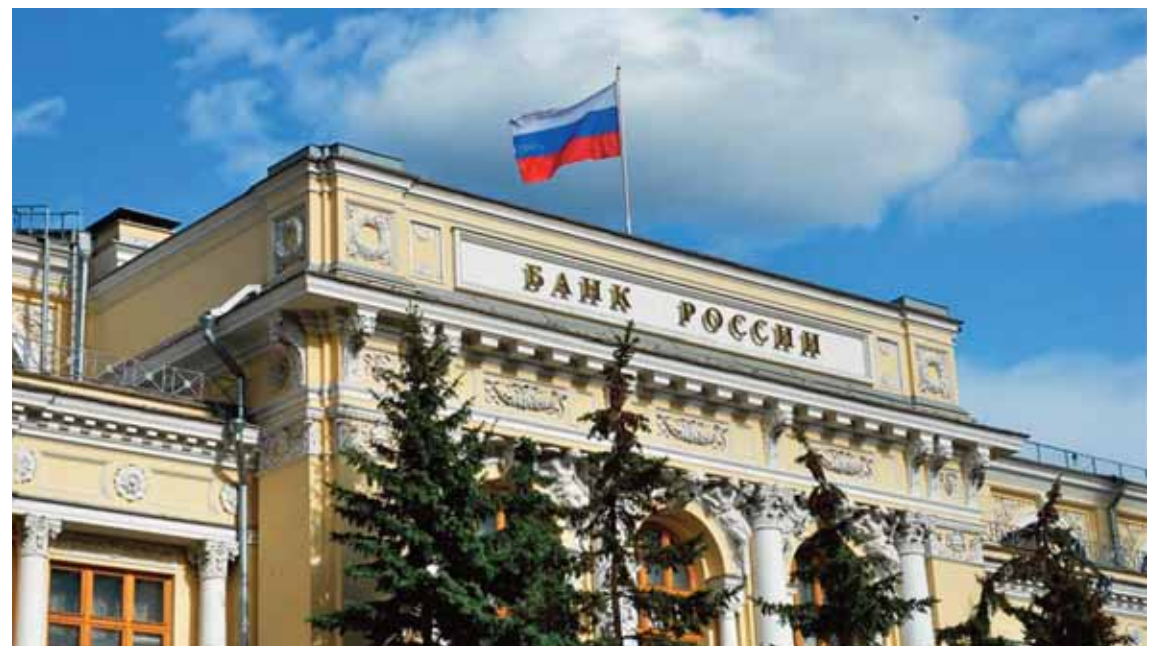
"We stand with the Ukrainian people in this dark hour. Even beyond the measures we are announcing today, we are prepared to take further measures to hold Russia to account for its attack on Ukraine," the statement said.

Meanwhile, Japan will join Western nations in removing selected Russian banks from the SWIFT messaging system, the country's prime minister said yesterday, piling further pressure on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine. "In what was released this morning by the Western nations, steps are taken to isolate Russia from the international financial system and the world economy including exclusion of specific Russian banks from SWIFT," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

"Western nations have requested Japan participate. Japan will join this initiative," he added.

SWIFT's messaging system allows banks to communicate rapidly and securely about transactions, and cutting Russia off would cripple its trade with most of the world.

Embattled Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday once again asked the international community to sever Russia from the SWIFT system. Kishida's government has already announced a series of joint sanctions against Moscow, targeting financial institutions and semiconductor exports, working with its partners in the Group of Seven. In addition to \$100 million in loans already offered to Ukraine, Kishida said Tokyo



would offer another \$100 million in emergency humanitarian aid.

'Paralyze' Russian central bank

Earlier this week, Western nations imposed an initial raft of sanctions, including personally against Putin and his foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. They also targeted the biggest Russian banks and effectively stopped energy-rich Russia's prized new export pipeline for natural gas, known as Nord Stream 2.

Saturday's measures now mean that "Russia has become a global economic and financial pariah," said the senior US official, who asked not to be named. He noted that Moscow's stock market had suffered its worst week on record and that the ruble was at a historic low against the dollar.

"Putin's government is getting kicked off the international financial system."

Cut from SWIFT, the chosen Russian banks will not be able to conduct transactions without going back in time and using a fax machine or a telephone in every single instance—effectively bringing their commerce beyond Russia to a halt. For now the SWIFT measure covers only part of the Russian banking network but could be expanded, the German government's spokesman said in a statement. "This is intended to cut off these institutions from international financial flows, which will massively restrict their global operations," the spokesman said. Restrictions on the Russian central bank aim to prevent the government from using its

massive foreign currency reserves to prop up the falling ruble. "Russia has to be able to sell those reserves and buy rubles to support its currency," but "without being able to buy the ruble from Western financial institutions... the ruble will fall even further," the US official said. "That means the Russian central bank can't support the ruble, full stop." European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said this will "paralyze" the Russian central bank.

'Only Putin can decide'

The phenomenon of wealthy Russians safeguarding their fortunes in luxury assets across the West, often in chic areas of Europe, will also come under attack. The so-called golden passport system to obtain European citizenship will be scrapped, while a US-EU "task force" will seek to identify and freeze hidden riches. Putin allies will find themselves barred from foreign luxuries, including "their ability to send their kids to fancy colleges in the West," the US official said.

The Western allies said in their statement that they also intend to coordinate against disinformation and other forms of "hybrid warfare" that Putin has used in his increasingly dangerous confrontation with the West. The US official said more sanctions were being considered and that all depended on Russia's next moves in Ukraine.

"This is Putin's war of choice," the official said. "Only Putin can decide how much more cost he is willing to bear." — AFP

Musk activates Starlink internet service in Ukraine

KYIV: Elon Musk said Saturday his company SpaceX's Starlink satellite broadband service had been activated in Ukraine, after a Kyiv official urged the tech titan to provide his embattled country with stations. "Starlink service is now active in Ukraine," Musk tweeted, adding "more terminals en route."

The tweet came some 10 hours after Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov urged Musk to provide Starlink services to Ukraine, days after it was invaded by neighboring Russia.

"While you try to colonize Mars—Russia try to occupy Ukraine! While your rockets successfully land from space—Russian rockets attack Ukrainian civil people! We ask you to provide Ukraine with Starlink stations," Fedorov tweeted at Musk. He also called on the billionaire "to address sane Russians to stand" against their government's invasion. — AFP

Google 'pauses' Russian media monetization across platforms

WASHINGTON: Google on Saturday became the latest US tech giant to prevent Russian state media from earning money on its platforms in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

It follows similar moves by its YouTube subsidiary and Facebook. "In response to the war in Ukraine, we are pausing Google monetization of Russian state-funded media across our platforms," a Google spokesperson said in a statement.

"We're actively monitoring new developments and will take further steps if necessary."

The move was revealed hours after YouTube announced it would block certain Russian media channels from monetizing their videos, among other restrictions. "In light of extraordinary circumstances in Ukraine, we're taking a number of actions," a YouTube spokesperson said in a statement.

"Our teams have started to pause the ability for certain channels to monetize on YouTube, including

RT's YouTube channels globally," the spokesperson said, referring to the Russian state-funded news outlet. YouTube channels earn money through ads that appear when users watch their videos.

On Friday, Facebook also said it was banning Russian state media from running ads and monetizing through its platform. Nations around the globe issued broad sanctions against Russian businesses, banks and officials after Moscow invaded Ukraine on Thursday. "As always, our teams are continuing to monitor closely for new developments, including evaluating what any new sanctions and export controls may mean for YouTube," the platform's spokesperson said.

In addition to restricting monetization, YouTube added it would limit recommendations to the same channels and is "continuing to actively surface authoritative news content" in Russia- and Ukraine-related search results.

Videos from RT and a number of other channels will also be "restricted" by YouTube, the company said. At the beginning of February, Germany banned RT, which prompted Russia to close the Moscow bureau of German media outlet Deutsche Welle. RT, created in 2005 under the name "Russia Today," is regularly accused by Western authorities of contributing to disinformation.

YouTube noted that over the past few days it has removed hundreds of channels, including some for "coordinated deceptive practices," the term the company uses for disinformation.



Facebook on Friday restricted Russian state media's ability to earn money on the social media platform as Moscow's invasion of neighboring Ukraine reached the streets of Kyiv.

"We are now prohibiting Russian state media from running ads or monetizing on our platform anywhere in the world," Nathaniel Gleicher, the social media giant's security policy head, said on Twitter. He added that Facebook would "continue to apply labels to additional Russian state media." Facebook's parent company Meta said earlier Friday that Russia would hit its services with restrictions after it refused authorities' order to stop using fact-checkers and content warning labels on its platforms. Social media networks have become one of the fronts in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, home to sometimes misleading information but also real-time monitoring of a quickly developing conflict that marks Europe's biggest geopolitical crisis in decades. — AFP

Tech sanctions a double-edged sword

MOSCOW: Sanctions to limit Russia's access to tech components like semiconductors may temporarily hobble its defense industry, but analysts said they risk boomeranging on the West if Russia withholds key raw materials. Such a move risks pushing Moscow to rely more on China, which will further reduce the West's leverage.

The sanctions the West adopted on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine have mostly targeted the financial sector, but some have begun to limit its access to high-tech components.

Japan, which is home to industrial giant Fujitsu, said Friday it will block exports to Russia of "general-purpose goods such as semiconductors".

While the EU is still considering what steps to take, the United States imposed on Thursday a ban that targets the defense and aerospace sec-

tors and includes semiconductors, computers, telecommunications, information security equipment, lasers, and sensors.

The United States can impose its decisions beyond its borders by threatening to shut recalcitrant companies and countries off from access to key US technology.

That is what the Trump administration did in 2019 when it banned Chinese smartphone maker Huawei from using semiconductors and software that use US technology. Taiwanese semiconductor manufacturer TSMC, which was a major supplier of chips to Huawei, had to cut off supplies as it used US technology in their manufacturing. Huawei had to turn to Chinese chip manufacturers, which didn't have the capacity to build semiconductors with as much processing power. — AFP

War complicates Fed's inflation fighting effort

WASHINGTON: The uncertainty created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact on the global economy is piling more complexity onto the US central bank's already tough fight to contain rising prices. Soaring energy and food costs have pushed inflation in the world's largest economy to the highest pace in four decades, and the Federal Reserve is poised to raise the benchmark borrowing rate in March to put out the fire. But while the Russia-Ukraine conflict is driving oil prices even higher, it also threatens to undercut the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It just makes a time that was always going to be challenging all the more so," Erica Goshen, a former senior Fed official, told AFP.

Fed policymakers will be "watching the data very carefully. It throws a few more considerations into the pot," said Goshen, senior economic advisor at Cornell

University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. Crude prices briefly topped \$100 a barrel on Thursday after Russia launched its invasion, the first time it passed that benchmark since 2014. And wheat prices also could spike, as Ukraine is one of the top global exporters of the grain.

The Fed slashed the benchmark lending rate to zero at the start of the pandemic, and flooded the financial system with cash in an effort to stave off a severe recession.

Together with massive federal spending programs, that effort was largely successful: the economy bounced back quickly, with growth of seven percent in 2021.

But high demand, supply chain snarls and labor shortages have combined to push the Fed's preferred inflation index to 6.1 percent in the year ended in January, far above the two percent target.

To contain the wave of price increases for energy, housing, cars and food, Fed officials for weeks have been preparing financial markets for coming rate hikes, hoping to engineer the elusive "soft landing" and avoid tipping the economy into recession.

Fed officials typically stick to generalities and hints, leaving markets to interpret their exact meaning, but in an unusually direct speech Thursday, Fed board member



Christopher Waller said there could be a "strong case" for a half-point increase in the benchmark lending rate in the first hike next month, twice the usual move.

But the situation in Ukraine could change his thinking before the March 15-16 meeting of the policy-setting Federal Open Markets Committee (FOMC).

"Front-loading" a half-point increase "would help convey the Committee's determination to address high inflation," he said. "Of course, it is possible that the state of the world will be different in the wake of the Ukraine attack, and that may mean that a more modest tightening is appropriate, but that remains to be seen." Goshen said some of this "tough talk" was to convince markets the Fed is serious, and to begin to move market rates and cool inflation pressures without being overly aggressive. — AFP

Business

Breakaway north Cyprus reels from collapse of Turkish lira

People grappling with spiking global commodity prices, hobbled tourism

NICOSIA: In the breakaway statelet of northern Cyprus, people are grappling with a perfect economic storm-spiking global commodity prices, hobbled tourism and, above all, the fallout from Turkey's financial crisis. "Everything has become more expensive-bread, milk, water, electricity bills," sighed Mehmet Cobe, a tailor in the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Covering the northern third of the Mediterranean island, the tiny territory declared itself a state in 1983, nine years after Turkey invaded in response to a coup engineered by Athens that sought to annex the island to Greece.

The so-called TRNC remains recognized only by Turkey, leaving the 300,000 residents highly dependent on the largesse and fortunes-of Ankara. On top of that, coronavirus restrictions have hit the crucial tourism industry which lures visitors with seaside resorts and casinos.

Turkey itself has been battered by a currency crisis that saw the lira lose nearly half its value against the dollar last year, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan demanded interest rate cuts to spur growth, even while inflation shot up.

The lira's slide, alongside surging

global energy and food prices, sent inflation in northern Cyprus skyrocketing to 46 percent last year. "Two days after receiving my salary, I'm left with nothing," said a hotel worker who asked not to be named.

Despite holding down jobs at two separate hotels, the 6,000 lira she brings home each month is now equivalent to barely 430 dollars, the worker said, leaving her dependent financially on her grown-up children.

'Aid-dependent'

TRNC prime minister Faiz Sucuoglu said last week the economy was a "priority" for his government, a coalition of right-wing nationalists who want outright secession from Cyprus. The plunging lira, soaring inflation and an unemployment rate of 10 percent have all fed into a disastrous economic performance, said Turgay Deniz, head of the TRNC's chamber of trade and industry.

After the economy contracted by 16.2 percent in 2020, output last year "continued to fall," Deniz said, drawing on estimates for 2021 that are yet to be finalized. The dependence of northern Cyprus on Turkey is stark, because no other country

recognizes the breakaway entity.

"The TRNC can only sign agreements with Turkey," which funds 15 percent of the budget, said Deniz. Other sources indicate that the statelet depends on Ankara for up to a third of its spending.

Northern Cyprus is an "aid-dependent economy," said Mustafa Besim, an economist at the publicly funded Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta. "The only source of external funding for Turkish Cypriots is financial support from Turkey," which provides an annual package, he added.

But only half of the amount promised for 2021 was delivered, owing to "the economic problems in Turkey", leaving infrastructure projects and businesses short of money they had counted on, Besim said.

Eyes on tourism

The TRNC has watched on powerlessly from the sidelines as Turkey's central bank has taken policy decisions that put the lira into freefall. The Turkish currency "is a parameter that we can't control," said Vargin Varer, managing director of freight transport company Armen Shipping.

It "is controlled by the Turkish gov-



Nicosia, Cyprus: In this file photo taken on January 20, 2022, people sit at a cafe in the northern part of Cyprus' divided capital Nicosia, in the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. — AFP

ernment-or even the Turkish president, we should say," he said.

The plunge in the value of the lira has made imports, upon which the TRNC is enormously dependent, much more expensive. Looking to the future, Varer pointed at one potential bright spot: the

tourism industry, which accounted for more than a fifth of northern Cyprus's economic output before the pandemic. The rising plausibility of "free travel this summer", if the pandemic eases off, should pull in foreign tourists looking for cheap holidays, he said. — AFP

NBK Money Markets Report

World economies on toes as Ukraine war dampens growth outlook

KUWAIT: Just two days after Vladimir Putin declared two separatist states in Ukraine and a first tranche of sanctions were slammed on Russia by global peers. Russian military troops stormed Eastern Ukraine as Vladimir Putin deemed it necessary against the threat to Russian security with the expansion of the US and its allies' troops in the region. Global peers seized the invitation to cripple the Russian economy with more sanctions cautiously to ensure minimal collateral damage to the current inflationary outlook. The US sanctioned Russian banks and technology exports in addition to the sale of sovereign debt and Russian elites, while the UK targeted Russian banks and EU followed similar sanctions on Russian elites.

Battle cries boomed on the forex front, muffling any chance of salvation from fortifying economic data. Bolstered by safe haven flows, the dollar captured any potential gains from its peers. The euro was brutalized after a volatile week in trading from the heights of 1.1350 to a fresh 2022 low of 1.1100. It finally crossed over to 1.1267 as murmured optimism droned in the background on ceasefire efforts. The

sterling limped back to 1.3405 after falling to 1.3375 and remains oppressed by the uncertain pessimistic economic outlook from officials. Advancing eastwards where echoes are slightly fainter, the yen failed to break free from an imprisoning 115. Down under, the Australian dollar managed to guard itself above at 0.7232 while the New Zealand dollar regained itself above the 0.6700 level after slipping below slightly.

Strengthened Data, Weakened Morale

A victorious US economy has been faring strongly with impressive manufacturing and services PMI data, unemployment claims coming in below expectations in a notch, and quarterly GDP growth obeying expectations at 7.0% last quarter. With the Federal Reserve on track to raise rates in their next meeting, the threat of geopolitical tensions and choked growth from the hike cast dampened clouds on consumer confidence. More volatility is looming as the Fed's decision hangs on its main inflation gauge, the core PCE price index, which came in as expected at 0.5% month-over-month.

More economic data to be scattered throughout the week include the ISM manufacturing and services figures, the ADP non-farm employment change, and the latest unemployment rate ahead of Fed chair Jerome Powell's testimony on Wednesday.

Market aftermath

Geopolitical blows swung bond yields and equities violently as they edged correction territory before finally resurrecting at the end of the week. The S&P 500, Dow Jones, and Nasdaq 100 all

closed the week in the green thanks to the latest batch of sanctions on exports that fueled equity gains. Treasury yields suffered deep wounds from the safe haven status battle as markets discerned geopolitical developments and looming rate hikes. The 10-year yield stood at 1.96% while the 2-year yield stood at 1.57%.

Europe's recent prosperous economic development failed to combat apprehensions from tensions. Rising wages and easing pandemic restrictions revived consumer demand which resulted in robust German manufacturing and services figures and guarded strong consumer sentiment. Yet, fears reverberated from the prospect of Putin weaponizing gas exports to its neighbors and Ukrainian refugees pouring into neighboring states. Wide eyes await ECB President Lagarde's speech later this week on the conflict to trail for clues of any readjustments to the monetary policy outlook later this year.

Defeated optimism

Across the Channel, the economic picture is blackened with pessimism despite better-than-expected health in the PMI manufacturing and services figures. Bank of England (BoE) officials kept their rhetoric cautious and dovish as they lean towards a slow and steady approach to cooling heated inflation with bets of a 50bp rate hike next month fading. Ahead of a squeeze in living standards from energy prices and taxes, BoE Governor Andrew Bailey highlighted the additional inflationary risks from Ukrainian tensions, further suppressing confidence in the economy.

In Australia, economic development is balanced

after manufacturing and services PMI came in much better than the previous month while wage growth came in as expected. The RBA insists to assess economic data before any action is taken. Monthly retail sales are released this week ahead of their meeting. Neighboring New Zealand's economic development spiked with exceeding retail sales as they proceeded with marching rate hikes for the third time and announced the commencement of tapering in July this year.

With COVID-19 issues dragging economic growth on top of geopolitical conflicts, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) boosted liquidity support as conflict amid the property market slump roiled their markets. The PBOC injected a net ¥290 billion (\$48.5 billion) in the market to keep liquidity stable in an effort to wipe the bloodshed of a massive market sell-off. Chinese stocks cheered after the injection.

Wrestling Prices

Prices in the commodity complex roared as oil and gold prices were shot left and right from safe haven cries. Oil prices raided \$100 a barrel as they rallied on hopes of Iranian barrels entering the parched supply chain and US President Joe Biden's pledge to tap into emergency supplies if needed. The gold rally also bickered amid chaotic market volatility after surging to \$1,950 an ounce followed by a significant drop to \$1,889.34 an ounce.

Kuwait
Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30275.

Chinese banks limit financing for Russian purchases

BEIJING: Several Chinese public banks are limiting financing to purchase raw materials from Russia for fear of Western sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine, Bloomberg news agency reported on Saturday.

China and Russia have strengthened their ties considerably since Moscow's

2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent Western sanctions. To power its growth, the Asian giant has also increased its purchases of Russian commodities, with about 30 percent of Russian oil and gas now sold to China.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at least two of China's largest state-owned banks, ICBC and Bank of China, are restricting funding for the purchase of Russian commodities, Bloomberg said.

The decision was taken for fear that allowing funding could be perceived as support for Moscow's invasion and risk sanctions from the United States and its allies, the US news agency said, citing unidentified sources. Bloomberg said the move may only be temporary.

ICBC is the world's largest bank by assets,

while Bank of China is the country's largest commercial bank for currency trading. US sanctions could potentially deprive them of access to the dollar.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine on Thursday sparked a wave of international sanctions against Moscow, mainly from Western countries. Washington has, among other things, imposed sanctions on energy giant Gazprom and other large Russian companies, which will no longer be able to raise money on Western financial markets. China is walking a diplomatic tightrope over the Ukraine conflict.

It does not want to directly oppose its ally Russia. While visiting Beijing for the Winter Olympics earlier in February, Putin signed important agreements with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. — AFP



Ukraine invasion dilemma for US Big Tech

WASHINGTON: US tech giants were under intense pressure to pick a side regarding Ukraine's invasion, at once facing calls to stand against Moscow's internationally condemned war but also Kremlin retribution for resistance.

Services like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have a unique power because of their global reach and ubiquity, but they are profit-motivated companies so a stridently principled stand can be bad for business. Since Moscow attacked its neighbor Ukraine this week, the besieged nation has urged firms from Apple to Google and Netflix to cut off Russia, while Facebook said its service was curbed for refusing to bend to Kremlin demands.

Twitter, which faced fines and slower service last year over government orders to remove certain content, reported Saturday its network was "being restricted for some people in Russia." "Western companies have provided an online space for Russians to

get information about the atrocities their government is committing in Ukraine," tweeted Alina Polyakova, president and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis.

"The Kremlin is moving aggressively to hide the truth," she added. Some of the companies have so far taken measured steps. For example, Facebook's parent Meta and YouTube have both announced restricting Russian state-run media's ability to earn money on their platforms.

"We're pausing a number of channels' ability to monetize on YouTube, including several Russian channels affiliated with recent sanctions," a company statement said.

"In response to a government request, we've restricted access to RT and a number of other channels in Ukraine," it added, referring to Russian state-run TV.

Ukraine's defiant government, which has urged its people to battle Russian forces, has asked for help from all quarters, including Apple's CEO Tim Cook. "I appeal to you... to stop supplying Apple services and products to the Russian Federation, including blocking access to the Apple Store!" Ukraine's digital minister Mykhailo Fedorov wrote in a letter he posted to Twitter Friday. — AFP

Cryptocurrencies enter Ukraine conflict

KYIV: Having evacuated part of his team from Kyiv, Mike Chobanian, boss of cryptocurrency exchange Kuna, is watching the effects of Russia's invasion on his flourishing industry with a weary eye.

"Business is running, but we're in survival mode over here," the 37-year-old boss said during a video call from his current refuge after leaving the Ukraine capital. Russia's military build-up led many Ukrainians to turn to cryptocurrencies, before the invasion seized up the sector.

But it is still facilitating global fundraising efforts, albeit through an opaque decentralised system that Russia could also exploit to circumvent sanctions.

The Ukrainian government on Friday imposed sanctions against the rouble, forcing Chobanian to halt cryptocurrency swaps with the Russian currency. "But who cares when it's war?" said Chobanian.

His platform saw a steady rise in business from Ukrainian accounts in recent weeks.



Worried about rising tensions, locals were buying up stablecoins, the dollar-backed electronic currencies often criticized by Western regulators for their opacity. "Bitcoin, you engage yourself in gambling, you don't know if it's going to go up or down," he explained.

"But here you're trying to preserve what you have and people perceive the US dollar as a safe haven. Cash is useless, you can't do much with it, it can be easily taken away with a gun. USDT (stablecoin) is a safe haven." But trading has become increasingly difficult since the invasion.

Several cryptocurrency users have, however, launched fundraisers that they say are dedicated to aiding the Ukrainian military and relief efforts.

More than \$4 million in cryptocurrencies arrived in two days on a single fundraising wallet for the "Come Back Alive" organisation, cryptocurrency research firm Elliptic said Friday.

"There's no limit, it can be raised from around the world, it's not dependent on the banking system, it's more transparent because it's a blockchain. It's a better option," said Chobanian. — AFP

GUCCI AND ADIDAS ARE BFF AT MILAN FASHION WEEK



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



Why have one logo when you can have two? That was the in-your-face message at Gucci's runway show Friday at Milan Fashion Week, where one could be excused for thinking they'd showed up at the wrong show. Instead of Gucci's decades-old world famous stripe logo in green and red, suddenly guests at the show saw Adidas' three white stripes everywhere—on bodices, baseball caps and running down the length of the male and female models' arms and thighs.

And if the hit-them-over-the-head-hard branding message still hadn't sunk in, the name "Gucci" underneath Adidas' trefoil logo was also added to the mix. Newsflash: Gucci and Adidas are collaborating.

In a short statement, Adidas confirmed the joining of forces, saying the union "combines the heritage and the creative codes of both brands". The mutual admiration society between the luxury apparel and sneaker brands left some enthused, and others puzzled, with images of unlikely pairings (avocado and watermelon anyone?) and head scratching memes appearing on Twitter shortly after the show. In the front row, there was Serena Williams and Rihanna, too-pregnant, in a black latex dress with a lavender fur and sparkly Cleopatra-style headdress. But back to the collaboration.

Stripes were on capes, stripes were on blazers,

stripes were on gloves, berets and more. A "Little House on the Prairie"-like dress with puffy sleeves and long ruffle skirt had stripes running down the bodice, sleeves, hem and high frilly collar. Plus the new Gucci trefoil at the waist. A form-fitting superhero look with built-in blue corset and Gucci's signature two-Gs fabric was—you guessed it—adorned with stripes.

On Instagram, Gucci designer Alessandro Michele said the clothes were "magical machines that can give birth to fairy tales of metamorphosis and re-enchantment." And maybe bring in some cash. Of course, Michele's favorite vintage mash-ups were still front and centre, whether patterned wool coats with furry collars, plaid suits, or other retro combinations in mustard, olive and other 1970's shades.

Gucci sales have sharply risen in recent months, helped by the "House of Gucci" film starring Lady Gaga and the success of Michele's recent collections. The collaboration is not the brand's first, having previously collaborated with couture label Balenciaga, and Microsoft Xbox. The "It" label put on a "Gucci Love Parade" show in November for the A-list in Hollywood, turning its Walk of Fame into the flashiest of catwalks with a collection replete with satin, spangles and ostrich feathers. Milan Fashion Week ends today. —AFP



Sports

Nets shock NBA champion Bucks, Morant dazzles in Grizzlies win

LOS ANGELES: Kyrie Irving returned from a two-week absence to score a season-high 38 points and lead the Brooklyn Nets to a nail-biting 126-123 win over the NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks on Saturday. Irving's decision not to be vaccinated against Covid-19 means he cannot play home games because of New York's vaccine mandate. But he showed no sign of rust against the Bucks. "It's the collection of guys we have in the locker room. Honestly, they keep me in shape," Irving said. "They keep pushing me, keep me motivated."

Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points and 14 rebounds. But he missed a desperation three-pointer at the buzzer that would have forced overtime, and the Bucks saw victory slip away against a team that had only two wins in their last 10 games. "Oh my goodness, he had a good chance to make that shot," Irving said. "Anything could have happened. We were resilient tonight, we did all the little things to get a win."

Nets star Kevin Durant and new acquisition Ben Simmons celebrated the victory from the bench. Nets coach Steve Nash said he expects Durant to return from a sprained knee ligament in the coming week. However, Simmons has yet to take part in a "high-intensity workout" since arriving in the trade that sent James Harden to the Philadelphia 76ers. Nash said Simmons' conditioning was a key issue but did not comment on a report that Simmons is battling a sore back.

Slovenian point guard Goran Dragic did make his Nets debut, scoring six points in 14 minutes. Irving said that despite the injuries and coronavirus concerns that have hindered the Nets so far this season, they have plenty of potential. "When we get our full team back, we're going to be good," he said of a

Nets team seeking to gain ground in an Eastern Conference led by the Miami Heat with the Chicago Bulls in hot pursuit.

The Heat moved a game ahead in the East with a 133-129 victory over the San Antonio Spurs while the Bulls fell 116-110 to Ja Morant and the Memphis Grizzlies. Morant was spectacular in a 46-point performance, setting a career-high and a Grizzlies' franchise record. His display ended Chicago's six-game winning streak. Chicago's DeMar DeRozan also saw his streak of eight straight games with at least 35 points snapped, just two shy of the franchise record set by Michael Jordan.

DeRozan finished with 31 points and seven rebounds, but that wasn't enough against 22-year-old Morant and his surging Grizzlies. Morant connected on 54 percent of his shots from the field with a trio of three-pointers and an array of highlight-reel baskets that included a 360-degree spin to bank in a shot and an alley-oop dunk in his 20-point third quarter. Miami, fueled by a season-high 36 points from Bam Adebayo, overcame a 16-point first-quarter deficit to improve to 40-21.

Celtics top Pistons

Elsewhere, Boston's Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown combined for 53 points to lead the Celtics to a 113-104 victory over the Detroit Pistons and their rising star Cade Cunningham. Tatum, fresh off his third All-Star Game appearance at the age of 23, had 26 points, 11 rebounds and six assists. Brown scored 27 points, and the Celtics notched their 11th win in 12 games. Cunningham scored 25 for Detroit, who started the fourth quarter with a four-point lead but couldn't replicate their upset win over the Celtics earlier this month.



MILWAUKEE: Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets jumps over Bucks defenders during the second half of a game at Fiserv Forum on Saturday. —AFP

"I'll give credit to Detroit, they came out and played another good game against us," Brown said. "But down the line, we executed, made some shots, and got out and ran, and we guarded how we do per usual and the game opened up a little bit." Atlanta's Trae Young bounced back from an off

night with a 41-point outburst in the Hawks' 127-100 victory over the Toronto Raptors. Young, who had connected on just three of 17 shots in a loss at Chicago on Thursday, made his first four shots against Chicago to put himself on his way to a fifth 40-point game this season. —AFP

PSG turn on style against St-Etienne

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe scored twice from Lionel Messi assists as an impressive Paris Saint-Germain came from behind to beat Saint-Etienne 3-1 and further extend their lead at the top of Ligue 1 on Saturday. Denis Bouanga put the struggling visitors in front at the Parc des Princes only for Mbappe to equalize just before the interval, and the France striker struck again just after the restart.

He then set up Danilo Pereira to head in the hosts' third goal as Mauricio Pochettino's team bounced back after losing 3-1 away at Nantes last weekend and moved 16 points clear of Nice and Marseille as they cruise towards the French title. PSG were three goals behind at half-time against Nantes and they were punished for a slow start here, Gabon international Bouanga pouncing on a mistake by Pereira to fire past Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Yet the home side eventually came to life and Mbappe continued his outstanding recent run of form, with his brace taking him on to 24 goals in all competitions this season. Mbappe has now scored 156 goals in a PSG shirt, equaling Zlatan Ibrahimovic's tally from his four-year spell in Paris between 2012 and 2016.

Only Edinson Cavani, with 200, has scored more

goals for the club. "It is not easy to describe his performances. He is incredible. I am proud of him," said Pochettino. Mbappe was withdrawn to a standing ovation late on at the Parc des Princes, where supporters kept themselves warm on a bitterly cold night by performing a Mexican wave as their team turned on the style.

The World Cup-winning striker will now serve a suspension and so will miss next weekend's trip to Nice which will be followed by the second leg of PSG's Champions League last-16 tie against Real Madrid in Spain on March 9. There Paris will defend the 1-0 advantage given to them by Mbappe's goal in the first leg. Here he scored the equalizer three minutes before the interval, latching onto Messi's excellent pass and firing in a shot that Saint-Etienne goalkeeper Paul Bernardoni should have saved.

Messi then produced another terrific pass for Mbappe to emphatically fire in two minutes after the restart to put the home side ahead. "He is magnificent. All that was lacking today was a goal," Pochettino told broadcaster Canal Plus of Messi's influence. "We are gradually playing better and better."

The third goal arrived in the 52nd minute as Mbappe delivered a superb cross with the outside of his right boot for Portuguese midfielder Pereira to head in, and PSG then came close to adding to their lead on several occasions. Angel Di Maria, on as a substitute, hit the post



PARIS: Saint-Etienne's French midfielder Mahdi Camara (left) fights for the ball against PSG French forward Kylian Mbappe at the Parc des Princes Stadium on Saturday. —AFP

direct from a corner, while the lively Neymar and Georginio Wijnaldum also struck the woodwork late on.

Saint-Etienne remain just a point above the relegation zone before their rivals at the foot of the table all play on Sunday. Earlier Nice leapfrogged Marseille into second on goal difference with a 0-0 draw away at Strasbourg, who sit in fifth place. Rennes are above them in fourth on goal difference after winning 4-2 away at Montpellier on Friday. —AFP

into mistakes.

Casemiro was particularly out of sorts but thought he had given Madrid the lead, banging a bouncing ball into the net after winning an aerial duel with Alejandro Catena. The goal was ruled out after replays showed he had pushed Catena in the back. Both teams had chances early in the second half. Vinicius' finish from six yards was blocked before Thibaut Courtois did brilliantly to deny Mario Suarez from heading Rayo in front.

Rayo tired and Madrid turned the screw in the last 20 minutes although Rayo had the best chance, Oscar Trejo and then Alvaro both thwarted by Courtois after Madrid failed to clear. The miss proved costly because moments later, Benzema was celebrating in the corner. He started the move, threading Vinicius through in the box before continuing his run. Vinicius could have shot but tapped it to his left, giving Benzema an open net.

Lodi, who provided a superb cross for Joao Felix's goal against Manchester United on Wednesday, completed a remarkable week by scoring twice. First, he fired in at the near post after some quick feet in the box and then he latched onto Geoffrey Kondogbia's ball over the top and fired in a second.

"He is very dangerous, he can score, he can break but the most important thing about him is what you don't see - how he gets on with his teammates, how he trains, how he commits," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone. Atletico have now registered two clean sheets in their last three games after managing none in their previous seven. "The team has a different spirit, a different aggression, we are much faster in transition, more forceful," said Simeone. "The results are coming." —AFP



ACAPULCO: Spain's Rafael Nadal wears a traditional Mexican mariachi hat while holding the winning trophy after defeating Britain's Cameron Norrie in the Mexico ATP Open men's single final on Saturday. —AFP

four games only for Norrie to strike back again as Nadal served for the match at 5-3, the 21-time Grand Slam champion surrendering a break with two forehand errors. Nadal made no mistake on his second attempt to serve out, reaching match point with a volley winner before Norrie belted a forehand long. —AFP

Real edge past Rayo, Atletico see off Celta

MADRID: Karim Benzema proved the difference again for Real Madrid on Saturday by scoring a late winner against Rayo Vallecano to send his team nine points clear at the top of La Liga. Atletico Madrid then backed up their encouraging performance against Manchester United in the Champions League by beating Celta Vigo 2-0 to go fourth, above Barcelona. Renan Lodi scored twice at the Wanda Metropolitano.

Benzema struck in the 83rd minute, his 29th goal of the season enough to seal a scrappy victory at Vallecas but one that could put Madrid almost out of sight if Sevilla fail to beat local rivals Real Betis on Sunday. Betis sit third and have been in excellent form in recent weeks. For an eighth match in a row, Madrid failed to score in the first half and this was their fifth game out of the last six that has seen them unable to score more than once.

Their lack of creativity could prove problematic against more testing opponents, with a Champions League second leg against Paris Saint-Germain and then the Clasico against Barcelona both approaching next month. "We knew it would be a difficult game," said Carlo Ancelotti. "We won but I'm not very, very satisfied."

Benzema returning to peak fitness and form would certainly help and the Frenchman looked sharp again after recently recovering from a thigh injury. Also



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (left) fights for the ball with Rayo Vallecano's Spanish midfielder Oscar Valentin at the Vallecas stadium on Saturday. —AFP

encouraging was his combination for the goal with Vinicius Junior, whose scintillating form has faded in recent weeks. "They combine so well," said Ancelotti. "Real Madrid is lucky to have these two players."

A superb start to the campaign had Rayo in the hunt for the European places a few weeks ago but five consecutive defeats has seen them drop to 12th. They pushed Madrid hard but were made to pay for a lack of quality in the final third, which Benzema and Vinicius ultimately provided. Marco Asensio and Benzema both had early chances but Rayo were the better team in the first half, drawing Madrid into a scrap and harrying them

He returned to win the Melbourne Summer Set Australian Open warm-up, then won the Australian Open for a second time to break out of a tie with Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic for most men's Grand Slam singles titles. His victory over Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final was a classic, the Spaniard rallying from two sets down to triumph. He beat the Russian again in the semifinals on Friday, just a day after Medvedev was assured of rising to number one in the world thanks to Djokovic's early exit at Dubai.

"I'm very pleased," Nadal said of his week's work. "It was a very important title for me, so I can't be happier." He started strongly against Norrie, putting 89 percent of his first serves in play in the first set and winning 79 percent of those points. Nadal pounced on his first break point in the fifth game of the first set, firing a forehand winner.

The Spaniard looked as if he could run away with the match when he broke Norrie in the opening game of the second set. But Norrie - who was riding an eight-match winning streak that included a run to the title in Delray Beach last week - hit back to level at 1-1, though he needed four break points to do it. Down 0-40, Nadal saved three break points before Norrie came out on top in a 20-ball rally.

After Norrie held for 2-1, Nadal reeled off the next

Man City survive Everton scare

LIVERPOOL: Frank Lampard described the decision not to award Everton a late penalty as "incompetence at best" as Manchester City ground out a 1-0 win at Goodison Park to move six points clear at the top of the Premier League. City's first league defeat since October last weekend against Tottenham has reawakened the title race with second-placed Liverpool having a game in hand on the leaders.

Pep Guardiola's men looked set to drop points again until Phil Foden pounced to punish an error from Michael Keane eight minutes from time. But the drama did not end there as Everton had strong claims for a penalty waived away after a VAR review for a handball by Rodri. "The decision was incredible," said Lampard. "A mistake is when you have done something wrong and don't have time to think about it. They had two minutes to digest the handball. "Even if the VAR says not sure, then go have a look. It is incompetence at best, if not that then someone needs to explain what it is."

Elsewhere on a dramatic day in the English top-flight, Christian Eriksen made an emotional return to football eight months after suffering a cardiac arrest. Brentford boss Thomas Frank brought on Denmark playmaker Eriksen in the 52nd minute of his side's 2-0 defeat at home to Newcastle. —AFP

Super sub Sane seals Bayern win

BERLIN: Leroy Sane grabbed a late winner as Bayern Munich won 1-0 at Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday to open up a nine-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga, while Robert Lewandowski led the league's show of support to Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion. Sane came off the bench before sealing the three points for Bayern in a game overshadowed by outside events, with Frankfurt's stadium lit in the Ukrainian national colors of blue and yellow.

Electronic signs at the ground read "Stop it, Putin!" in a message to Russian President Vladimir Putin. There was a minute's silence, as there were at other grounds around Germany, before kick-off. The Bayern team wore black armbands for the victims of the conflict while Munich captain Lewandowski wore a yellow and blue armband.

"I decided to wear the armband this morning, the world cannot accept what is going on, we have to support Ukraine and the people fighting there," said Lewandowski. "I am anti-war and think what is happening there can not be allowed, it hurts. I hope the whole world supports Ukraine - their people are fighting for freedom and I have huge respect for them." —AFP

Juve eye unlikely charge for title

MILAN: Dusan Vlahovic scored twice as Juventus claimed a 3-2 win at Empoli on Saturday to move within seven points of Serie A leaders AC Milan. The Turin giants were shaky at the back but secured a first win in four matches thanks to Vlahovic, who moved to the top of the league goalscoring charts ahead of Ciro Immobile. Massimiliano Allegri's side are unbeaten in 13 Serie A games, since a 1-0 loss to Atalanta in November.

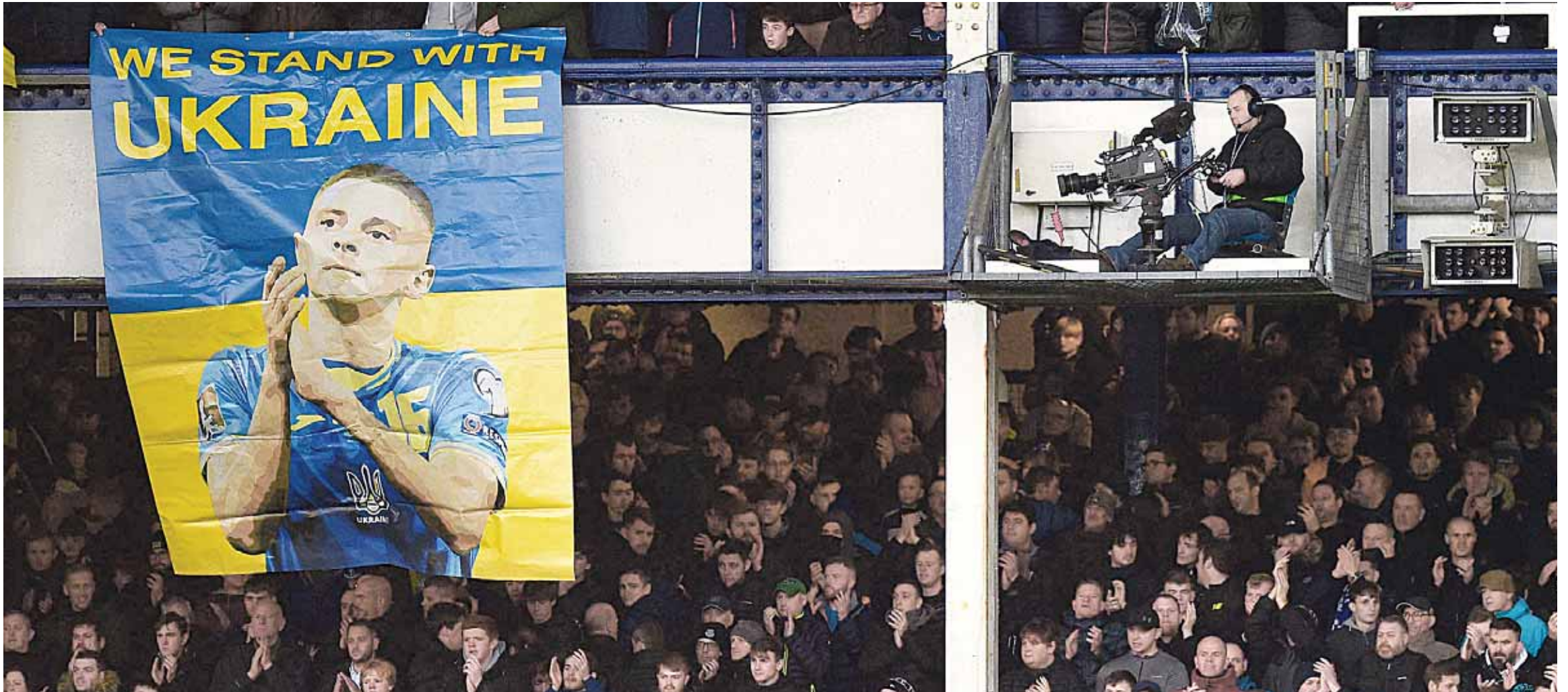
"An individual can never make the difference without a team behind him," the 22-year-old Vlahovic told DAZN. "If we stay united and all work together, we can achieve great results. "I was not accustomed to all this attention, as the coach also said, but with the right mindset, focus and concentration, you can do anything."

Fourth-placed Juve are also locked in a battle with Atalanta, who they lead by six points, in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League. Atalanta, who have played two games fewer than Juventus, host Sampdoria today. But an unlikely title challenge could still materialise, after a series of slip-ups from the top three of AC Milan, Inter Milan and Napoli. —AFP

Nadal downs Norrie to claim Acapulco title

ACAPULCO: Rafael Nadal continued his perfect start to 2022, beating Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-4 to lift the Acapulco ATP title in his first tournament since winning the Australian Open. Nadal needed one hour and 54 minutes to beat Britain's 12th-ranked Norrie for the fourth time in as many career meetings. "Cameron is a very solid player, he's a tricky player, he makes you feel that you cannot play comfortable against him at all," Nadal said. "I had been going through some very difficult moments in the match."

But the world number five wasn't too unsettled to claim a 91st career victory, and his fourth in Acapulco after wins in 2005, 2013 and 2020. As he did in 2020, Nadal won this week without dropping a set. Nadal is undefeated since losing to Lloyd Harris in the third round at Washington on August 5, 2021. He ended his 2021 season after that because of a left foot injury.



LIVERPOOL: A banner that reads "We stand with Ukraine" is displayed during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Manchester City at Goodison Park on Saturday. —AFP

Abramovich hands over control of Chelsea

Judo body suspends Putin as honorary president • Czechs, Swedes refuse to play Russia

LONDON: Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich said Saturday he was handing over the "stewardship and care" of the Premier League club to the trustees of its charitable foundation. The move comes with Russia under intense scrutiny following its invasion of Ukraine this week. Billionaire Abramovich, who took over at Stamford Bridge in 2003, said in a statement: "During my nearly 20-year ownership of Chelsea FC, I have always viewed my role as a custodian of the club, whose job it is ensuring that we are as successful as we can be today, as well as build for the future, while also playing a positive role in our communities."

"I have always taken decisions with the club's best interest at heart. I remain committed to these values. That is why I am today giving trustees of Chelsea's charitable foundation the stewardship and care of Chelsea FC. I believe that currently they are in the best position to look after the interests of the club, players, staff, and fans."

It is understood Abramovich took the decision in order to protect Chelsea from

reputational damage as war rages in Ukraine. The Telegraph reported Abramovich will remain the owner of the club and is not looking to sell the European champions. Chelsea chairman Bruce Buck is also chair of the club's foundation. Blues manager Thomas Tuchel admitted on Friday that uncertainty over Abramovich's future as owner was weighing on his club ahead of yesterday's League Cup final against Liverpool.

Earlier in the week, using parliamentary privilege, Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran named Abramovich as one of 35 "key enablers" to Russian leader Vladimir Putin who should be sanctioned. The UK government on Friday ordered all assets of Putin and his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov frozen over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Treasury issued financial sanctions notices against the two men, adding them to a list of Russian oligarchs who have already had their property and bank accounts in the UK frozen. Abramovich is not on the list. Britain is a favorite destina-

tion for oligarchs and their families and has been criticized for not doing enough to prevent the flow of their money into the country. Abramovich has supplied Chelsea with £1.5 billion (\$2 billion) worth of funding over the past 19 years.

Chelsea have enjoyed a period of unprecedented success as a result, winning five Premier League titles and two Champions League crowns among a vast haul of silverware since he took over the club. "We note Mr Abramovich's statement and are seeking urgent clarification on what this statement means for the running of Chelsea FC," the Chelsea Supporters' Trust (CST) said in a statement. "The CST board are ready to work with the trustees of The Chelsea Foundation in order to ensure the long-term interests of the club and supporters. We stand with the people of Ukraine."

Meanwhile, Russian president Vladimir Putin has been suspended as honorary president of the International Judo Federation (IJF) due to Russia's invasion of

Ukraine, the sport's governing body announced yesterday. "In light of the ongoing war... in Ukraine, the International Judo Federation announces the suspension of Mr Vladimir Putin's status as Honorary President and Ambassador of the International Judo Federation," read the IJF statement.

Putin, an accomplished judoka who was awarded an eighth dan in 2014 - one of the highest levels in the sport, has been honorary president since 2008. IJF president Marius Vizer lauded him back in 2014 as "the perfect ambassador for our sport". Putin has made much of his fondness for keeping fit with judo and ice hockey.

Also, the Czech Football Association said yesterday the national team would not play Russia in a potential 2022 World Cup playoff in March following the invasion of Ukraine. "The Czech national team will in no case play a potential game against Russia in the World Cup playoffs," the Czech FA said in a statement, following the same decision by Sweden and Poland. —AFP



RAWALPINDI: Security personnel conduct a security drill at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday ahead of the first cricket Test match between Pakistan and Australia. —AFP

Aussies arrive for first Pak tour in 24 years with security tight

ISLAMABAD: Australia flew into Pakistan yesterday for their first cricket tour in nearly a quarter of a century - and into a high-security bubble that will envelop them throughout their six-week stay. Senior batsman Steve Smith posted a picture on Twitter of the 35-strong Australia tour party inside their charter flight's cabin after it touched down in the Pakistan capital, Islamabad.

Pakistan have struggled to attract visiting sides since a fatal terror attack on the visiting Sri Lanka team's bus in 2009. Australia pulled out of a tour five years earlier after a suicide blast at a Lahore church. They last played in Pakistan in 1998, winning the three-Test series 1-0 and blanking the hosts in the three one-day internationals.

Having been forced to play their home games abroad - mostly in the United Arab Emirates - Pakistan appeared to have reassured international cricket authorities last year with both New Zealand and England scheduled to tour. But the Black Caps hastily departed in September just minutes before their first match was due to start, citing security fears, and England postponed tours by both their men's and women's teams soon after.

The decisions incensed Pakistan cricket authorities, who felt they had done everything possible to ensure safety and security. They say they are again leaving nothing to chance, with nearly 4,000 police and military personnel guarding the team hotel in Islamabad and the cricket stadium in the nearby garrison city of Rawalpindi.

Australia captain Pat Cummins said he was reassured by the high-level security, the sort normally reserved for visiting heads of state. "It's comforting," said Cummins after being whisked to the team's Islamabad hotel in a heavily-guarded convoy. "We are really lucky to be surrounded by so many professionals. Absolutely feel incredibly safe. Lots of security, straight off the plane and straight to the hotel."

A spokesman for Pakistan's interior ministry told AFP that "such arrangements are only made for high-level foreign delegations, (and) the president and prime minister of Pakistan". Roads will be blocked off when the Australians make the 15-km commute to the stadium from the capital, with their team bus to be shadowed by army helicopters.

Snipers will be positioned on buildings surrounding the stadium, while nearby shops and offices have been ordered to close on match days, the interior ministry said. Similar arrangements will be in place for matches in Karachi and Lahore. —AFP

Emblem Road shock winner in \$20m Saudi Cup

RIYADH: Saudi longshot Emblem Road came from behind to claim a shock win in the world's richest horserace, the \$20 million Saudi Cup, in Riyadh on Saturday. The 66-1 outsider, ridden by Panamanian jockey Wigberto Ramos, stormed up the outside in the home straight to win a five-horse sprint by a head from US trainer Bob Baffert's Country Grammar.

Saudi-based Ramos and owner Prince Saud bin Salman Abdulaziz were jubilant afterwards as they were surrounded by fans celebrating the 1,800m race's first Saudi winner in its third edition. The \$10 million first prize capped a lavish, two-day meeting at the King Abdulaziz Racecourse dirt track where 240 horses from 16 countries competed for a total purse of \$35.1 million.

Earlier, Christophe Lemaire rode four Japanese winners in the Neom Turf Cup, the Turf Sprint, the Red Sea Turf Handicap and the Riyadh Dirt Sprint. American trainer Baffert, who is battling doping charges after Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit tested positive last May, won the Saudi Derby with Pinehurst.

The Saudi Cup is part of a Saudi investment spree on high-profile events. The deeply conservative kingdom has attracted Formula One and heavy-



RIYADH: Jockey Wigberto Ramos with Emblem Road celebrates after he won the 1800m race of the Saudi Cup on Saturday. —AFP

weight boxing, and in October its Public Investment Fund snapped up Premier League football team Newcastle United.

he world's biggest oil exporter is also bankrolling a new Super Golf League, intended as a rival to the

leaky defense has conceded 17 goals.

The 66-year-old Argentine remained convinced he could turn things around but the Leeds board decided they had to act to preserve their top-flight status.

The club intends to make an announcement regarding Bielsa's successor on Monday, with former RB Leipzig and RB Salzburg boss Jesse Marsch the heavy favorite to take over.

Chairman Andrea Radrizzani said he was forced to act due to the club's "precarious position" in the Premier League, saying it had been the toughest decision of his tenure at Leeds. "With Marcelo as our head coach, we had three incredible campaigns and the good times returned to Elland

US PGA Tour that has long dominated the sport. The focus on sport is part of a broad strategy under crown prince and de facto leader Mohammed bin Salman, 36, to diversify the oil-reliant Saudi economy and attract foreign investment and talent. —AFP

Road," he said. "He changed the culture of the club and brought a winning mentality to us all."

"The moments created, particularly in the 2019/20 season and winning promotion to the Premier League, will of course live long in all our memories, myself and the fans included. "However, I have to act in the best interest of the club and I believe a change is required now in order to secure our Premier League status." —AFP



Marcelo Bielsa

Struggling Leeds sack manager Marcelo Bielsa

LONDON: Leeds United yesterday sacked manager Marcelo Bielsa following a poor run of results that has left the Premier League side teetering just two points above the relegation zone. Saturday's dispiriting 4-0 loss to Tottenham at Elland Road was their fourth straight defeat, a run during which their