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# Russia strikes Ukraine cities; convoy masses near capital

Russia vows to 'demilitarize and de-Nazify' Ukraine • 350 civilians killed; thousands flee



**BROVARY:** An armed man walks past a burned armored personnel carrier (APC) BTR-4 at a check-point in the city of Brovary outside Kyiv yesterday. — AFP

**KYIV:** Russian forces struck cities in eastern Ukraine and massed armored vehicles and artillery near the capital Kyiv yesterday, as Western powers promised further sanctions to bring down Russia's economy. On the sixth day of Russia's invasion, officials in Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, said the Russian army had shelled the local administration building.

An AFP reporter saw the windows of the building were blown out and there was rubble all around it. Local authorities in Mariupol on the Azov Sea also said their city was without power after bombing. In Kherson on the Black Sea, Russian army checkpoints were reported at city entry points. "The mask has finally dropped. Russia is actively shelling city centers, directing missiles and shells directly at residential areas and government buildings," an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Twitter.

"Russia's aim is clear—mass panic, civilian victims and the destruction of infrastructure. Ukraine is valiantly fighting back," wrote the adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak. More than 350 civilians have been killed in the fighting and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have fled into neighboring countries. Russia has defied mounting global pressure and international pariah status to press ahead with its invasion and initial ceasefire talks between Moscow and Kyiv on

Monday failed to secure a breakthrough.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu yesterday said Russia would continue its offensive "until set goals are achieved". He vowed to "demilitarize and de-Nazify" Ukraine and protect Russia from a "military threat created by Western countries". Western powers are planning ever more stringent economic sanctions.

"We will bring about the collapse of the Russian economy," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told the Franceinfo broadcaster. The British government warned Russian President Vladimir Putin could face prosecution. Putin and his commanders "will be held accountable for any violations of the laws of war," Justice Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News.

As the conflict intensifies, fears are growing of even higher casualties if Russian forces launch an offensive to try and take Kyiv—a city of 2.8 million. Satellite images showed a long build-up of armored vehicles and artillery starting 29 kilometers north of the city. The column is more than 65 kilometers long and covers the entire road from near Antonov airport outside Kyiv to the town of Pryborsk, US satellite imaging company Maxar said. "Some vehicles are spaced fairly far apart while in other sections military equipment and units are

Continued on Page 2

## Arabs decry racist 'double standard'

**BAGHDAD:** Like much of the world, Arabs were stunned by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but shock quickly gave way to indignation over media commentary seen by many as racist against people from the Middle East. "This isn't a place—with all due respect, you know—like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades," said Charlie D'Agata of US network CBS News.

"This is a relatively civilized, relatively European—I have to choose those words carefully too—city where you wouldn't expect that or hope it is going to happen." A day later, after much online furor, D'Agata apologized for his "poor choice of words". This was just one of many remarks on reputable media outlets drawing a line between the conflict unfolding in Ukraine and those in other parts of the world.

But Arabs were quick to point out the double standard, noting that while the toll of war may be similar in the respective conflicts, the media treatment is not. Many also drew a comparison between Europe's welcoming of Ukrainian refugees and the influx of Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans, which was declared a "migrant crisis".

Political scientist Ziad Majed said that, while there was "magnificent solidarity" from the world over the Ukraine conflict, it also revealed a "shocking distinction". The discrepancies in media treatment revealed the "dehumanisation of refugees from the Middle East", said Majed, a professor at the American University of Paris. "When we hear some commentators speaking about 'people like us', this suggests that those coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or Africa are not (like them)".

The Qatari channel Al Jazeera English was also not immune to the controversy. "These are not, obviously, refugees trying to get away from areas in the Middle East that are still in a big state of war," said one of its anchors. "They look like any European family that you would live next door to." The network later issued an apology, describing the remarks as "insensitive and irresponsible". Salem Barahmeh, director of the pro-Palestinian platform Rabet, was quick to point out seeming discrepancies in the commentary.

"First we discover that international law still exists. Refugees are welcome depending where they come from. Resistance to occupation is not only legitimate but a right", he wrote on Twitter.

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## Indian student killed in Ukraine

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian student was killed yesterday in shelling in Ukraine, New Delhi said as it urged Moscow and Kyiv to secure safe passage for around 12,000 of its stranded nationals. "With profound sorrow we confirm that an Indian student lost his life in shelling in Kharkiv this morning," Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said on Twitter.

He added that the foreign secretary was "calling in the Russian and Ukrainian ambassadors to reiterate our demand for urgent safe passage for Indian nationals who are still in Kharkiv and cities in other conflict zones." Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, has been a target for Russian forces

since President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of the Eastern European country last Thursday.

Yesterday the central square of the city near the Russian border was shelled by advancing forces who hit the building of the local administration, regional governor Oleg Sinogubov said. Before Russia's invasion there were around 20,000 Indians in Ukraine. Around 8,000 have since managed to leave the country, of whom some 1,400 have been flown back to India, according to officials.

According to Indian media, some Indian students are being prevented from crossing into neighboring

Continued on Page 2

## 440 civilians killed in S Sudan clashes

**NAIROBI:** At least 440 civilians died in brutal fighting between rival factions in southwestern South Sudan over just a few months last year, the United Nations said yesterday. The report comes on the heels of a warning by the United Nations last month that the world's youngest country risked a return to war, with bouts of interethnic violence and political fighting threatening to undo even the limited progress made in implementing a stuttering peace process.

"Grave human rights violations and abuses, including hundreds of killings, were committed against civilians during fighting in Tambura County, Western Equatoria State," according to the joint report issued yesterday by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Human Rights Office.

It blamed members of the armed forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and rivals in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) of Vice President Riek Machar, and "their respective affiliated militias" for the violence. Between June and September last year, at least 440 civilians were killed in fighting between rival groups in Tambura county, 18 injured and 74 abducted, the report found.

At least 64 civilians were also subjected to conflict-related sexual violence, among them a 13-year-old girl who was gang-raped to death, it said, while at least 56 people were reported missing during the June-September period. In addition, some 80,000 were forced to flee their homes to escape the fighting, it said.

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**NEW DELHI:** A family member (right) welcomes her relative evacuated from Ukraine on a special flight at Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

## Oil prices jump as stocks sink

**LONDON:** World oil prices rallied and European equities sank yesterday with investors unnerved by key crude producer Russia's attack on Ukraine. Brent oil surged more than five percent to top \$103 per barrel and approach recent 2014 peaks, on the eve of a key output meeting of OPEC and non-member producers including Russia.

Frankfurt and Paris stock markets meanwhile accelerated losses to shed around three percent in early afternoon deals. London slid 1.4 percent, as investors shrugged off Asian gains. "European stocks are once again heading lower with Russia/Ukraine headlines continuing to hurt sentiment," City Index analyst Fiona Cincotta told AFP.

"Losses on the FTSE are modest, thanks to a strong performance from resource stocks, as commodity prices rise." Frankfurt's steeper losses were "unsurprising given Germany's

reliance on Russian energy", she added. Bitcoin gained five percent to \$43,603 with strong support for the world's most popular cryptocurrency in Russia, where many investors are seeking shelter from the nation's sanctions-ravaged economy.

Key European stocks indices had also fallen Monday after world powers imposed new sanctions on Russia. With no let-up in the assault on its neighbor, Russia has been pummeled by a series of widespread and debilitating sanctions. The measures have sent the ruble crashing to a record low, hammered Russia's stock market and forced the central bank to more than double interest rates to 20 percent.

The Moscow Stock Exchange remained shut yesterday in an attempt by authorities to stave off another widely expected dramatic sell-off. The crisis has also ramped up fears about supplies of crucial commodities from the region including wheat and nickel but particularly crude, just as demand surges owing to economic reopenings.

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## Local

# Oil prices up 3% as Russia Ukraine crisis continues

## Kuwait oil price rises by \$2.08 to \$98.13 pb: KPC

KUWAIT: Global prices for oil jumped by three percent Monday due to the ongoing Russian military invasion of Ukraine as well as excluding Russia from SWIFT global payment system, leading to major disruption of oil exports. Leaders of the US, Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Canada, their counterparts in the EU issued a joint statement via the White House Saturday condemning the ongoing war in the Ukraine and expressing their commitment to ban Russian from SWIFT. The price of the Brent crude closed yesterday at \$100.99 per barrel after a huge increase by \$3.06, the same case with West Texas Intermediate, which leaped by \$4.13 to reach \$95.72 pb.

### Great impact

In this regard, oil analyst Dr Khaled Bodai said that the Russian invasion of the Ukraine had greatly impacted oil prices, leading it to surpass the \$100 pb margin. He predicted that prices might reach \$120 pb if production of Russian oil was disrupted or banned as a result of the ongoing Russian-

Ukrainian crisis. If there was a resolution to the crisis via Russia controlling Ukraine or peacefully withdrawing, the prices will go back between \$90 to 100 per barrel, indicated Bodai.

Meanwhile, oil consultant and analyst Dr Abdulsamee Behbehani indicated that Russian military operations in the Ukraine had led to supply fears, which pushed prices beyond \$100 pb, an unprecedented price since 2014. Russia is one of the major oil and natural gas suppliers with many European countries dependent on it for its needs of oil, indicated the analyst, predicting that oil prices might reach a staggering \$150 per barrel if Russian military operations in the Ukraine continued.

### Kuwait oil price rises

The Kuwaiti oil price rose by \$2.08 to \$98.13 per barrel (pb) on Monday, compared with Friday's \$96.05 pb, as reported by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. In the world market, the Brent crude went up by \$3.06 to \$100.99 pb and West Texas Intermediate surged by 4.13 cents to settle at \$95.72 pb. — KUNA



KUWAIT: An undated picture shows a view of Al-Zour oil and gas installations south of Kuwait. — AFP

## Prime Minister meets US Central Command chief



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets US Commander of the Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah accompanied by Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday US Commander of the Central Command

General Kenneth F McKenzie and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was also attended by Kuwait Army Chief of Staff General Sheikh Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad held talks with General McKenzie and his accompanying delegation. — KUNA



Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah meets US Commander of the Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie.

## Palestinians send Kuwait 'message of fondness'



RAMALLAH: A sign congratulating Kuwait on its national holidays raised in Ramallah, Palestine. — KUNA

RAMALLAH: The celebrations held by Palestinians to mark Kuwait's national day prove just how "fond" they are of the Gulf Arab country, a minister said on Monday. "Our celebrations of Kuwait's national day convey the message that Kuwait is in the heart of every Palestinian," Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Minister Sheikh Hatem Al-Bekri said on the sidelines of one of these gaieties. The Kuwaitis reciprocate these feelings of amity as well, as evident in the copious amounts of aid the

Palestinians have received from Kuwait, the minister underlined. Expressing equal gratitude for Kuwait's overwhelming support, Ismail Abuhawala, a local charity chief, cited the country's "illustrious journey" in the world of philanthropy, one that the Palestinians have been among the ultimate beneficiaries. The aid projects Kuwait has completed for the Palestinians run the gamut from the construction of healthcare to educational facilities, added the official. — KUNA

## Russia strikes Ukraine cities...

Continued from Page 1

travelling two or three vehicles abreast on the road," Maxar said. In the city, makeshift barricades dotted the streets and residents formed long queues outside the few shops with essentials that remained open. "We will greet them with Molotov cocktails and bullets to the head," bank employee Viktor Rudnichenko told AFP. "The only flowers they might get from us will be for their grave."

In the village of Shaika near Kyiv, Natasha, 51, opened a canteen in the local church to feed soldiers and volunteers. "The shelling and the bombing kept us up all night," she said. More than 660,000 people have already fled abroad, the UN refugee agency said yesterday, with neighboring Poland alone having taken in nearly 400,000 people. Iryna Plakhuta, a pregnant 43-year-old executive, had to leave her family behind in the capital because of fears over her safety.

"Our husbands stayed in Kyiv," she said. "They are protecting Ukraine. It's so hard." Badr Tawil, 23, a student, was among a group of evacuated from Ukraine who landed yesterday at Ben Gurion airport outside Tel Aviv. "We just woke up once and we heard the sounds around us. Bombs everywhere. So

we decided to leave, just to leave Ukraine," he said.

Putin announced his demands to bring the war to an end in a phone call with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Monday. They included recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea and Ukraine's demilitarization. Instead, Western nations have moved to increasingly isolate Russia, responding with an intensifying diplomatic, economic, cultural and sporting backlash. The weekend featured a momentous series of announcements from Europe, with Germany unveiling a historic change to its defense policies. The EU also said it would buy and supply arms to Ukraine, the first such move in its history.

Moscow came under fire on Monday at the UN General Assembly and the International Criminal Court (ICC), which opened a war crimes investigation. Russia also faced urgent calls at an extraordinary UN General Assembly debate to end its "unprovoked" and "unjustified" assault. Inside the General Assembly hall Monday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pleaded: "The fighting in Ukraine must stop. Enough is enough."

And Turkey said it would implement an international treaty to limit ships passing through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, a move requested by Ukraine to block the transit of Russian warships. The Russian ruble crashed to a record low as sanctions imposed by the West over the weekend had an immediate impact in Moscow, forcing the central bank to more than double its key interest rate to 20 percent. — AFP

lowing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The news came after rival energy titan BP also signaled its exit from Russia. TotalEnergies yesterday said while it would stop providing capital for new projects in Russia, the French giant was not withdrawing from current projects in the country.

Nevertheless, "there has been a mass exodus by Western companies from Russia in recent days as the Kremlin looks increasingly isolated and fragile", said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Sophie Lund-Yates. "It is clear that while most pain will be felt by Moscow, these decisions will weigh on European businesses too, which will come through in their next quarterly results," she noted. — AFP

## Indian student killed in...

Continued from Page 1

countries, with border guards reportedly refusing to let them pass and demanding money. "I was standing near the Ukrainian border, awaiting my turn to enter Romania when I saw a few guards point guns at Indian students and start abusing them in their language," the Times of India quoted one student as saying.

"Students, who were already scared, started screaming in terror." The Hindustan Times quoted Ishika Sarkar, a student in eastern Ukraine, saying in

## Arabs decry racist double...

Continued from Page 1

The Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists' Association condemned "examples of racist news coverage that ascribes more importance to some victims of war than others". "This type of commentary reflects the pervasive mentality in Western journalism of normalising tragedy in parts of the world such as the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and Latin America."

## 440 civilians killed...

Continued from Page 1

"Looting and destruction of property, child conscription, attacks on personnel and facilities, hate speech and incitement to violence were among the other human rights violations the investigation

uncovered." The report said a large number of victims and witnesses interviewed "depicted men armed with AK-47 rifles as well as machine guns... and other weapons including machetes, knives and clubs". The attackers often moved in small groups, dressed in black, concealed their faces and spoke a combination of languages—Azande, Balanda and Arabic, it said. The Tambura region, which lies not far from the border with the Central African Republic, has long been the scene of rivalry between the Azande and Balanda ethnic groups. — AFP

For Syrians, the disparity in media treatment is particularly striking as Russia launched a bloody intervention to prop up Bashar Al-Assad's regime more than six years ago. Before the war in Ukraine, Majed said, Syrian territory served as a "laboratory" for the Russian army, on which it "tested its arsenal and tactics". Journalist Philippe Corbe referenced that conflict when he spoke about the Ukraine refugee flow on French broadcaster BFM TV. "We are not talking about Syrians fleeing the bombardment of the Syrian regime, supported by Vladimir Putin," he said. "We are talking about Europeans who are leaving in their cars, that look like our cars... and who are just trying to save their lives." — AFP

## Oil prices jump as stocks...

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The conflict provides an extra headache for global central banks, who will likely have to recalibrate their plans to tighten monetary policy as they try to support their economies.

Back in London, Shell's share price dipped 0.7 percent after the energy major announced it would sell its stake in all joint ventures with Gazprom, fol-



Local

# Water gun, balloon celebrators rain on Kuwait national parades

## Eye Center received 92 cases of injuries sustained in two days

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Celebrating National and Liberation Days is a joy for kids and adults in Kuwait. People are used to going on parades on the Gulf Road and at the Khairan and chalet areas. Since the 1980s, children were used to spraying white foam on each other, and few celebrated by spraying water.

A few years ago, the government banned using foam spray during the celebrations, so celebrators added another item to their celebration gear: water balloons. Added to a rise in using water guns in recent years, this kind of celebration caused huge consumption of water, which lead the government to advise people to abstain from celebrating in this way.

While the Ministry of Interior announced banning spraying water from water guns and throwing balloons during the national celebrations, police were seen allowing children to play with water guns and throw balloons at gatherings and parades on the Gulf Road. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Electricity and Water announced launching an awareness campaign against wasting water during national celebrations. Yet, it seems that people did not take the campaign seriously, as the celebrators used thousands of balloons filled with water during the holiday.

For the past two years, there were no celebrations due to the pandemic and banning of gathering. So,

kids were very excited to join the celebrations this year. They expressed their excitement by throwing hundreds of water balloons on people and vehicles at the parade. While the throwing of balloons was expected by those who drove or walked on the Gulf Road, this practice was not expected in other areas where the damp celebrations spilled over.

Several people complained of being attacked by children in different neighborhoods far from the sea-



**'Save water' campaigns met with deaf ears**

side and the Gulf Road. These incidents are even more dangerous since people in these places are not expecting such attack. A man in Hawally was seriously injured after being attacked by a balloon thrown directly to his eye. Another lady also complained of being a victim of a water balloon attack in Salmiya.

Head of the Al-Bahar Eye Center, Dr Abdullah Al-



KUWAIT: Children armed with water guns and water balloons wait for passing vehicles during a National Day parade on the Gulf Road. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Baghli, said that throwing balloons filled with water on the face and eyes may cause serious injuries. "Such negative behavior should stop as it's harmful for the health and waste of water," he said in statements published by Al-Qabas daily.

"The emergency department at the Center received 92 cases of injuries in two days only (25th and 26th of February). These cases include 75

corneal abrasions or cuts, six hits near the eye, one cut wound to the eyelid, a blow around the eye that led to an orbital bone fracture, internal bleeding in the eye, a case of bleeding and external wound in the eye, and six other cases of injuries caused by throwing balloons," added Baghli, saying the number of injuries in general this year was lower than the previous years before the pandemic.

## Health Minister tours Al-Sabah Medical Zone

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed visited several health facilities in Al-Sabah Specialized Medical Zone to check on the conditions of services and work scheme. The minister's tour included visiting NBK Children's Hospital, Kuwait Cancer Control Center and Badriya Al-Ahmad center. He was also accompanied by the ministry's Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha and head of the district Dr Abdullatif Al-Sahli. Minister Saeed met with several patients and learned about their conditions and their level of satisfaction on the medical services they receive. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Khaled Al-Saeed is seen during his tour. — Health Ministry photos



## Indian embassy wraps up weeklong festival

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: The curtain came down on the weeklong cultural festival 'Namaste Kuwait' on Monday which was organized by the Indian Embassy, Kuwait to celebrate Kuwait national days. The celebration brought alive the cultural heritage of India through music, dance, yoga and films.

The event also marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and India and the 75th anniversary of India's independence. The festival also coincided with the birth anniversary of the renowned Indian physicist and Nobel laureate Sir CV Raman.

"We had a very eventful week in Kuwait. We have seen a lot of Indians joining hands with our Kuwaiti friends to celebrate the week-long National Day celebrations," Indian Ambassador Sibi George said in his opening remarks. He conveyed greetings to the leadership, the government and the people of Kuwait on the joyous occasion of the National Days.

Appreciating the strong people-to-people contact between India and Kuwait, the ambassador highlighted the richness of Indian culture and civilization. "Through this celebration, we have demonstrated again to our Kuwaiti friends the beauty of



Indian Ambassador Sibi George speaks during the event.

India, a land of continuous civilization and varied cultural heritage," he added.

"We have a forward-looking action plan in place to broaden our engagement with Kuwait for 2022. We will have an exciting year with more political, economic and cultural engagement. I invite you all to be partners in our endeavor to celebrate India in Kuwait and further strengthen our long-standing dynamic partnership," he said.

"When I look back to 2021, I am happy that despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had an excellent year in our bilateral relations and also in our engagement with our Kuwaiti friends and our Indian community. We celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in a befitting manner. At the same time, we made it a point that those Indians who need our support always get it. Together, we were able to fight challenges thrown at us by the pandemic. Better consular services and the welfare of our community always remain our priorities," he mentioned in his remarks.

On the concluding day of 'Namaste Kuwait', the ambassador thanked all the Indian associations, community members and artists and children who joined hands in this effort to showcase Indian culture and heritage. The event was live-streamed on the embassy's social media platforms.



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## Local

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## News in brief

## Kuwaitis in Russia urged to keep cash

**MOSCOW:** Kuwait's embassy in Russia on Monday warned its nationals to keep some cash in hand after a temporary limit on daily cash machine withdrawals was placed amid the possibility of restrictions being placed on the use of overseas bank-issued credit cards. Many airlines have suspended their flights to and from Russia, the embassy went on to warn, with some domestic flights also halted, after European countries closed their airspace to Russian aviation, with only limited commercial options remaining for those who wish to travel. The embassy also urged Kuwaitis to steer clear of crowded places, to keep their personal identification documents with them at all times and to keep a watchful eye over developments through local and international media. In the event of an emergency or an urgent situation, Kuwaiti nationals may contact the embassy on +7 925 631-13-13.

## Kuwait lists 558 COVID-19 cases

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's health ministry reported yesterday one death from COVID-19 and 558 new cases over the past 24 hours, taking the country's infection caseload to 620,452. Some 1,206 more people recovered from the virus to up the number of those to have overcome the disease to 609,349 people, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, adding that the recovery to positive case ratio stands at 98 percent. The country's death toll from the pandemic increased to 2,539 people, while 8,564 people are hospitalized with the virus, 52 of whom needed intensive care, Dr Sanad noted. The number of swab tests conducted has reached 17,936, out of a total of 766,329.8 tests, added the spokesman.

## Man hurt in Qurain house fire

**KUWAIT:** One man sustained burns in a fire reported in Qurain yesterday. Firemen dealt with the blaze reported in a house in the area, as they first evacuated several residents trapped behind flames and thick smoke before they extinguished the flames, Kuwait Fire Force said. The homeowner sustained hand burns and was taken in an ambulance to the hospital, it added, noting that an investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire.

## Kuwait distributes water in Yemen

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Society for Relief launched a campaign on Monday for the distribution of nearly 8,100 shipments of drinking water to camps for the displaced in four of Yemen's governorates over the next five months. The endeavor comes as part of the wider 'Kuwait by Your Side' campaign, which continues for a seventh consecutive year. Some 26.4 million liters of water will be handed out to displaced families in the southern provinces of Aden, Dali and Lahij alongside Hodeida, located to the west of the capital Sanaa, from March to July, KSR deputy director Adel Baashin said. The move aims to meet the camps' needs for drinking water, as the conditions due to the ongoing conflict has made it difficult to obtain the crucial commodity as the sweltering heat of summer approaches.



# Traditional exhibition at Liberation Tower



**KUWAIT:** An exhibition was organized at the Liberation Tower during the national holidays featuring artifacts and traditional displays from Kuwait's history. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Diplomatic Women's Committee visits Arab Fund building

**KUWAIT:** Within the programs of the Diplomatic Women's Committee for Kuwaiti National Days celebrations, the committee's advisor Nargis Al-Shatti prepared a visit to the headquarters of "Arab Fund for Arab Economic Development" to get familiarized with this important institution in Kuwait. Established 30 years ago, the Fund aims to support development projects for the countries of the Arab world and to strengthen the role of the State of Kuwait by assisting and supporting the Arab countries on their economic development projects. The Arab Fund headquarters building is considered one of the landmarks of the State of Kuwait with its historical, cultural and heritage holdings that highlight the civilization and history of the Arab world throughout the ages. DWC members toured between the different areas and sections of this his-



torical building while Engineer Fawaz Al-Haj, the Public Relations Officer, presented a wonderful explanation about the history, achievement and development of this institution. At the end of the

visit, DWC members presented appreciation shield describing historical and cultural landmarks of the State of Kuwait and appreciated Arab Fund management for granting DWC a wonderful experience.





Ukraine is 'victim' of US policy: Iran



HONG KONG: People queue outside a pharmacy in Hong Kong yesterday, as panic buying returned to the city with many supermarket shelves stripped bare following mixed messaging from the government over whether it plans a city lockdown later this month when it tests all residents. — AFP

# Lockdown fears spark panic buying

## Hong Kongers strip shop shelves bare

HONG KONG: Hong Kongers stripped shop shelves bare yesterday as panic buying set in following mixed messaging from the government over whether it plans a China-style hard lockdown this month. The latest disarray came as the city's top medical school estimated just under a quarter of all residents had been infected with COVID-19 since the start of the year.

Photos circulating on social media showed people had trouble finding a variety of items including meat, vegetables, frozen food, noodles, paracetamol and testing kits. "We are like ants going home, grabbing a bit at one spot at a time," a woman, who gave her surname Wu, told AFP yesterday in a supermarket where most vegetables and meat had been snapped up.

One of the most densely populated cities on Earth, Hong Kong has supermarkets with limited backroom storage space. Apartments are also some of the smallest in the world, leaving little space to stock up. The vast majority of Hong Kong's food is imported from mainland China and the current supply crunch has been worsened by cross-border truckers getting infected by the highly transmissible

Omicron variant.

The financial hub is in the grip of its worst coronavirus outbreak, registering tens of thousands of new cases each day, overwhelming hospitals and shattering the city's zero-COVID strategy. More than 190,000 infections have been recorded in the last two months, compared with just 12,000 for the rest of the pandemic. Authorities plan to test all 7.4 million residents this month and isolate all infections either at home or in a series of camps that are still being constructed with mainland help. City leader Carrie Lam had initially ruled out a mainland-style lockdown, where people are confined to their homes during the testing period.

But on Monday, health chief Sophia Chan confirmed it was still on the table. Multiple Hong Kong media said authorities were planning a variety of

lockdown options for the test period, citing sources. The South China Morning Post said the current favoured option was a nine-day "large-scale lockdown" where most residents would only be allowed out to buy food. Experts from the University of Hong Kong published new modeling data yesterday which estimated the current number of infections at 1.7 million.

They warned that mass testing should be delayed a month rather than under current plans when the wave would be at its peak with as many as 183,000 daily cases. "Doing so earlier, especially when case numbers will still be too high to properly and appropriately isolate and care for, paying particular attention to population mental and emotional wellbeing in HK's unique context, would not be recommended," Gabriel Leung, dean of HKU's medical school, wrote on Twitter.

The government says food supplies are stable and that residents will soon be informed of plans. "We will notify everyone in advance so you can be well prepared," number two official John Lee told reporters at the opening of a 3,900-bed isolation facility where mild infections will be treated.

But analysts said uncertainty and distrust were fuelling consumer habits. "We have so many questions but all answers are 'to be confirmed'," Chan Ka-lok, an international politics scholar at Baptist University, wrote on social media. Faith in government assurances is low in Hong Kong, where authorities have carried out a two-year crackdown on dissent after huge democracy protests, and have a history of back-peddalling on promises.

The decision on mass tests was itself a U-turn. It is not yet clear when testing will take place and what the government will do with all the cases it finds. Some 70,000 isolation units for mild cases are due to come online in the coming weeks, in requisitioned hotels, public housing units and camps. At Hong Kong's current official caseload, that would cover roughly two days' worth of new infections. — AFP



### Financial hub in the grip of worst COVID outbreak

## 'Bombs everywhere': Zionists flee Ukraine

LOD: A repatriation flight from Romania carrying Zionists evacuated from Ukraine landed at Ben Gurion airport outside Tel Aviv yesterday to the teary relief of waiting relatives. Badr Tawil, 23, a student who fled Ukraine's under-fire second city Kharkiv, said he had escaped chaos. "We just woke up once and we heard the sounds around us. Bombs everywhere. So we decided to leave, just to leave Ukraine," he said. Zionist Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said Monday his office had helped 4,000 leave Ukraine since Russia invaded last week. "We will do everything to not leave anyone behind, or any Jew behind," he said in remarks to journalists.

Evacuees were forced to escape to neighboring countries by land after Ukraine closed its airspace to civilian traffic in the face of the Russian invasion. Many of the people repatriated yesterday were members of the Arab minority who make up 20 percent of the Jewish state's population. A student who identified himself only as Hussein described a harrowing escape from the war zone. "For four days, we have been sleeping in staircases and train stations," he said.

"We had a really difficult time without food. I was in Ukraine in Kharkiv. It is the last year of my studies but now I left everything to return," Uda Abu Saied, whose son Muhammad returned on the flight, said she had been terrified for his safety. "I wasn't sure if my son would return or not. He was in the most dangerous place," she said. "They went on their own with the bus for 24 hours and I imagined all kinds of scenarios like a missile hitting and killing them or maybe that they would get captured."

The foreign ministry said Monday that one Zionist had been killed in Ukraine when the convoy he was travelling in came under fire as he tried to reach neighboring Moldova. The foreign ministry said authorities had contacted the man's wife, who was in Ukraine with their children. — AFP

## Virus wave deepens grim conditions for domestic workers

HONG KONG: Janice Obiang stifled sobs as she packed goods to send to the Philippines, gifts for loved ones she hasn't seen in years as life for domestic workers in virus-hit Hong Kong goes from bad to worse. Few have suffered more during Hong Kong's pandemic restrictions than the hundreds of thousands of women from the Philippines and Indonesia who work as domestic helpers. And as the city reels under its most severe coronavirus wave to date, many are now at breaking point.

"I really want to move. I really want to have vacation," Obiang said, as a police officer with a megaphone gave regular reminders for people not to gather in groups. "But I don't have a choice, we need to stay," the 36-year-old told AFP, adding it had been four years since she went home. "We really miss our family." There are about 340,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, down from 400,000 when the pandemic began.

Paid a minimum of HK\$4,630 (\$590) a month, they work six days a week and must live with their employers, in a city that offers some of the world's smallest apartments. While the work is tough, it pays more than the women can earn in the Philippines, allowing them to support families as key breadwinners. But the pandemic has made a hard job even harder. For two years Hong Kong kept the coronavirus at bay with a strict zero-Covid policy and long quarantines, meaning most foreigners have not seen family for long periods.

The highly transmissible Omicron variant broke through at the start of the year but authorities have been ordered by China to return to zero-Covid despite the exponential caseload. As a result, the government has taken to advising Hong Kongers to keep domestic workers inside during their one day off. Police have also stepped up fines—the equivalent of one to two months' salary for a domestic worker—



HONG KONG: Police officers (right) monitoring foreign domestic helpers (left) sheltering from the cold weather - as gatherings of more than two are now illegal due to pandemic restrictions - on their Sunday day off in Hong Kong's Mongkok district, amid the city's worst-ever coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

for breaching the current ban on any more than two people gathering in public.

### Sacked for falling sick

Avril Rodrigues said her phone has not stopped ringing with stories of intensifying suffering and dismay. "Imagine thinking 'I am not allowed to fall sick' out of fear of losing your job," Rodrigues, who works at the charity Help for Domestic Workers, told AFP.

But that is exactly what is happening to some. She recalled one woman calling from outside one of Hong Kong's hospitals as they buckle under thousands of new infections each day. "(Her employer) made her do a rapid test because she had a slight cold and when she went to the hospital, the employer told the agency to inform her 'Don't come back,'" Rodrigues said.

Multiple stories like this have emerged in local media or through press conferences arranged by increasingly infuriated charities and unions in the last fortnight. Some had to sleep rough during an unusually cold winter snap, including one domestic helper with a young baby. Last week Hong Kong's government issued a statement reminding employ-

ers they could not sack a domestic helper purely because they were sick, and could face fines.

### 'We need to feel like we are free'

Lita, 34, who asked to use a pseudonym, said staying at her employer's home during her day off just meant working seven days a week given the coffin-like size of her room, which is not uncommon in Hong Kong apartments. "You go in like a dead person, only to sleep," she said. Jec Sernande, from the Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions, said many domestic helpers do not even have their own rooms. "Sitting for the whole day in the kitchen or in the living room—that is not a rest," she said.

Unionists like Sernande have long campaigned for better working conditions and are angered by the lack of compassion shown by authorities and some employers during the pandemic. "They need to get more recognition, because they contribute a lot to the society and the economy," she added. Charity services have been overwhelmed by requests for help partly because few plans were in place to deal with soaring cases when the disease eventually broke through. — AFP



## International

# Deadly floods sweep Australia east coast; waterways burst their banks

## Tens of thousands urge to flee

**GRAFTON:** Deadly floods swept Australia's east coast yesterday, stranding people on bridges and rooftops and forcing tens of thousands to flee their homes. Dozens of emergency warnings are in effect across the states of Queensland and New South Wales, where a week-long "rain bomb" has dumped a meter of water on some areas. Several waterways have burst their banks or broken through levees, inundating towns and forcing residents to evacuate or seek safety on higher ground.

Nine people have died and more than a thousand people have been rescued. Authorities have warned that more fatalities are likely. The latest victim was a woman in her 80s whose body was found by police inside a home in the country town of Lismore. "She is yet to be formally identified," said New South Wales Police. In the usually laid back surf town of Byron Bay, Hannah Leser had enjoyed the weekend celebrating her wedding with 150 guests.

But the new bride and groom are now rescuing friends stranded in the nearby towns of Ballina and Mullumbimby in a borrowed four-wheel-drive. About 30 people are camped at a house where the couple were to spend their honeymoon. "It's chaos but all of

our friends and family are safe," she told AFP. "This is not quite the honeymoon I expected but it is what it is." Australia's military has deployed two MRH-90 Taipan helicopters to aid the rescue effort.

In one daring aerial rescue, the crew plucked two people to safety as muddy waters lapped at the corrugated metal roofing of their home. Live television images on public broadcaster ABC showed a rescuer sitting on the roof with the pair, preparing to strap them to the chopper's winch. "We've seen people stranded on roofs for hours, we've seen children being rescued, we're seeing people stranded on bridges," said New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet.

### Sailing past roofs

Emergency services were overwhelmed by calls for help and flotillas of makeshift rescue boats fanned out across towns as people tried to ferry their

## A week-long 'rain bomb' dumps meter of water



neighbors to safety. In Lismore, local member of parliament Janelle Saffin had to swim to safety after she was stranded in the floodwaters. "We went to the verandah, hanging on to the rafters," she told Nine Newspapers.

Local resident Danika Hardiman was rescued Monday after she woke up to find floodwaters had



**GRAFTON:** A submerged shed is seen on the bank of overflowing Clarence River in Grafton, some 130 kms from the New South Wales town Lismore yesterday. —AFP

reached the balcony of her second-floor apartment in the town's main street. She and her partner managed to climb up to the roof and were eventually rescued by "two guys in a boat, two locals," she told AFP, describing the scenes in Lismore as "horrific". "Imagine you're in a boat sailing past people's roofs," she said.

Makeshift evacuation centers have been set up in

primary schools, recreation centers and retired service members' clubs. Travis Lavdaras headed for Ballina Airport, where the departure lounge was filled with families, holidaymakers and the elderly trying to escape. "There were big lakes' worth of water on either side of the highway" on the way to the terminal, he said, with many flights cancelled and an evacuation ordered for the area nearby. —AFP

## 'Disillusioned, betrayed,' Brazilians flock abroad

**SAO PAULO:** Brazil's vibrant mix of business, beaches and carnival has long lured expats from around the world, but a reverse migration is also in effect, as each year thousands of citizens pack up and head for new pastures. High levels of violence, unemployment, inflation and the pandemic are main reasons why Brazilians have left Latin America's largest economy, say experts.

And the outgoing tide has only increased in recent years, alarming authorities concerned about brain drain in high-demand sectors such as technology. Joining the exodus is Gabriela Vefago Nunes, a nurse from southern Santa Catarina state who pulled stakes for Canada last year. "I don't know if I would say (I was) unhappy... but I couldn't see my future" in Brazil, the 27-year-old told AFP. "I already was thinking about having a family, children, and I thought: I can't do that here." In her home town of Blumenau, Vefago Nunes was working two jobs to get by. Last September she and her husband left for Quebec, where she now works in a medical center, joining the more than 120,000 Brazilians currently living in Canada. The relative safety of Quebec is a relief for Vefago Nunes. "We can see the possibility to have a family. We have the security. I can see families outside not worried by violence," she said. "In Brazil, we always go out with the expectations of something bad to happen. We are very happy."

### 'Betrayed'

The most popular destinations for Brazilians are the United States (1.2 million), Portugal (276,000) and Paraguay (240,000). There were three million Brazilians living abroad in 2016 but that figure has only increased since far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took power three years ago. The current exodus even exceeds the 1.8 million that left in the mid-1980s due to hyperinflation. "The main reason people leave is economic: for work opportunities... earning more money, saving, buying a house," said Gabrielle Oliveira, a migration specialist and professor at Harvard University. "People have lost confidence and feel betrayed by their own country. They think: 'I gave so much and received nothing in return.'"

Whereas those that left in the 1980s were mostly wealthy, Oliveira says the current migrants come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Authorities say they are mostly young men. Mechanical engineer Marcos Martins feels lucky to have a "more successful" career than many of his compatriots but nonetheless he plans in April to swap "stressful" Rio de Janeiro for Lisbon. "One of the motivations for going abroad is to have the possibility of earning more for the same or less effort," the 58-year-old said.

### 'Not coming back'

Portugal offers tax advantages for Brazilian businessmen or pensioners, says publicist Patricia Lemos, who launched a company in 2018 to help her compatriots make the same move to Portugal. "Here a 50- or 60-year-old can find work. In Brazil, they can neither find work nor even sell popcorn," she said.

A move to Europe is also facilitated by the fact many Brazilians have Portuguese or Italian nationality through ancestors. Compounding concerns over the exodus is a recent projection that the population will age dramatically. The over 65s will represent more than 40 percent of the population in 2100, compared to 7.3 percent in 2010, according to the government's Institute of Applied Economic Research.

The proportion of under 15s will drop from 24.7 percent to nine percent. "It is something that could make many things more difficult, because more and more people are retiring and there are fewer of a productive age," said Oliveira. In Sao Paulo, nurse Ricardo Vieira de Arruda, 33, is learning French in the hope of moving to Canada. "I'm thinking about going and not coming back," he said. "There is not the same quality of life in Brazil as abroad. Here, if you have money you have a good quality of life, but if you don't then you have nothing." —AFP

## How US 'wokeness' became right-wing cudgel globally

**ORLANDO:** With COVID-19 beginning to fade into the rear view mirror, the largest annual conservative gathering in the United States sounded the alarm this weekend over what they deem to be another fast-spreading virus: "wokeness."

Once a rallying cry for Americans to be alert to racism, "wokeness" has become the political term of the hour, co-opted by culture warriors to denigrate "political correctness" and leftist orthodoxy. "The radical left is trying to replace American democracy with woke tyranny," former US president Donald Trump told the Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida during his keynote speech Saturday.

Speaker after speaker at CPAC invoked rightwing betes noires from "cancel culture" to the policing of pronouns. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a potential 2024 presidential hopeful, joined in the barrage of accusations, telling the crowd that "the woke is the new religion of the left." The concept has metastasized from its US origins to penetrate the

global body politic, from the English-speaking world to newsrooms, university boards and parliaments in Europe, Asia and South America.

"Among conservatives, wokeness is an all-pervasive ideology of extreme identity politics on behalf of minorities and women which is oppressive towards traditional cultural views," said Democratic political analyst Ed Kilgore. The word "woke" as a means of describing enlightened skepticism over systemic injustice has its origins in African-American vernacular dating back before World War II.

American linguist John McWhorter points to the music of US blues-folk musician Lead Belly, who can be heard imploring his fans to "stay woke" on the 1938 protest song "Scottsboro Boys." It appears to have crept into mainstream parlance in the early-to-mid 2010s, as the killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and other African-Americans ignited a firestorm of protest from Black Lives Matter activists who beseeched followers to "stay woke" to racially-motivated police brutality.

## Singapore urged to show 'mercy' to disabled man on death row

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore's top court was yesterday urged to show "mercy" as it heard the last-ditch appeal of a Malaysian man facing execution despite criticism from supporters who say he is mentally disabled. Nagaenthran K Dharmalingam was arrested in 2009 for trafficking a small amount of heroin into the city-state, which has some of the world's toughest drugs laws, and handed a then mandatory death sentence the following year.

He was finally scheduled to be hanged in November but the plan sparked criticism due to concerns he has intellectual disabilities, with the European Union and British billionaire Richard Branson among those condemning it. The 34-year-old lodged a final appeal and, after several delays, Singapore's Court of Appeal yesterday heard the charge. His lawyer Violet Netto argued that executing someone who is mentally disabled runs counter to international law.

She urged the judges to show

"mercy" by allowing Nagaenthran to undergo an independent assessment, and asked for the defense to be given time to find psychiatrists to conduct the examination. But prosecutor Wong Woon Kwong opposed the move and said the defense was seeking to delay proceedings, accusing them of "abusing the process of this court".

Yesterday's proceedings ended without a verdict being issued, and a ruling will be handed down at a later date, which is still to be decided. Nagaenthran was in court for the hearing, which took place with social distancing measures in place to cut the risk of coronavirus infections, and with heavy security. The appeal was supposed to take place months ago but was delayed after Nagaenthran contracted COVID-19.

Campaigners fear chances of success are slim. If Nagaenthran is hanged, it would be the first execution in Singapore since 2019. Concerns are also growing that his hanging will be the first in a series in the coming

## Caught between crises, Joe Biden urges optimism

**WASHINGTON:** Embroiled in the most severe US-Russia crisis since the Cold War, President Joe Biden will take on a no less difficult domestic challenge during his State of the Union address: restoring Americans' optimism. Biden has been bouncing between calamities his first year in office—from Donald Trump threatening US democracy to the Afghan debacle, from waves of COVID variants to economic turmoil, and now Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Yet when he addresses joint session of Congress, Biden accentuated the positive. Asked for the 79-year-old president's top line, his Press Secretary Jen Psaki told ABC News: "His belief in the resilience of the American people and the strength of the American people." That's pure Biden, the happy warrior who came out of retirement because, he says, someone needed to rescue America from Trump.

But even for a man relaxed enough to poke fun at himself in public and devout enough to attend church most weeks, these are grim times. His speechwriters for the keynote address will have trouble persuading Americans otherwise. Biden claims he is delivering on his big promises to unify the nation, end Covid-19 and restore US prestige abroad. "I think we're making slow progress on some of these things, but that's where we're moving," he said over the weekend in a YouTube interview.

The country, however, disagrees. In a new Washington Post-ABC poll, only 37 percent approve of Biden's presidency, and 55 percent disapprove. An NPR poll found that more than half the country considers Biden's first year a failure. And the backlash is building ahead of what polls indicate will be a defeat for Democrats in November midterm elections, likely delivering at least one of the chambers of Congress to Republicans.

Already bogged down by the highest inflation in 40 years and a nation deeply divided between left and right over just about everything, Biden is now also facing another foreign crisis, just over six months after the traumatic US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Biden's getting some kudos for forging historic Western sanctions on Russia, while supplying the Ukrainian military. It is, supporters say, his finest hour. —AFP



**WASHINGTON:** A US flag flies in front of the US Capitol in Washington, DC as ahead of US President Joe Biden's first State of the Union address. —AFP

### Free speech

Its appropriation by liberal whites as a watchword for heightened cultural awareness followed soon after. From there conservatives turned it into a slur, an accusation of superficial, over-the-top sociopolitical sensitivity or authoritarian, performative political correctness. In its new pejorative guise, the term spread quickly

to Europe, particularly France, where "le wokisme" is seen by supporters of Eric Zemmour, a far-right election rival to President Emmanuel Macron, as a toxic, divisive US import. In Britain, too, rightwing politicians have been pushing back against social-justice and LGBT activism, framing it as a threat to free speech and marker of progressiveness gone awry. —AFP



**KUALA LUMPUR:** Activists hold placards before submitting a memorandum to parliament in protest of the impending execution of Nagaenthran K Dharmalingam, sentenced to death for trafficking heroin into Singapore. —AFP

months, with activists warning that authorities are gearing up to execute three other drug traffickers. Singapore is among more than 30 countries worldwide where drug-related offences are still punishable by death, according to Amnesty International.

Activist Kokila Annamalai said she had spoken to Nagaenthran after the

proceedings, and he was "making a plea... to give him another chance." He wants another chance mostly for the sake of his family, because he's very concerned about the trauma to them if he is executed," said the activist from the Transformative Justice Collective, which campaigns against the death penalty in Singapore. —AFP



## International

# Russia-Ukraine crisis stretches Indian 'neutrality' to the limit

## India's traditional balancing act looking wobblier than ever

NEW DELHI: Russia's invasion of Ukraine has left India's traditional balancing act between Moscow and the West looking wobblier than ever, with experts saying New Delhi has few good diplomatic options. Last week India abstained on a UN Security Council resolution deploring Russia's "aggression" against Ukraine, winning praise from Moscow for its "independent and balanced position". But while New Delhi hoped this would be seen as neutrality, in many capitals its failure to condemn the invasion was taken as de facto backing of Moscow that gave President Vladimir Putin useful diplomatic cover.

And India is also reportedly looking to bolster its rupee-rouble trade pact with Moscow, potentially undermining Western efforts to isolate Russia from the global financial system. The crisis has left India facing a dilemma: it leans towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War-while Pakistan was in the Western camp-and their close relations outlived the fall of the Iron Curtain, with Moscow still by far its biggest arms supplier.

At the same time it needs Western support to contend with Xi Jinping's increasingly assertive China: Beijing is extending its reach into the Indian Ocean, and the two countries had a deadly border clash in 2020. Together with the US, Japan and Australia, India is also a member of the "Quad alliance" that is seen as a bulwark against China.

Its decision to abstain at the Friday Security Council vote left it alongside only Beijing and the United Arab Emirates, while Russia vetoed the resolution. "There are not many choices that India has,"

said Nandan Unnikrishnan of the Observer Research Foundation. It "has as much investment in a relationship with Russia as it has in maintaining a relationship with the United States", he told AFP. "India's challenges in the maritime is where it needs the United States and India's challenges on the continental shelf is where it requires Russia."

### Hug the bear

Putin visited India last year, in a rare foreign trip for the Russian president, bear-hugging Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the two men bolstered military and energy ties. New Delhi is the world's

second largest importer of arms after Saudi Arabia and according to the Business Standard, between 2016-2020, 49.4 percent of its purchases were from Russia. Late last year it began taking delivery from Russia of the S-400 missile defense system that it agreed to buy for over \$5 billion in 2018, despite the threat of US sanctions. And while New Delhi is looking to develop its own capacity and diversify its suppliers, US imports accounted for just 11 percent.

The Asian giant of 1.4 billion people is also a major consumer of Russian oil. Total annual bilateral trade runs at around \$9 billion, with much smaller quantities of pharmaceuticals, tea and coffee going the other way. Russia has also repeatedly vetoed UN resolutions condemning Delhi over its behavior in Indian-administered Kashmir where a violent insurgency has raged for decades. According to Happyman Jacob from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Russia is perhaps India's "only partner of conse-



New Delhi has few good diplomatic options



NEW DELHI: Activists of the Indian youth congress shout slogans during a protest on the issue of stranded Indian students in Ukraine near the residence of Indian external affairs minister in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

quence" in the territory to its north.

### 'East-West conflict'

While New Delhi aspires to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, a role that would bring greater responsibility on the world stage, it has been careful to avoid explicitly condemning Russia. So far it has not referred to Moscow's operation as an invasion and instead emphasized narrow domestic aspects of the crisis, primarily the evacuation of Indian students from Ukraine.

Officially, Washington has kept its annoyance quiet, saying India and Russia "have a relationship... that we don't have" and calling on Delhi to use its "lever-

age" with Moscow. But ex-officials have been more vocal, with former US diplomat Richard Haass calling India's "careful, avoid angering Putin at all costs response" a sign that it "remains unprepared to step up to major power responsibilities or be a dependable partner." But commentator Sanjaya Baru said Western countries should be more indulgent of India's ties to Russia-precisely because of its role in confronting China. "Only a vibrant India can take the edge off an aggressive China," he wrote in the Times of India. There is "no reason why India should be taking sides in what is essentially an East-West conflict, centred in Europe and a continuation of the Cold War", he added. —AFP

## Ukraine is 'victim' of US policy: Iran

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader yesterday said US policies are to blame for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling for an end to the war that broke out last week. "The root cause of the Ukraine crisis is the US and the West's policies," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech marking a Muslim religious anniversary. "The United States regime is a crisis-creating and crisis-living one. It feeds on crisis. "In my opinion, today Ukraine is also the victim of such policy. Today, the Ukraine situation is related to this US policy. The US has dragged Ukraine to this point," he added.

He accused Washington of meddling in the "internal affairs of the country, setting up demonstrations against the governments, creating velvet revolutions, creating color coup d'etats". Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine last Thursday. Ukraine says more than 350 civilians have been killed since, and that Moscow is amassing more troops for a possible assault on the capital city Kyiv.

Iran's supreme leader said Tehran wants the "war to end", and called for civilians' lives and infrastructure to be spared during the conflict. "We are against war and destruction, anywhere in the world," Khamenei said, adding that "we are against killing people, the destruction of people's infrastructure". The invasion has pushed tensions between Russia and the West to their highest point in decades.

The US, European allies and NATO members have imposed severe sanctions on Moscow and are supplying Ukraine with weapons and defense equipment. Khamenei said that lessons should be drawn from the war, mainly that "Western powers' support of puppet regimes and governments is a mirage, it is not real". Relations between the US and Iran have been severed since April 1980, a year after the fall of the pro-Western shah.

This was followed by the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran, and the seizing of hostages in a crisis that lasted for more than a year. The two arch-rivals are currently engaged in indirect negotiations in Vienna to restore a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, from which Washington unilaterally withdrew in 2018. Iran's leader, who has the final say in major state policies, called the US a "mafia regime". "Political



TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks during a live TV speech in Tehran yesterday. —AFP

mafia, economic mafia, arms-producing mafia: different types of mafias that control and lead the policies of the country and actually control the country," he said. —AFP

## China should eventually 'co-exist' with COVID-19

BEIJING: China should aim to co-exist with the virus and could move away from its zero-COVID strategy "in the near future," a top Chinese scientist said in a possible sign that the country's leadership is rethinking its strict approach. The country where the coronavirus was first detected in 2019 is now one of the last places still clinging to a zero-tolerance approach, responding to small outbreaks with snap lockdowns and cutting off most international travel.

But fatigue over disruptions to everyday life as well as semi-autonomous Hong Kong's struggle to contain a mass Omicron outbreak have raised questions about the sustainability of Beijing's approach. China's strategy against COVID-19 cannot "remain unchanged forever" and "it is the long-term goal of humanity to co-exist with the virus" at tolerable death and illness rates, Zeng Guang wrote on social media platform Weibo on Monday.

Zeng is the former chief scientist of China's Center for Disease Control and Prevention and one of the experts behind the country's initial COVID response. Zeng said that while China's approach had prevented the early chaos of widespread infection experienced by many Western countries, its low infection rate was now a "soft spot" as far fewer people had built up natural immunity.

He said Western countries were now showing "commendable courage" in exploring how to live with the virus and that China should "observe and learn" even though there was still "no need to open the country's doors at the peak of the global pandemic". "In the near future, at the right time, the roadmap for Chinese-style co-existence with the virus should be presented," Zeng said. His comments are unusual for an official in China's government, which has touted its low infection rates to the Chinese public as a sign of the superiority of its approach.

Experts who previously questioned "zero COVID" have faced a backlash, including prominent scientist Zhang Wenhong who was attacked by online trolls and probed for plagiarism after a similar Weibo post in July. Zeng's post did not appear to make as much of a splash online, attracting only a few thousand responses on a platform where trending topics normally engage millions of users.

His comments come after authorities said in February that they would crack down on "excessive" COVID-19 measures by local governments, including arbitrary quarantines and business shutdowns. The problems associated with a zero-COVID approach have been laid bare in Hong Kong, which is in the midst of its worst outbreak yet and has seen panic buying following mixed messaging from the government over whether it would impose strict mainland-style measures.

Authorities plan to test all 7.4 million residents this month and isolate all infections either at home or in a series of camps that are still being constructed with mainland help. But experts from the University of Hong Kong published new modeling data yesterday which estimated the current number of infections at 1.7 million and suggested delaying mass testing to avoid overwhelming the financial hub's ability to isolate and care for those infected. —AFP

## Tired and emotional, Ukrainians arrive by train in Berlin

BERLIN: At Berlin central station, commuters rush past a mother and her four children as they stand bewildered on the platform, weighed down by heavy luggage. Two of them, still toddlers, are wearing hats and jackets in blue and yellow, the colors of the flag of Ukraine, the country from where they have just fled. Germany has opened its doors to refugees from Ukraine since Russia's invasion of the country began last week, displacing more than half a million people already. National rail operator Deutsche Bahn has laid on free travel for refugees and is also preparing to charter additional trains from the Polish border.

"We are going to Dresden (in eastern Germany). We have a good friend there who said he could find us a place to stay," 17-year-old Ukrainian student Maxym Floria tells AFP. Floria set off four days ago with his mother and younger brother from Izmail, in the Odessa region, and has travelled through Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland to get here. "If

Odessa fell we didn't stand a chance, so we decided to leave with my family," he said. Only a relatively small number have made it to Germany so far: around 1,800, according to a spokesman for the interior ministry.

### Men left behind

Of the more than 500,000 people who have left Ukraine to seek refuge in neighboring countries, more than half of them are in Poland, according to the UNHCR. Floria's father, like all men aged between 18 and 60, has not been allowed to leave Ukraine as he has been called up to fight. The family are not intending to stay in Germany permanently. "I firmly believe that we will be able to go home safely and that everyone will fight for our country," Floria said, visibly emotional and exhausted.

Berlin is expecting to see a sharp increase in the number of women and children arriving from Ukraine in the coming days. The German capital and the surrounding state of Brandenburg



BERLIN: A man walks past a mural by Berlin-based street artist Eme Freethinker featuring Russian and Ukrainian youths embracing in Berlin. —AFP

have already reactivated some of the systems deployed in 2015 to cope with an influx of refugees from the Middle East, mainly Iraq and Syria. Ukraine is at least 700 kilometers from Berlin, but Interior Minister Nancy Faeser has repeatedly stressed that Germany's borders are open to those fleeing the conflict.

The Russian invasion has provoked an outpouring of support in Germany,

with more than 100,000 people joining a demonstration in Berlin on Sunday to show solidarity with Ukraine. Some have also taken to social media to organize initiatives to transport food and clothes to the Polish-Ukrainian border and to offer accommodation in Berlin. The European Union is planning to grant Ukrainians fleeing the war the right to stay and work in the 27-nation bloc for up to three years. —AFP

## 11 die; fire rips through Syrian shopping mall

DAMASCUS: A fire in a shopping centre in the Syrian capital Damascus killed at least 11 people yesterday, the interior ministry said, in one of the deadliest blazes of recent years. Many of those killed were security guards or other staff on duty overnight in the six-storey building, civil defense director Ahmad Abbas said. The cause of the blaze was not immediately clear.

"Eleven people have died as a result of the fire in the La Mirada mall, and two people have been rescued," the interior ministry said. The fire caused

"extensive material damage", it added, ripping through stores that sold clothes, leather goods and cosmetics-many of which were highly flammable. "Investigations are underway to determine the cause of the blaze," the ministry statement said.

Fires in the Syrian capital are relatively frequent, some caused by electrical short-circuits, others by unsafe heating. A 52-year-old witness, who asked to be identified only by his first name Hani, said the fire broke out at around 3:00 am. "The fire started on the top floor and started to spread quickly to other levels," he said. Damascus police chief Hussein Jumaa said the cause of the blaze was likely "internal." "The fire spread so fast that the people in the building couldn't save themselves," Jumaa told state television.

Twenty fire engines helped douse the blaze, civil defense chief Abbas said. "It took around four hours for us to bring the fire under control," he said, adding that the victims died either of suffocation or

of severe burns. "They were all guards working at the mall, or workers on duty," Abbas added. Ten of the 11 corpses recovered from the building were charred beyond recognition, the state SANA news agency reported.

It said seven people were wounded, including those who suffered smoke inhalation. An AFP correspondent saw fire trucks stationed outside the charred facade of the shopping mall, where dozens of businesses had been destroyed. "We have asked everyone to stay away from the area to facilitate civil defense operations," a fire department official told AFP on condition of anonymity, because he was not authorized to speak to the media. Despite the security cordon, dozens flocked to the scene, including business owners eager to check on their shops. One store owner collapsed when he saw the scale of the damage. "My livelihood is gone... my money is gone," he wailed. —AFP



## Business

# Top Chinese firms push 5G credentials despite US ban

'By the end of 2022, we are expected to roll out over one million 5G base stations'

**BARCELONA, Spain:** On a stage reserved for the biggest players in the global telecoms industry, three Chinese firms took their place alongside three Western companies—and pushed the message that they wanted to “work together”. But the state-owned companies—China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom—have been barred from doing business in the United States, severely hampering their global ambitions.

The US authorities cited security and risks of meddling by the Chinese state—similar reasons lay behind Huawei's exclusion from the US market in 2020. With a relatively small international footprint, all three firms used their presentations at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona to trumpet their achievements in their homeland.

“By the end of 2022, we are expected to roll out a total of over one million 5G base stations, with subscribers using 5G networks to exceed 330 million,” said Yang Jie, boss of China Mobile. The roll-out of 5G—a faster, more efficient mobile network—is seen as vital for a host of future technologies, not least self-driving vehicles and advanced industrial machinery. But the rest of the world is lagging far behind China, and analysts are expressing concern that excluding the Chinese firms from the global market will do more harm than good.

In his pitch to the MWC, Vodafone boss Nick Read was explicit about the challenge faced by Europe. “At (the) current rate, it will take at least until the end of the decade for Europe to match the transformational, full 5G experience that China will

already have achieved this year,” he said.

The three state-owned firms have been integral to that effort. China Mobile boasts almost one billion subscriptions, making it by far the biggest firm in the world. The other two Chinese companies each have more than 300 million subscriptions.

And all three are heavily pushing 5G. “If we look at the world of the way it is now, at least on the consumer side, 65 percent of 5G sits in mainland China,” said Dario Talmesio of Omdia, a research firm. He said “a body of expertise, experience... and best practices” was being established in the region.

“Can the rest of the world confidently say: ‘We don't need that?’” The US government believes they can live without it. In banning China Unicom in January, the US Federal Communications Commission said the company could be exploited by the Chinese government and posed “significant national security and law enforcement risks”.

## 'Hearts and minds'

The battle lines are drawn, but on stage the three Chinese firms were cautious not to tackle the US ban directly. Yang ended his video presentation by saying China Mobile was “willing to work with all sectors of society” to “unleash the infinite potential” of 5G and other technology.

China Telecom chief Ruiwen Ke said he wanted to “work together” to “create a better future”. The Chinese firms were on a “hearts and minds mission”, according to Ben Wood of research firm CCS Insight, using their platform in Barcelona to stress



**BARCELONA, Spain:** A visitor talks on the phone in front of a 5G logo on the opening day of the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona. The world's biggest mobile fair is held from February 28 to March 3, 2022. — AFP

China's strengths more generally.

“The Chinese are very proud of what they have created and they want to come and tell that story,” he said. “And they want to make sure that they set the agenda for the future evolution of technology.” Wood and Talmesio both highlighted the massive

advantage enjoyed by the Chinese firms because of the sheer size of their domestic 5G business.

Talmesio said the firms were sending a “clear message” in Barcelona: “We're here, we're still international, we're happy to do business with anyone if they'll let us.” — AFP

## Aim of sanctions is to 'collapse' Russian economy

**PARIS:** France said yesterday that Western sanctions against Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine will cause the Russian economy to collapse.

“We will bring about the collapse of the Russian economy,” Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told the Franceinfo broadcaster a day after France, the EU and others said they would impose a new round of sanctions on Russia.

“The economic and financial balance of power is totally in favour of the European Union which is in the process of discovering its own economic pow-

er,” he said. “We are waging total economic and financial war on Russia,” he said.

On Monday, the EU added top Kremlin-linked oligarchs and Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman to its sanctions blacklist. Among the high-profile names were close Putin allies Igor Sechin, head of state oil giant Rosneft, and Nikolay Tokarev, boss of pipeline mammoth Transneft.

Three men ranked within Russia's 10 top richest by Forbes were also added: Metals magnate Alexei Mordashov, tycoon Alisher Usmanov, and businessman and Putin friend Gennady Timchenko. “The oligarchs need to watch out because the list of oligarchs that have been targeted by the EU is very large,” French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told the BFM channel late Monday.

He said they were being hit “not only in their share portfolios but also with the possibility—and we will do it in France—of asset seizures. “So if I was an

oligarch, in Russia or France, I'd be worried.” Le Drian added: “I hope he (Putin) realises how the balance of power has shifted and that he has lost the information war.”

## French energy

Le Maire said the total amount of Russian assets being frozen amounted to “almost 1,000 billion dollars”. After the Russian central bank raised its key interest rate to 20 percent on Monday, “companies can only borrow at high rates”, Le Maire said. He acknowledged that ordinary Russians would also suffer from the impact of the sanctions, “but we don't know how we can handle this differently”.

Le Maire said he would talk to France's two energy giants TotalEnergies and Engie in the coming days to decide on their involvement in Russian energy projects. There was now “a problem of principle” with any collaboration with people close to

Putin, Le Maire said. His remarks, which came after other energy majors including Shell and BP announced that they would pull out of Russia, caused Engie's share price to slump by five percent in early Paris bourse trading yesterday.

Engie is notably involved in Russia's pipeline project Nord Stream 2, which Germany last week put on hold when Moscow recognised two Ukrainian breakaway republics. TotalEnergies pledged Tuesday that it “will not invest any new capital in new projects in Russia”—but did not say whether it would pull out of the country.

The group makes between three and five percent of its annual sales in Russia and owns a 19.4-percent stake in gas group Novatek and 20 percent in Yamal LNG, a liquefied gas specialist, among others. The group said it approves “the scale of sanctions put in place by Europe” against Russia and pledged to implement them. — AFP

## London Underground paralysed by strike

**LONDON:** London's underground Tube railway was suspended yesterday, the capital's transport body said, as staff strike over fears of job cuts and pension changes due to a funding crisis. “All tube lines are suspended,” a Transport for London spokesman told AFP, as the organisation urged commuters to work from home or use alternative public transport.

Members of the RMT transport trade union are staging separate walkouts tomorrow in a bitter dispute that has sparked travel chaos, with knock-on effects also expected today and Friday. The action comes as the British government handed TfL a new financial lifeline last week after COVID lockdowns shattered revenues.

The RMT warns that any spending cutbacks as a result of the deal will lead to hundreds of job losses, reductions in pensions and affected working conditions. London mayor “Sadiq Khan should be standing up to Tory ministers who want to needlessly attack jobs, pensions and conditions of key transport workers”, said RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch. “It is this political failure that has left tube workers with no choice but to strike this week.”

Taxpayers will provide TfL with £200 million (\$270 million, 240 million euros) in a fourth extraordinary funding settlement that helps TfL through to June 24, the government had announced Friday. Britain has now provided TfL with close to £5.0 billion in emergency funding since March 2020 when the UK first went into lockdown.

TfL also runs bus and overground railway services throughout London. Its revenue crashed by 95 percent at the height of the first coronavirus wave in 2020, while in recent months the Tube has been plagued by strikes. — AFP



**LONDON, United Kingdom:** People queue to board a London bus yesterday, during a day of strike action on Transport for London's (TfL) London Underground tube service. — AFP

## Bayer swings back to full-year profit in 2021

**BERLIN:** German chemicals and pharmaceuticals giant Bayer said yesterday that it was back in the black in 2021, thanks primarily to a strong performance of its agrochemicals division. Its return to profit came after the coronavirus pandemic and litigation costs had pushed it into a massive loss a year earlier.

Bayer said in a statement that it booked a net profit of 1.0 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) last year, compared with a loss of 10.5 billion euros in 2020. The maker of Aspirin said it also returned to profit at an underlying or operating level, with earnings before interest and tax showing a profit of 3.3 billion euros, compared with a loss of 16.1 billion euros the year before.

“The Bayer Group had a successful year in 2021, both operationally and strategically,” the statement said. “We posted substantial growth, strengthened our innovation pipeline and made progress toward our sustainability targets. All this shows that Bayer is on the right track,” said chief executive Werner Baumann.

“We not only met our updated group forecast, but in fact exceeded it,” he added. The strong performance was partly driven by Bayer's agricultural division, which benefited from higher prices for soybean seeds and glyphosate-based herbicides.

Bayer expects turnover and profitability to improve in 2022, but its forecasts are based on a “stable geopolitical environment” in eastern Europe, which has changed “spectacularly” following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Bayer's pandemic woes in 2020 were compounded by ongoing legal battles over the substance glyphosate, deemed a “probable” carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. The company still faces lawsuits in the United States and has appealed to the US Supreme Court against a San Francisco court ruling ordering it to pay damages to a Non-Hodgkin lymphoma sufferer. — AFP

## Japan confirms cyberattack hit Toyota supplier

**TOKYO:** Japan's government said yesterday that a cyberattack was behind disruption at a Toyota supplier that forced the top-selling automaker to halt operations at domestic plants for a day. Local media reported the attack on parts supplier Kojima Industries was a possible ransomware attack, with the firm saying it detected a “threat message” on Saturday night before discovering its server was “infected with a virus”.

Its statement had to be forwarded by Toyota as Kojima's server is still down. The parts maker still does not know when it will be able to restore its system and resume production, a Kojima

spokesman told AFP.

Japan's top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno confirmed “a cyberattack” on the company, but declined to offer details, saying it was still being investigated. He also warned that the “risk of cyberattacks is rising due to the current situation, including Ukraine,” calling for companies to “strengthen cyber security measures.”

The leading business daily Nikkei reported the cyberattack involved ransomware, a kind of malware that effectively ransoms a victim's information. Toyota said Monday the system failure at Kojima Industries forced it to suspend operations at the 28 lines of its 14 domestic plants yesterday. But it confirmed on Tuesday that it would resume operations the next day. The cyberattack comes with nations that have imposed sanctions on Russia over its Ukraine invasion, including Japan, on high alert over possible retaliatory cyberattacks. — AFP



**TOKYO:** File photo shows the logo of Japan's Toyota Motor displayed at a dealership in Tokyo. Japan's government said yesterday that a cyber attack was behind disruption at a Toyota supplier that forced the top-selling automaker to halt operations at domestic plants for a day. — AFP

## Energy prices drive German inflation up again in February

**FRANKFURT, Germany:** German inflation rose again in February, official data showed yesterday, as the crisis in Ukraine added to fears that energy prices could keep inflation in the eurozone higher for longer.

Consumer prices rose by 5.1 percent annually in February, according to the federal statistics agency Destatis, after the pace slowed in January to 4.9 percent. The renewed rise dashed previous expectations

that inflation would progressively ease after reaching a decades-high peak of 5.3 percent in December.

The continued squeeze on prices was down to “COVID-19-related effects such as delivery bottlenecks”, while “energy product prices continue to have an impact”, Destatis said in a statement. The longstanding pressures were “superimposed by uncertainties caused by the Russian attack on Ukraine”, which threatens to further increase the price for energy, Destatis said.

Supplies of oil and, in particular, gas have been caught amid rising tensions between the West and Russia, a major supplier to European countries. “The development of gas and crude oil prices is likely to remain decisive for the development of German consumer prices in the coming months,” said Fritz Koehler-Geib, chief economist at the

public lender KfW.

“The Russian war of aggression in Ukraine is counteracting a gradual stabilisation of energy prices and a gradual decline in the high inflation rates,” she said, adding that further sanctions against Russia could lead to “new rises”.

The figures for Europe's largest economy will add to expectations of a fresh rise when eurozone inflation figures are published on Wednesday. On the harmonised index of consumer prices, the European Central Bank's preferred measure, inflation in Germany rose from 5.1 percent to 5.5 percent, according to Destatis.

Already well above the bank's two-percent inflation target, accelerating inflation could add to pressure for the ECB to tighten monetary policy faster when it meets next week. — AFP



## Business

# Toshiba CEO resigns ahead of vote on spin-off plan

## Toshiba stands by its two-way split plan

TOKYO: Toshiba's CEO resigned yesterday, adding fresh uncertainty weeks before a key shareholder meeting on a plan to spin off the Japanese conglomerate's devices unit. Satoshi Tsunakawa had been chief executive for less than a year at the tech and industrial giant, which has lurched from crisis to crisis in recent years.

He will continue to serve as interim chair of the board of directors, Toshiba said in a statement. His resignation comes ahead of an extraordinary shareholder vote on March 24 on Toshiba's plan to spin off its electronic devices segment and sell "non-core" businesses.

The proposal is a revision of an earlier plan to split Toshiba into three companies, which met with opposition from some key shareholders. Toshiba yesterday stood by its two-way split plan, saying new CEO Taro Shimada would "lead the company that will run the energy and infrastructure business" after the device unit is spun off in the second half of 2023.

"One of the first tasks I'll be tackling is

to build robust trusting relationships with all of our stakeholders, including clients and employees, to strengthen governance and carry out our management plans steadfastly," Shimada told reporters.

The sprawling conglomerate was once a symbol of Japan's advanced technological and economic power, but faced a series of scandals and financial problems in the 2010s. A takeover offer from private equity fund CVC Capital Partners last year stirred tumult within Toshiba around allegations it was intended to blunt the influence of activist investors.

Tsunakawa's predecessor Nobuaki Kurumatani, who previously worked for CVC, resigned in April 2021, insisting his decision was not related to the buyout controversy. Tsunakawa had spoken out against taking Toshiba private in an interview with Bloomberg News on Monday.

He told the outlet that splitting into two companies remained the best plan, despite calls from some investors to reopen talks on selling the conglomerate. Mio Kato, an ana-

lyst at LightStream Research who publishes on Smartkarma, said the timing of the resignation was "a bit curious".

It "suggests that maybe activist investors may have been less than thrilled about Tsunakawa's position on privatisation and pressured the board to replace him," he said. Management positions at Toshiba "are now semi-toxic", Kato added, describing the company as "looking rather rudderless here".

Representative Executive Officer Mamoru Hatazawa is also stepping down from his current position but will continue to serve as a company director, Toshiba said. Tsunakawa told reporters that restructuring the top of the company would allow for "agile management" by specialised teams "in each of our core businesses".

"In order for us to continue to increase our corporate value through profitable growth as a company, we don't have the option of maintaining the status quo without changing our portfolio or the shape of the company," he said. — AFP



TOKYO: This handout picture provided by Toshiba Corp. shows new CEO Taro Shimada (R) and new COO Goro Yanase (L) attending an online press conference in Tokyo yesterday. Toshiba's CEO Satoshi Tsunakawa resigned yesterday, adding fresh uncertainty weeks before a key shareholder meeting. — AFP

## China backpedals on climate promises as economy slows

BEIJING: When China's President Xi Jinping issued his traditional Lunar New Year wishes from the country's coal heartland in January, the subtext was clear: Beijing is not ready to kick its coal addiction, despite promises to slash emissions.

The ink had barely dried on the hard-fought deal struck at last year's United Nations climate conference in Glasgow when Beijing's backslide on pledges began. The country's central economic planner has watered down a roadmap to slash emissions, greenlighted giant coal-fired power plants, and told mines to produce "as much coal as possible" after power shortages paralysed swathes of the economy last year.

Environmentalists are concerned this would mean China would continue to pollute beyond the 2030 deadline by which it has promised to have reached peak emissions. Xi's trip to mining towns in Shanxi-China's biggest coal producing province-saw him making crispy noodle snacks with families "recently lifted out of poverty".

"We are not pursuing carbon neutrality because others are forcing us, it's something we must do. But it can't be rushed," he said later, while inspecting a thermal power plant.

"We can't delay action, but we must find the right rhythm." Days earlier, Xi

told Communist Party officials in Beijing that low-carbon goals should not come at the expense of "normal life"-a major change in rhetoric from his 2020 announcement at a UN assembly that China would be carbon neutral by 2060.

### Dependent on coal

The Glasgow pact encourages countries to slash their emissions targets, with the aim of limiting warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius (36 degrees Fahrenheit) ideally to 1.5 degrees. Experts have warned that global emissions must be halved within a decade to have a chance of achieving that goal.

A report issued by the UN's climate science advisors on Monday said that warming beyond 1.5C would wreak permanent damage to the planet and that nearly half the world's population is already "highly vulnerable" to the accelerating impacts of climate change.

"The world's biggest polluters are guilty of arson of our only home," UN chief Antonio Guterres said in response to this most compelling scientific overview of climate change impacts to date. China generates an estimated 29 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions-double the US share and three times that of the European Union.

Environmentalists had hoped that

post-Glasgow, Beijing might announce a maximum carbon cap for the whole country but Li Shuo, a campaigner for Greenpeace China, told AFP that is now "off the table".

Policymakers in Beijing have long walked a tightrope balancing climate objectives with domestic growth. Beijing has pledged to curb coal consumption after 2025 — but last year, half of China's economy was fuelled by it.

Now as growth slows, authorities are resorting to an old formula of propping up smokestack industries to juice the economy. In late 2021 China began construction on 33 gigawatts of coal-fired power plants-the most since 2016 — that will emit as much carbon dioxide annually as Florida, according to data from Global Energy Monitor. Even more new plants are being built in the first few months of 2022 as well, all of which can operate for 40 years on average.

### 'Ambition in jeopardy'

During the Glasgow talks the Chinese delegation-like many others-promised a detailed roadmap to peak emissions for different industries and regions over the next decade. Existing guidelines issued just before the talks only include vague targets for increasing energy efficiency and say renewables will supply a quarter of China's electricity by 2030.

They have not yet been updated. This "suggests that the politics are tough, ambition is in jeopardy, and the regulators are reserving as much wig-



BAODING, China: File photo shows wind turbines at Caozhuangci village in Baoding in China's northern Hebei province. — AFP

gle room (to pollute) as possible for the next few years," Greenpeace's Li said.

Earlier last month, Beijing pushed back the deadline for slashing emissions from the steel sector-China's biggest carbon emitter-five years to 2030. "Steel and cement need to peak earlier than the country as a whole to ensure China's targets are on track," said Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Meanwhile, China's investments in overseas oil and gas projects tripled to \$10.9 billion last year, according to a Fudan University report in January.

### Renewable bottlenecks

Another of China's key pledges-to

increase wind and solar capacity to three times the current level over the next decade-has been blown off-course as well by supply chain disruptions and soaring raw material costs.

The price of polysilicon, used to make solar panels, jumped 174 percent in December from the previous year. Analysts fear more fossil fuels will be burnt to meet China's growing energy needs as the rollout of renewables slows.

"The political signals are much more cautious (than before), saying the transition will be slow, and coal would remain a mainstay of China's energy supply for a long time," said Myllyvirta. — AFP

## Italy PM urges more action on Russia oligarchs, central bank

ROME: Prime Minister Mario Draghi yesterday hailed the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and said Italy was ready to do more, urging increased pressure on oligarchs and Russia's central bank. The European Union on Monday added top Kremlin-linked oligarchs and President Vladimir Putin's spokesman to its sanctions blacklist.

More sweeping measures, including prohibiting transactions with Russia's central bank, have helped plunge the Russian economy into turmoil. Italy, the eurozone's third-largest economy, "is ready for further restrictive measures, should they be necessary", Draghi told lawmakers in the Senate on Tuesday.

"In particular, I have proposed to take further targeted measures against oligarchs. The idea is to create an international public register of those with assets of more than 10 million euros." He also said the international community should "intensify further the pressure on Russia's central bank", without giving details.

And Draghi, a former head of the European Central Bank, said the Switzerland-based Bank for International Settlements should "participate in sanctions". The BIS, dubbed the central bank for central banks, acts as a neutral space where central bankers can meet and discuss monetary policy issues.

On Monday, BIS spokeswoman Jill Forde said it would follow sanctions and not be an avenue for sanctions "to be circumvented". Draghi hailed the EU's "prompt, firm, rapid, strong and above all united" response to the conflict.

"Perhaps Putin saw us as impotent, saw us as divided, as drunk on our own wealth. He was wrong," the premier said. "We have been and we will be ready to react, to fight back... to defend our values."

Draghi also repeated his government's advice that Italians in Kyiv should leave and exercise "maximum caution". He said Italian embassy staff had moved to the ambassador's residence together with a group of Italians, including children, he said. —AFP

## Maersk to stop deliveries to Russian ports

COPENHAGEN, Denmark: Danish shipping giant Maersk said yesterday that it would stop taking new non-essential orders to and from Russia, due to sanctions imposed over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Citing the impact of sanctions, "bookings to and from Russia will be temporarily suspended, with exception of Foodstuffs, Medical and Humanitarian supplies", Maersk said in a statement. The Danish company, one of the world's leading container haulers, added it would attempt to honour bookings placed prior to the sanctions.

Maersk said the suspension would "cover all Russian gateway ports until further notice". The company said the exceptions were to "underline" a focus on "social responsibility" and "efforts to support the society despite all the complications and uncertainties" with current supply chains to

and from Russia.

"We will keep monitoring the situation and reviewing impacts from sanctions to return our offering in Russia back to normal as soon as we are able to ensure stability and safety of our operations via Russian seaports," the company added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday called for a ban on Russia from "all ports, all canals and all the world's airports". The Danish giant, which is tied with Italy's MSC for the world's largest container shipping company, had already stopped all shipping to Ukraine because of the security situation.

Maersk's announcement follows other Nordic companies limiting their operations in Russia. On Monday, Swedish truck maker Volvo said it was stopping sales and halting production at its Kaluga plant, and telecoms giant Ericsson also said it would halt deliv-



GOTHENBURG, Sweden: File photo shows the container ship Maersk Murcia is moored at a terminal in the port of Gothenburg, as cargo is loaded onto it by crane. — AFP

eries to Russian clients. More than 350 civilians, including 14 children, have been killed during the invasion,

according to Ukraine, while more than a half a million people have fled the country. — AFP

## China manufacturing activity picks up in Feb

BEIJING: Factory activity in China picked up in February, official data showed yesterday, as market demand and production resumed following the Lunar New Year holiday. The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) — a key gauge of manufacturing activity — edged up in February to 50.2, defying expectations of a return to contraction territory, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed.

The 50-point mark separates growth

from contraction. "Enterprises resumed work and production in good shape after the holiday," NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said in a statement. He added that new orders in the world's second-biggest economy picked up, indicating that market demand returned after the holiday break.

The purchasing price index for key raw materials and the ex-factory price index both increased as well, rising "markedly for two consecutive

months", Zhao said. He noted that costs for petrol, coal and other materials continued to be in a "high range".

"Early indicators suggest that conditions improved in February," Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, added in a recent report. "Most localised restrictions on industrial areas and port cities were lifted thanks to fewer [coronavirus] outbreaks this month compared to January."

Pinpoint Asset Management chief economist Zhiwei Zhang added: "These encouraging signs likely reflect the effect of supportive macro policies." China logged a spike in domestic coronavirus cases in late December and

January ahead of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, with authorities scrambling to eradicate flare-ups in several major cities and restrictions such as lockdowns imposed.

Case numbers moderated after that, and non-manufacturing PMI picked up from 51.1 in January to 51.6 in February, NBS data showed. In particular, activity in the construction sector accelerated. The service industry's performance, however, still lags behind that of similar periods in earlier years, Zhao said.

"Virus cases dropped back in late January and were relatively low throughout the holiday, but consumers were still very cautious," Evans-Pritchard said. — AFP



## Lifestyle | Awards



Opera singers perform in Giuseppe Verdi's 'Don Carlos' at The Metropolitan Opera in New York City. — AFP photos



Eric Owens performs as King Philippe II in Giuseppe Verdi's 'Don Carlos' at The Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

# At Met Opera, a balancing act between the traditional and cutting-edge

The Metropolitan Opera in recent years has taken steps to draw in new opera-goers with more modern works, this year launching its season with its first piece by a Black composer. The prestigious New York institution on Monday will launch the second half of its programming with another milestone—although this one appears designed primarily to satisfy its older guard. The company will perform Giuseppe Verdi's "Don Carlos" in its original French—the lan-

with the social media hashtag "#MetSoBlack." "We have very conservative audiences and we also are attracting very young and diverse audiences," Gelb said. "Not everything will please all of them." "But we're trying to at least please most of them most of the time."

#### 'Break new ground'

"Fire" was the first full opera performed at the house in a year and half due to the coronavirus pandemic, and marked the organiza-

a simulcast of the show in Harlem.

"Don Carlos," in contrast, exudes tradition: set in a royal court during the Spanish inquisition, it's populated by a troubled set of characters who spend much of five-act saga conspiring against each other. While the demands are different than with a completely new work like "Fire," reinventing a beloved work like "Don Carlos" involves challenges of its own. Verdi's longest opera, the Italian version of "Don Carlos" has been a staple at the New York house for decades, featuring stars like Jussi Bjorling, Franco Corelli and Montserrat Caballe.

"Don Carlos" requires marathon singing performances from the tenor in the title role as well as from the soprano playing Elisabeth de Valois, whom Don Carlos loves; they are played by Matthew Polenzani and Sonya Yoncheva. The work brimming with wrenching arias and confrontational duets was in this rendition staged by David McVicar, and features mostly dark sets that capture a grim world backdropped by war and terror.

Ben Bowman, a violinist and Met Orchestra concertmaster, said that when it comes to famous operas like this one, "I don't know that innovation is so critical." "What we cherish is the opportunity to carry out these traditions, and to sustain them for future generations. The goal is to capture with 'emotionally historic accuracy' the stifling atmosphere of the Spanish inquisition, said Gelb, which he called a "good parable for what is happening in today's world with rising intolerance and rampant authoritarianism."

Speaking with AFP midway through a final dress rehearsal, Gelb reported "grumbling" from



Sonya Yoncheva and Matthew Polenzani perform in Giuseppe Verdi's "Don Carlos" at The Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

some old-timer audience members over some of the set choices. "I can't keep them always happy," he chuckled. Appointed in 2006, Gelb has had ups and downs with benefactors and other key figures in the Met universe over his tenure, but says "the Met is much more adventurous artistically" than it was when he began. "It has to be," he said. "For the art form to survive we have to break new ground." "Art is about change."

#### A season for Ukraine

The company last week announced its 2022-23 season with a balance that includes "Champion"—another Blanchard opera—as well as the premiere of the contemporary piece "The Hours." And it will, as always, feature new productions of classics, including by Wagner and Mozart. More immediately, the company is navigating the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine on classical

music. Gelb, in a video address posted over the weekend, dedicated the rest of the Met's season to the people of Ukraine while slamming "the lies and propaganda" of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He vowed the Met will "no longer engage with artists and institutions that support Putin or are supported by him."

But a key question remains: will the Met still feature Anna Netrebko, the star Russian soprano who has been seen as a Putin sympathizer? "We'll see," Gelb told AFP, comments given before he released his video statement. Netrebko is currently scheduled to appear later this season in "Turandot" and next season's Italian version of "Don Carlos." In a recent statement the acclaimed artist decried the war but also said that "forcing artists, or any public figure, to voice their political opinions in public and to denounce their homeland is not right." — AFP



Opera singers perform in Giuseppe Verdi's 'Don Carlos' at The Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

guage the epic opera was first performed in when it premiered in Paris in 1867 — instead of the usual Italian translation.

"We have a very eclectic audience," Met General Manager Peter Gelb said of the juggling act between pieces like "Don Carlos" and "Fire Shut Up in My Bones," the work that opened the season by Terence Blanchard, who proudly touted the September premiere

tion's boldest step thus far to appeal beyond its usual core audience, which generally leans older, wealthier and white. Audiences at "Fire" performances, half of which sold out, were notably younger and more diverse. To coincide with premiering the opera that tackles issues surrounding racism, sexual identity and trauma, the Met also organized related events to engage new audiences including

## A yak at the Oscars: First nomination for Bhutanese film

Filmed in one of the remotest corners in one of the world's most inaccessible countries, "Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom", is the first Bhutanese film ever nominated for an Academy Award. At an altitude of 3,400 metres (11,150 feet), Lunana, where it was shot on location, is home to around 50 people and lies up to 10 days' trek from the nearest motorable road. Winters are long and harsh, and solar power is the only electricity source, creating major logistical challenges.

Equipment and supplies for the film were carried in by 75 mules, while more than 70 helicopter trips transported the cast and crew. The movie explores a society in transition through Ugyen, a discontent teacher with dreams of making it big as a singer in Australia, but who is transferred to Lunana, a village of yak herders and fungus collectors.

His initial reaction to Lunana is overwhelmingly negative, but the locals—real-life villagers playing themselves—slowly spark a change of heart. The script is laced with Bhutanese mysticism and environmental messages, while the action takes place against a natural backdrop of vast vistas and snow-capped peaks. "It is a story about yak songs, it is a story about the value of yak dung," said first-time director Pawo Choyning Dorji. "It touches upon this universal human story, about seeking what you want, where you belong, seeking happiness."

"That is something that is really needed in our world," he told AFP. "With the pandemic we have become a society where we want to separate, we want to build boundaries, we want to build walls, we



want to highlight what makes us different, what makes us better or they worse than us. "I wanted to show a simple story where all of us could find and celebrate this universal human quality." In January the film was selected as one of five nominees for Best International Feature Film at the Oscars taking place next month.

#### 'Happy country'

Bhutan is known for its concept of Gross National Happiness, prioritizing well-being as well as economic development, and Ugyen wears a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase in the film's opening scenes. But growth has brought greater desire, and thousands of Bhutanese have left their Himalayan homeland in recent years

in search of better financial and educational opportunities. Australia is their favorite destination, so much so that Bhutanese now refer to the "Australian Dream", and the country opened an embassy in Canberra in October. Teachers are highly respected in Bhutan and along with doctors are the highest-paid government employees, at most ranks earning more than civil servants of equivalent grade, but hundreds of them are resigning every year.

"There are so many Bhutanese who seem to be leaving this so-called 'happy country' to look for happiness elsewhere," said Dorji. "There's nothing wrong with that," he added. "That's just how life is." Lunana epitomises the changes Bhutan is undergoing: 3G mobile technology was installed in the village just as the film crew were wrapping up production. Dorji says the local school's star pupil Pem Zam—who in the movie tells Ugyen that teachers "touch the future"—"messages me on Facebook".

#### Homemade butter

"Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom" is only the second Bhutanese film ever to be submitted to the Oscars, after "The Cup" in 1999, made by Dorji's spiritual and cinematographic teacher, Khyentse Norbu. "The Cup" was critically acclaimed but did not make the shortlist for an award. "Lunana" has already accumulated 18 prizes on the international film festival circuit, but the director said he had "no expectations" from Hollywood.

Many Bhutanese are hearing about the Oscars for the first time as a result of the movie. One monk told Dorji that he offered a kilogram of homemade butter and 50 Bhutanese ngultrum (\$0.60) at a temple to pray for Lunana's success. "Other films have these big budgets pushing their campaign, we don't," said Dorji. "But we are a campaign that is carried by the hopes, aspirations and prayers of a whole country." —AFP

## Disney, Sony Pictures halt film releases in Russia

Disney and Sony Pictures are suspending the release of their films in theaters in Russia after Moscow's assault on Ukraine, the companies announced separately on Monday. It follows the example of other major firms choosing to pull out of the country since President Vladimir Putin launched the invasion last week. "Given the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the tragic humanitarian crisis, we are pausing the release of theatrical films in Russia, including the upcoming 'Turning Red' from Pixar," Disney said in a statement. "We will make future business decisions based on the evolving situation," the US entertainment giant added.

"In the meantime, given the scale of the emerging refugee crisis, we are working with our NGO partners to provide urgent aid and other humanitarian assistance to refugees." Sony Pictures also said it would pause its planned theatrical releases in Russia, including the upcoming title "Morbius." This is due to "the ongoing military action in Ukraine and the resulting uncertainty and humanitarian crisis unfolding in that region," the company said in a statement.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been impacted and hope this crisis will be resolved quickly." Several multinationals have already distanced themselves from Russia in recent days. Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft took steps on Monday to limit the dissemination of information from news outlets affiliated with the Russian government. More drastically, British oil companies BP and Shell have announced that they are dumping their shares in joint projects with Russian oil groups. — AFP



## Sports

# South Africa outsmart New Zealand to win by 198 runs, draw series

## South Africa read the conditions far better than New Zealand

**CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand:** South Africa outwitted and outplayed New Zealand in a crushing 198-run second Test victory in Christchurch yesterday to draw the two-match series 1-1. New Zealand, facing a record fourth-innings chase of 426 to win, were all out for 227 eight balls after tea on the final day.

It completed a remarkable turnaround for South Africa who read the conditions far better than New Zealand after being thrashed by an innings and 276 runs in the first Test on the same ground. Captain Dean Elgar set the tone when he became the first captain to win the toss and bat first at Hagley Oval, demanding his side "front up" after that humiliation and they obliged.

"It paid off for us. I am one for taking risks. This is a big one in terms of playing well away from home," he said. "We needed to rise up and level the series. We have shown in the past that we have a lot of character in the team."

In terms of South African Test victories "it ranks quite high," he added. A century by Sarel Erwee laid the base for a first innings 364. Kagiso Rabada took five for 60 as New Zealand folded 71 in arrears and an unbeaten 136 from Kyle Verreynne in the second innings tightened the clamp on New Zealand.

A disappointed New Zealand captain Tom Latham, who saw the chance of a history-making first series win over South Africa slip away, put the blame on his batsmen. "Our blueprint is about putting a big first innings score on the board, if we were able to do that things might look slightly different," he said. "Unfortunately we were not able to build partnerships in the first or second innings."

### Forlorn hope

New Zealand started the final day at 94 for four

and while Devon Conway and Tom Blundell were at the crease they held hope they could salvage a draw. But it was a forlorn hope and their 85-run partnership ended shortly before lunch when Conway went leg before wicket for 92.

New Zealand's hopes of salvaging a draw rose again at 227 for nine when rain forced the players from the field, but it was a brief respite. The South African-born Conway, who averages a remarkable 63.91 from 12 innings, had added 32 to his overnight 60 and was in sight of his fourth Test century when Lutho Sipamla claimed the wicket with a pinpoint yorker.

Blundell pressed on with Colin de Grandhomme and went to lunch looking set on 44 only to be removed soon after the resumption without adding to his score. He mistimed striking a short ball from Marco Jansen and skied it to Temba Bavuma at midwicket.

It started a rich spell for Jansen who also took the wickets of Colin de Grandhomme for 18 and Kyle Jamieson for 12. Kagiso Rabada removed Tim Southee and Keshav Maharaj ended the match with Matt Henry lbw for nought. It was a disappointing result for New Zealand after their comprehensive win in the first Test and who were searching for a first ever series win against South Africa.

They went into the Test with an unchanged side, relying on a pace attack and no spinner which has become customary on the usually emerald Hagley Oval wicket. But South Africa noted the second Test wicket was more khaki than green, promoted left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj into the starting eleven and he became a significant point of difference.

Maharaj set the stage in the second innings when he was introduced early and bowled top-order batsmen Henry Nicholls and Daryl Mitchell after



**CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand:** South Africa's Marco Jansen (R) and Sarel Erwee attempt to catch the ball to dismiss New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson on day five of the second cricket Test match between New Zealand and South Africa at Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday. —AFP

Rabada had claimed openers Latham and Will Young. He then finished off the Test with Henry's wicket to leave New Zealand yet again without a series win over South Africa after 17 attempts over 90 years.

Latham defended not playing a spinner in his

side. "We have our way of how we like to go about things which we have done for so long here in New Zealand," he said. "Even though the wicket was slightly flatter it didn't necessarily offer a huge amount of turn and it was certainly a side that we believed could win the Test match." —AFP

## Wheelchair basketball team's win hailed

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of Kuwait Wheelchair Basketball Federation and Chairman of Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Shafi Al-Hajeri dedicated Kuwait national wheelchair basketball team's West Asia Cup win to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti government and people.

Hajeri promised more achievements to keep Kuwait's flag flying high in the coming continental and international events. The team won all its matches during the 3rd West Asia games held in



Shafi Al-Hajeri

Manama. Kuwait's win coincides with the celebration of its 61st National Day and 31st Liberation Day.

## Chelsea face uncertain future

**LONDON:** "Your input and passion made it possible," Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel told Roman Abramovich as the pair celebrated a 19th trophy of the Russian billionaire's reign as owner at the Club World Cup earlier this month. Just a few weeks on, the future for Abramovich and the London club he has owned since 2003 is unclear as Russia wages war on Ukraine.

Abramovich's attempt to take some heat off the European champions by handing "stewardship and care" of the club to trustees of the Chelsea Foundation has been met with cynicism and confusion. The 55-year-old, whose fortune is worth \$13.6 billion according to the latest data from Forbes magazine, remains the owner and reportedly has no intention yet to sell his stake.

Tuchel meanwhile confirmed after Sunday's League Cup final defeat by Liverpool that the day-to-day running of the club would not be affected with director Marina Granovskaia and technical and performance advisor Petr Cech still in position.

The Telegraph and BBC reported some unease among the Chelsea Foundation trustees at the legal implications and reputational damage they could suffer by taking on the role. Abramovich has not been named on a growing British sanctions list targeting Russian banks, businesses and pro-Kremlin billionaires. But British Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran used parliamentary privilege last week to name Abramovich as one of 35 "key enablers" to President Vladimir Putin who should be sanctioned personally by the UK. Should such reprisals be forthcoming, it remains unclear where Chelsea would stand.

"In a legal context stewardship means no more than the job of supervising or taking care of something, in other words the job of 'caretaker,'" said sports lawyer Stephen Taylor Heath. "Should the government decree that Abramovich should not be in

control of the club, the Premier League would immediately have to analyse whether ownership of the club has in fact been transferred to the trust."

### Successful investment

The latest accounts from Chelsea's parent company Fordstam Ltd showed the soft loans from Abramovich to the club have now exceeded £1.5 billion (\$2 billion). Chelsea have profited from two decades of unprecedented success as a result.

The Blues had one league title in their history prior to a takeover that started the wave of major foreign investment in English football and helped hyper-inflate the cost of transfer fees and wages.

Within two years Chelsea were Premier League champions, the first of five titles since Abramovich took charge. In those glorious early years of Jose Mourinho's time as manager, Chelsea's sugar daddy was a regular attendee at Stamford Bridge. Twice Mourinho suffered the more ruthless side of Abramovich. Sackings have been almost as common as silverware with Tuchel the 13th man to take the job in the past 19 years.

### Recent years

Abramovich's appearances gradually became more fleeting and there were questions over whether his interest would be maintained after delays in the renewal of his UK work visa saw him withdraw his application in 2018. Plans to redevelop Stamford Bridge were shelved shortly afterwards.

But Chelsea pounced when the coronavirus pandemic decimated the cash reserves of many other clubs across Europe with a £220 million spending spree in the summer transfer window of 2020. That investment paid off by winning the Champions League for the second time last year. Abramovich attended the final against Manchester City in Porto and celebrated the triumph with the players on the pitch. Those images were recreated on February 12 as Chelsea won the Club World Cup for the first time in Abu Dhabi to complete the set of winning every available trophy in the Abramovich era. —AFP



**RAWALPINDI, Pakistan:** Australia's Steven Smith (C) bats during a practice session at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday, ahead of the first cricket Test match between Pakistan and Australia. —AFP

## Smith looking to replicate Ashes heroics in Pakistan

**ISLAMABAD:** Star Australian batsman Steve Smith said yesterday he was "feeling good" after recovering from concussion and hopes to replicate his big scoring from the Ashes during Australia's tour of Pakistan, their first in 24 years. The 32-year-old fell heavily and banged his head attempting a boundary catch in the second Twenty20 against Sri Lanka in Sydney last month, ruling him out of the rest of that series.

Smith, who is expected to be a batting mainstay for the tourists in the three-match Test series starting in Rawalpindi Friday, said he is looking forward to some big scores. "I've progressed really nicely," Smith told a virtual press conference from the team's hotel in Islamabad.

"Now I am excited to be in Pakistan. I love getting on a roll and being able to play a lot of cricket, and just finding my groove. The last away tour, I performed really well in the Ashes and hopefully I can replicate something similar in this series," said

Smith, who scored a whopping 774 in England in 2019, with three hundreds.

Smith has a good record elsewhere in Asia, with 1,200 of his 7,784 runs plundered in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates. Now he is looking forward to the challenge of playing in unfamiliar Pakistan conditions, where Australia haven't toured since 1998 because of security issues.

"I love playing on different surfaces, and all the different challenges of playing on different surfaces around the world," he said. "Hopefully I hit a lot of balls in the next few days and find a nice rhythm going into the first Test on Friday."

The Australian squad held their first practice session on Monday after completing a 24-hour Covid isolation and providing negative tests. The team are also being kept in a tight security bubble, travelling in armoured vehicles to and from the hotel and with more than 4,000 security personnel deployed specifically for the tour.

Smith said he always longed to play in Pakistan. "It's the first time a lot of us have been here. We're really excited," he added. "We know how passionate Pakistanis are about cricket." The second Test is in Karachi (March 12-15) and the third in Lahore (March 21-25). The tourists will also play three one-day internationals and a single Twenty20 fixture. —AFP

## Quartararo fears Ducati speed while Marquez revs up

**PARIS:** MotoGP opens a marathon season on Sunday in Qatar with champion Fabio Quartararo trying to hold off Francesco Bagnaia on the faster Ducati, while both glance back anxiously at Marc Marquez. Marquez has made it clear he is chasing a man who has left the circuit. Valentino Rossi retired at the end of last season after racing in the elite category since 2000, two years before MotoGP was created.

The Italian won seven top-class world titles. At a few days past his 29th birthday, Marquez has six.

"My goal is to fight for the title," Marquez said at the Honda team presentation, but he added that the competition would be tough. "Fabio was champion, and he deserves to be because he was the most consistent, but Pecco Bagnaia ended the year being the fastest with the Ducati."

Marquez returned last season after crashing a few laps into the 2020 campaign. For much of last season, he struggled and he sat out the last two races with double vision. With one good arm, he still won three races, all at tracks with an emphasis on left-turning corners, which the Spaniard preferred even before smashing his right arm. "Today everything looks good, the vision is perfect, the arm is better too," he said in February.

Worryingly for his rivals, the revamped Honda seems to be quicker. The second factory rider, Pol Espargaro, set the best time at pre-season testing in Indonesia and then declared: "I've never been so

fast." That might not be an entirely a good thing for Marquez. In previous seasons, the Honda bikes have been set up to suit his risky and aggressive riding style.

Quartararo, a 22-year-old Frenchman, has also made a habit of winning with bikes on which others struggle. Last season he collected 278 points while the other three men who raced factory Yamahas over the season collected just 31. After winning five of last season's first 12 races, Quartararo struggled to keep up with the accelerating Ducatis as Italian Bagnaia won four of the last six.

At testing, the Frenchman complained to the motorbike media that Yamaha has been unable to deliver a greater top speed.

"Last year we were an average 9kph (slower), today we are at 9kph. So we didn't make any steps forward," he said. "If you have no power, you adapt yourself, like I did in the past. So, if we need to adapt we're going to adapt."

Yet while Quartararo has a lower top speed than the Bologna Bullets, testing suggested he still compensates with the best average speed over a lap.

While Yamaha, KTM and Honda will all have one satellite team this season, Ducati has three.

"When you know that there will be eight Ducatis, eight of the fastest bikes ever, it will be difficult," said Quartararo. It is going to be a long season.

After 14 races in 2020, all in Europe, and 18 last year in a second Covid-curtailed season, there are 21 on the schedule. That is up from the 19 in each of the two seasons before the pandemic.

Finland makes its belated return after a 40-year gap. Indonesia, which hosted two races in the 1990s, is also added. Australia, Argentina, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia, all cancelled in each of the last two seasons, are scheduled to run in a season that stretches to November 6. —AFP





MEMPHIS: Devin Vassell #24 of the San Antonio Spurs dunks against Desmond Bane #22 of the Memphis Grizzlies during the second half at FedExForum in Memphis, Tennessee. — AFP

## Morant spurs Grizzlies, Heat gore Bulls

### Win leaves Memphis in third in Western Conference with 43 wins, 20 defeats

LOS ANGELES: Ja Morant produced a virtuoso 52-point performance as the Memphis Grizzlies defeated the San Antonio Spurs 118-105 in the NBA's Western Conference clash on Monday.

Morant made 22 of 30 shots from the field in a magical display for Memphis, two days after scoring 46 points in a win over Chicago.

Morant's career-high masterpiece included two dazzling season highlights — starting with an astonishing dunk over the Spurs' Austrian player Jakob Poelll. He then topped that on the stroke of halftime with a gravity-defying fadeaway jump shot after plucking a length-of-the-court pass from Steven Adams out of the air. "I'm thankful for my teammates, my coaches," Morant said.

"They believe in me and have all the confidence in the world that I'll make the right plays." The win leaves Memphis in third in the Western Conference with 43 wins and 20 defeats, trailing the Golden State Warriors (43-18) and the leading Phoenix Suns (49-12).

San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich meanwhile

saluted Morant as a "beautiful player."

"What else can you say about him? It's not just that he's athletic...he knows what is going on on the court," Popovich said. "So, you combine that cerebral part of his game with his athleticism and you've got a special kid."

#### DeRozan 'blitzed'

Elsewhere on Monday, the Miami Heat shut down DeMar DeRozan to rout the Chicago Bulls 112-99 in their top-of-the-table Eastern Conference clash. Gabe Vincent and Tyler Herro scored 20 points apiece while Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo each had 15 points as Miami's balanced offense completed a convincing victory.

But Miami's hard-nosed defensive display also played a huge role in the win, with the Heat ending DeRozan's remarkable run of 10 consecutive games with 30 points or more.

DeRozan was held to 18 points and was never allowed to settle into his rhythm by a rampant Miami, who improved to 41-21 at the top of the

conference standings. The Bulls remain in second at 39-23. "We set multiple things for him — we blitzed him, we tried to give him everything we had and make him uncomfortable," Vincent said of Miami's defense of DeRozan.

"He made some shots despite it, but we came out with the win." The emphatic victory kicks off a challenging run of games for Miami, who play the NBA champions Milwaukee Bucks on Wednesday and the Philadelphia 76ers on Saturday either side of a road game against the struggling Brooklyn Nets.

"This means a lot - we're playing a lot of tough teams this week," Vincent added. "We wanted to set the tone for the week we want to have." Zach LaVine led the scoring for Chicago with 22 points while DeRozan and Ayo Dosunmu both had 18 points each. Nikola Vucevic was held to 14 points. Save for a brief spell early in the first quarter, Miami led throughout and after erupting in the third quarter - outscoring Chicago 36-21 - had taken a 24-point lead to effectively settle the contest. — AFP

## Russia's sporting freeze grows over Ukraine invasion

PARIS: Russia continued to pay a heavy sporting price for its invasion of Ukraine yesterday, frozen out by a snowballing list of sports with perhaps the most painful blow coming in ice skating. Russia, traditionally a powerhouse in the sport in which they won six medals at the Beijing Olympics including two gold, yesterday had their skaters barred from all competitions.

This rules them out of March's world championships to be hosted in Montpellier, France. It is another significant blow to a country who under President Vladimir Putin had used sport as a powerful force for its image both globally and internally.

Under his presidency they have hosted the Winter Olympics in 2014 in Sochi — though that was overshadowed by the state-sponsored doping scandal — and the 2018 football World Cup. On Monday, the governing bodies who oversee those sporting showpieces hit Russia hard.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) urged sports federations and organisers to exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes and officials from international events. Hours later world football's governing body FIFA kicked Russia out of the 2022 World Cup as football's global governing body and UEFA joined forces to expel Russian national teams and clubs from all international competitions.

Yesterday they lost the right to host the men's Volleyball World Championships — which the old Soviet Union won twice — in August and September. "The FIVB Board of Administration has come to the conclusion that it would be impossible to prepare and stage the World Championships in Russia due to the war in Ukraine," said the International Volleyball Federation in a statement.

"It has accordingly decided to remove from Russia the organisation of the FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship scheduled to be held in August and September 2022."

#### 'Give birth to life'

This follows UEFA stripping Saint Petersburg of hosting the Champions League final — European football's premier club competition — and Formula One cancelling the Russian Grand Prix last Friday. The Ice Skating Union (ISU) said they had decided to bar the skaters — this also includes short track and speed skating — after they "carefully evaluated" the IOC's statement on Monday.

"The ISU Council... agreed that with immediate effect and until further notice, no skaters belonging to the ISU Members in Russia and Belarus shall be invited or allowed to participate in international ice skating competitions," the body said in a statement. — AFP

## Atalanta thump Samp to stay on Juve's tail

BERGAMO, Italy: Atalanta cruised past Sampdoria 4-0 on Monday to keep pace with Juventus in Serie A's race for the Champions League. Mario Pasalic's early strike, goals in each half from Teun Koopmeiners and Aleksei Miranchuk's late finish ensured that Atalanta stayed three points behind Juve, who sit in fourth after their win at Empoli on Saturday.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side have a game in hand which if they win would move them above Juve thanks to their superior head-to-head record. A typically attack-minded display at the Gewiss Stadium gave Atalanta just their second win from eight Serie A games played since the turn of the year, ending a run of five league matches without victory. It was also their first league home win since the end of November, their fourth in

Bergamo all season.

Pasalic opened the scoring in the sixth minute with a powerful header which completely wrong-footed Wladimiro Falcone in the Samp goal.

The Croatia international netted his ninth league goal of the season after replacing Ruslan Malinovskyi just before kick-off. Malinovskyi, who had recently spoken out against the Russian invasion of his home country Ukraine, was due to start but picked up a calf injury in the pre-match warm up.

The 24-year-old was pictured chatting on the sidelines with his compatriot Vladyslav Supryaha, who is on loan at Samp from Dynamo Kyiv. "We can see that Ruslan is having some trouble at the moment... we're trying to help him but it's difficult," said Marten de Roon to DAZN.

Koopmeiners added the second just before the half-hour mark when he slotted home a calm finish from Matteo Pessina's pass. And after Francesco Caputo missed two good chances to put Samp back in the game and had a goal ruled out for offside Netherlands midfielder Koopmeiners made sure of the points for Atalanta in the 61st



BERGAMO, Italy: Atalanta's Dutch midfielder Marten de Roon (L) fights for the ball with Sampdoria's German forward Abdelhamid Sabiri during the Italian Serie A football match between Atalanta and Sampdoria at the Azzuri d'Italia Stadium in Bergamo. — AFP

minute. The 24-year-old was set up by Russian Miranchuk, who barely celebrated after rounding off the scoring with a superb individual goal with four minutes remaining. Midfielder

Miranchuk almost looked sheepish after dribbling around three players before cutting a lovely shot back across Falcone to end a near-perfect evening for Atalanta. — AFP

## World Taekwondo revokes Putin's black belt

HONG KONG, China: Russian President Vladimir Putin had his honorary black belt in taekwondo revoked by the sport's international governing body yesterday, over his country's invasion of Ukraine. As Russian troops amass outside Kyiv, and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees flee into neighbouring countries, world leaders have heaped pun-

ishing economic sanctions on Putin and his closest allies, as well as Russian-linked businesses.

The sporting world has had a similar reaction: Russia was booted out of qualifying for this year's football World Cup, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has urged federations to exclude athletes from Russia, as well as from its ally Belarus.

World Taekwondo, which governs international federations for the sport, was the latest to condemn Putin, saying yesterday that Moscow's actions went against the sport's vision: "Peace is more precious than triumph."

"In this regard, World Taekwondo has decided to withdraw the honorary 9th dan black belt conferred to Mr Vladimir Putin in November 2013," the Seoul-

based body said in an official statement. It added that official taekwondo events would not be organised in Russia or Belarus.

In line with the IOC's urging, the flags and anthems of both countries will also not be displayed or played at taekwondo events around the world. "World Taekwondo's thoughts are with the people of Ukraine and we hope for a peaceful and immediate end to this war," it said.

Putin does not actually do taekwondo, but is instead accomplished in judo, another martial art, and has long served as an honorary president to the International Judo Federation. On Sunday the IJF suspended his status as honorary president and ambassador to the sport. — AFP