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Fighting rages in Ukraine; Russian troops claim city

ExxonMobil, Apple, Boeing latest US giants to cut ties with Moscow



KHARKIV: Firefighters extinguish a fire in the Kharkiv's regional police department building, which was hit by recent shelling yesterday. — AFP

KYIV: Russian forces said they had captured a port on the Black Sea yesterday as Russian and Ukrainian troops battled for another city and Ukraine's leader said Moscow wanted to "erase" his country. The Russian army said it had taken control of Kherson, as its troops advanced and pounded cities across southern and eastern Ukraine, defying sanctions and international isolation.

Russian paratroopers also landed in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-biggest city, triggering clashes in the streets, Ukrainian forces said. The emergency services said four people were killed in the city yesterday and there was now "mass shelling and bombing" in the centre. In a video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russian forces wanted to "erase our country, erase us all".

Zelensky said Tuesday's strike on a television mast in the capital Kyiv demonstrated Russia's threat to Ukrainian identity. Five people were killed in the attack on the tower at Babi Yar, the site of a Nazi massacre in which over 33,000 people were

killed—most of them Jews. The 44-year-old Zelensky, who is himself Jewish, urged Jewish people around the world to speak up. "Nazism is born in silence. So, shout about killings of civilians. Shout about the murders of Ukrainians," he said.

Ukraine says more than 350 civilians, including 14 children, have been killed in the conflict and the International Criminal Court has opened a war crimes investigation against Russia. The UN said 836,000 people have fled since the conflict began seven days ago, including many students and migrant workers from Africa and the Middle East who had been living in Ukraine. "We left everything there as they came and ruined our lives," said Svitlana Mostepanenko, a refugee registering in Prague.

"Our families, they're bombing even... houses where there are kids, small kids, children, they die now," she added. In his first State of the Union address on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden warned the sanctions campaign to cripple Russia's economy would

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President Biden warns 'dictator' Putin, oligarchs

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden branded Vladimir Putin a "dictator" Tuesday and warned Russia's billionaires that he was coming after their yachts and private jets, as Russian air strikes pummeled Ukraine in a bid to crush the US ally's resistance. Despite sanctions and warnings of a humanitarian crisis, Moscow launched a fresh assault on a residential block in Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv as the US

leader sought to steel the American public's resolve for the turmoil ahead.

"A Russian dictator, invading a foreign country, has costs around the world," Biden told lawmakers in his annual State of the Union address, promising "robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at Russia's economy." Biden had planned to tout his policy successes during his speech, discuss how the United States had turned a corner on the pandemic and outline what he wanted to accomplish in the coming months.

But much of that was upended by one of the most significant geopolitical crises since the end of the Cold War, as Putin's nuclear saber-rattling sent shockwaves through the international community. In an

emotional start to Biden's address, lawmakers packed into the US Congress gave a standing ovation to the Ukrainian people as the president voiced solidarity with the ex-Soviet country.

Speaking on day six of Russia's invasion, Biden said Putin's aggression was "premeditated and totally unprovoked"—but hailed the resolve of the Western alliance in responding with brutal sanctions. "(Putin) thought he could divide us here at home," Biden said. "But Putin was wrong. We are ready." Biden said he had tasked the Department of Justice with assembling a task force to go after the "crimes" of the Russian oligarchs "to find and seize their yachts, their luxury

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WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden gestures, applauded by US Vice President Kamala Harris (left) and US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, as he delivers his first State of the Union address at the US Capitol. — AFP

Two years into pandemic, is the end in sight?

PARIS: Two years after the official start of the pandemic, some countries are now trying to "live with COVID", however scientists warn that potential new variants and unequal vaccination rates threaten any long-awaited return to normality. When US global health researcher Christopher Murray wrote "COVID-19 will continue but the end of the pandemic is near", in The Lancet medical journal in late January, he summed up the hopes of many national health authorities around the world.

In the weeks leading up to the two-year anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring a pandemic in March 2020, countries such as Britain and Denmark lifted all legal COVID restrictions. Many US states also relaxed mask and other rules. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the change marked the beginning of learning "to live with COVID", as the global death toll falls after the more

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The role of Turkish drones in Ukraine

ANKARA: The pride of Ankara, Turkish combat drones were quickly put into action by Ukraine following Russia's invasion. But while they have proved their worth in several recent conflicts—from Syria to Libya to Nagorno-Karabakh—the terrain this time is less favorable, experts say. Kyiv has around 20 Bayraktar TB2 drones, built by the Turkish military.

Relatively cheap and effective, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been their number one salesman, securing deals with around 15 countries around the world. The Ukrainian ambassador in

Ankara has regularly tweeted images of explosions attributed to the drones, targeting Russian columns and artillery, with accompanying phrases like: "#Bayraktar-"Mashallah (God be praised)" and strings of joyous emojis.

"These TB2 strikes are, in comparison to ground combat, relatively small in number, but important for Ukrainian morale precisely because it shows Russia does not control the skies," said Aaron Stein, of the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

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LEFKONIAKO: A Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drone flies at Gecitkale military airbase near Famagusta in the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). — AFP

Queen Elizabeth returns to work after COVID-19

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II resumed public engagements Tuesday after falling ill with COVID, as her son and heir Prince Charles was quoted as saying that she is "a lot better". Concerns have mounted for the 95-year-old monarch's health since she tested positive on February 20, overshadowing the start

of her record-breaking 70th year on the throne.

But a palace statement indicated she was now well enough to hold virtual engagements, hosting the new ambassadors of Andorra and Chad from her home at Windsor Castle. The queen last week cancelled similar scheduled engagements with new ambassadors as she was suffering from what were described as "mild" COVID symptoms.

A diplomatic reception she was also due to attend yesterday this week was cancelled on the advice of Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Buckingham Palace has said it will not give a running commentary on

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LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II appears on a screen via videolink from Windsor Castle, during a virtual audience to receive the Andorra's ambassador to the United Kingdom. — AFP

Local

Tunisian President conveys greetings to Kuwait's Amir

Acting interior minister meets Lebanese, Palestinian counterparts



TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied receives Kuwait's Acting Minister of Interior Dr Mohammad Al-Fares. — KUNA photos

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied expressed yesterday his appreciation and greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing him good health, and the State of Kuwait more prosperity and progress. This came during a reception ceremony held on the sidelines of the 39th session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, held in the capital Tunis. President Saied met with Kuwait's Acting Interior Minister Dr Mohammad Al-Fares along with

other Arab Interior ministers, where they discussed security developments, ways to support stability in the Arab world, and exchanged views on international and regional developments.

President Saied expressed his happiness at his country's hosting of the 39th session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, wishing that these efforts would be crowned with success. He stressed the importance of this meeting and the issues it deals with



Kuwait's Acting Minister of Interior Dr Mohammad Al-Fares meets Lebanese Minister of Interior, Bassam Mawlawi.



Kuwait's Acting Minister of Interior Dr Mohammad Al-Fares meets Palestinian Minister of Interior, Ziad Hab Al-Reeh.

and security files aimed at consolidating the foundations of security and stability in the Arab world. Meanwhile, Dr Fares conveyed to the Tunisian President the greetings and appreciation of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, wishing sisterly Tunisia continued progress and prosperity.

On Tuesday, Dr Fares held talks separately with Lebanese and Palestinian ministers of interior, Bassam Mawlawi and Ziad Hab Al-Reeh, respectively. The two

meetings reviewed a range of issues of common concern for the Arab countries with emphasis on security cooperation. Mawlawi and Hab Al-Reeh appreciated Kuwait's contributions to the security cooperation among Arab countries and its efforts to support the Palestine question. Fares also met with INTERPOL President Maj Gen Ahmad Naser Al-Raisi of the UAE to discuss security information sharing between Kuwait and the international policing agency. — KUNA

World Bank applauds Kuwait on 'gender discrimination' policies

WASHINGTON: The World Bank Group commended on Tuesday the efforts made by Kuwait and 22 other countries over the last year to empower women economically. In its latest annual Women, Business and the Law (WBL) report, the World Bank said, "Despite the disproportionate effect on women's lives and livelihood from the global pandemic, 23 countries reformed their laws in 2021 to take much-needed steps towards advancing women's economic inclusion." Globally, the highest number of reforms were made in the Parenthood, Pay, and Workplace indicators,

according to the WBL 2022 report. The Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa regions showed the largest improvements in the WBL Index in 2021.

Dealing with Middle East and North Africa, the report said the region improved its laws the most due to reforms in five economies. "Kuwait prohibited gender discrimination in employment. Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, and Oman improved their laws," it pointed out. However, Mari Pangestu, World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships, said, "While progress has been made, the gap between men's and women's expected lifetime earnings globally is \$172 trillion - nearly two times the world's annual GDP." "As we move forward to achieve green, resilient and inclusive development, governments need to accelerate the pace of legal reforms so that women can realize their full potential and benefit fully and equally," she added. — KUNA

Kuwait calls for global agreement to counter cybercrime

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait affirmed late Tuesday that the world needed an international comprehensive agreement to counter cybercrime. This came during a statement delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi to the first negotiating session of the Ad Hoc Committee to elaborate a UN cybercrime Convention, which began on February 28 and will continue until March 11. Otaibi said Kuwait established on January 6, 2022, a national center for cybercrime security, gathering several specialized government entities to formulate a national plan for cybersecurity. He added that the center was keen on following up on international efforts to counter cybercrime, affirming that formulating a global convention on the issue was an important step.

Otaibi called for formulating a convention that would take into consideration UN agreements on combating organized crime in all shapes and forms, saying that all countries should be held accountable if they crossed the line within cyberspace. It should be made clear what constitutes a cybercrime, drawing well-defined lines that would determine the bases for crimes and punishment, he stressed, adding that any convention in this regard must set the rules of sharing information amongst



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN headquarters Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during the session. — KUNA

states and security agencies.

The Budapest Convention — the first international treaty seeking to address internet and computer crimes, signed on November 23, 2001, and took effect on July 1, 2004 — was an important document convicting such type of illicit behavior, he added. The Kuwaiti diplomat called for enforcing UNGA resolution 47/247 on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes, saying that it should be one of the basic blocks of an international convention on cybercrime. Ambassador Al-Otaibi concluded his address with a call for cooperating with the UN Secretariat in establishing a cybercrime convention taking into consideration the vast differences in national legal systems of the UN member states. — KUNA

Fighting rages in Ukraine...

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escalate and its oligarchs were being targeted. Biden hailed the resolve of the Western alliance and voiced solidarity with Ukraine as lawmakers in the US Congress gave a standing ovation to the Ukrainian people. "A Russian dictator, invading a foreign country, has costs around the world," Biden told lawmakers, promising "robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at Russia's economy."

Russian troops rolled into Ukraine last week to achieve Putin's mission of overthrowing Zelensky's government and "denazifying" the pro-Western country. But Ukrainian troops have fought back hard and prevented Russia from capturing any of the country's biggest cities. Yesterday, however, Russian defense ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Russian forces were in now "full control" of Kherson, a city with a population of 290,000 people.

He said talks were under way between the Russian army and local authorities on maintaining order, protecting the population and keeping public services functioning. Ukraine's army said there was a battle in the country's second city Kharkiv, in northeast Ukraine near the Russian border with a population of 1.4 million. "There is an ongoing fight between the invaders and the Ukrainians," the army said on messaging app Telegram.

AFP saw rocket damage on security, police and university buildings in Kharkiv. Ukrainian forces said Russian strikes hit a residential block and a government building in the city on Tuesday killing 18 people, drawing comparisons to the massacres of civilians in Sarajevo in the 1990s and condemnation for what Zelensky called a "war crime". As the civilian death toll mounts, there is growing opposition to the conflict within Russia, with thousands detained for taking part in anti-war protests.

"I am urging everyone to take to the streets and fight for peace," jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said in a statement posted on Facebook. He called on Russians not to be afraid of going to prison. "Everything has a price and now, in the spring of 2022, we should pay that price."

Western countries have imposed crippling sanctions on Russia's economy and there have been international

bans and boycotts against Russia in everything from finance to tech, from sports to the arts. In the latest development, the EU banned broadcasts of Russian state media RT and Sputnik and excluded seven Russian banks from the global SWIFT bank messaging system.

The list did not name two major Russian banks, Sberbank and Gazprombank, which were left connected to SWIFT to allow EU countries to pay for Russian gas and oil deliveries. Sberbank, Russia's largest lender, said yesterday it was leaving the European market after coming under pressure from Western sanctions. The EU and NATO members have also sent arms and ammunition to Ukraine, although they have made clear that they will not send troops and the EU has dampened Zelensky's hopes of membership of the bloc.

In response to the invasion, Western companies have also withdrawn from projects in Russia, deepening the economic toll on Moscow that saw the ruble collapse this week. Apple, Boeing, Disney, ExxonMobil and Mastercard announced Tuesday in rapid succession steps to withdraw or freeze business in Russia. German logistics giant DHL joined them yesterday, saying it would stop deliveries to Russia and Belarus, which has allowed the passage of Russian troops to attack Ukraine. "Going forward, Russia will be a pariah, and it's hard to see how they can restore anything resembling normal interactions in the international system," said Sarah Kreps, professor at Cornell University. The invasion has sent global markets into a spiral, with crude surging past \$110 a barrel and equities sinking. Aluminum and gas prices hit record highs on supply fears and the Moscow Stock Exchange failed to open for a third day running.

Initial talks between Russia and Ukraine on Monday failed to yield any breakthrough. Since then, strikes have been reported in Konstantinovka in eastern Ukraine, Borydyanka near Kyiv and Zhytomyr in central Ukraine. In an important strategic victory, Russian troops attacking from the Crimean peninsula said they had linked up along the Azov Sea coast with pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The city of Mariupol was reportedly encircled. The separatists have been fighting Ukrainian government forces since 2014 in a conflict that has killed more than 14,000 people. US satellite images show that Russia has massed artillery and armored cars near Kyiv, raising fears of an imminent assault. "The enemy is drawing up forces closer to the capital," Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko said in a video address. "Kyiv is holding and will hold. We are going to fight," he said. — AFP

of Kharkiv. Although Russia has denied targeting civilian infrastructure, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called the assault "absolutely sickening" and reminiscent of massacres of civilians in Sarajevo in the 1990s.

Eight people were reported dead in a residential building in the city and officials said 10 had been killed by Russian shelling on a local government complex. A strike on the main TV tower in Kyiv also killed five people and knocked out some state broadcasting, Ukrainian officials said, but left the structure intact. Fresh explosions were heard late Tuesday in Kyiv and Bila Tserkva, 50 miles to the south, according to local media. News outlets also reported Russian missiles damaging residential buildings and a hospital in Zhytomyr, citing the major transport hub's mayor Sergei Sukhomline. — AFP

Two years into pandemic...

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transmissible though less severe Omicron variant swept the world. The WHO has said that the "acute phase" of the pandemic could end by the middle of this year if around 70 percent of the world is vaccinated.

Spain has been among the nations calling for approaching COVID as having transitioned to an "endemic" phase, meaning it has milder seasonal outbreaks that humanity can live with, such as the flu. However some scientists worry governments could use the somewhat vague term to justify lifting life-saving measures.

The role of Turkish drones in...

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But the positive assessment also rests on Russia's surprising reticence to use its full airpower.

"The Russian air campaign has baffled experts, including myself, who made the incorrect assumption that they would be far more active over Ukraine," said Stein. Russian air power will overwhelm Ukraine's drones "at some point in the near future," he predicted.

Several conflicts in recent years have offered a shop window for Turkey's drones. They were a determining factor in Nagorno-Karabakh in November 2020, giving Azerbaijan's forces the edge over Armenia in the disputed region. In Libya a year earlier, they were crucial to repelling a protracted offensive by rebel commander,

Queen Elizabeth returns to work...

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the head of state's health, but news that she is undertaking duties again will be seen as a positive. During a walkabout on a visit to Southend-on-Sea, east of London, a member of the public asked Charles about his mother's health.

University of Oxford evolutionary virologist Aislin Katzourakis said "the word 'endemic' has become one of the most misused of the pandemic." "A disease can be endemic and both widespread and deadly," he wrote in the journal Nature last week, pointing out that malaria killed more than 600,000 people in 2020, while 1.5 million died of tuberculosis. There are also other options than just pandemic or endemic. The British government's scientific advisory body SAGE has laid out four potential scenarios for the years to come.

Under the "reasonable best-case" scenario, there will be smaller regional or seasonal outbreaks, as the higher COVID numbers lead to fewer flu cases. Under the worst-case scenario, new unpredictable variants build into repeated damaging virus waves, requiring the return of harsh restrictions. The different outcomes hinge on two key uncertainties: the possible emergence of new variants, and the ability of vaccines to protect against the disease in the long term. — AFP

General Khalifa Haftar, against the government in Tripoli.

Turkey has also deployed drones against Kurdish militants and government forces in Syria—the latter backed by Russia. "Hardy, reliable, competitive," gushes a Western competitor, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Turkey has reinvented the Kalashnikov of the 21st century," they added—a reference to the AK-47 rifle created by the Soviet Union that flooded war zones around the world due to its ease of use and cheap price tag. The TB2 is 6.5 meters long and half the weight of its US counterpart, the Reaper, carrying four laser-guided munitions. Its maker Baykar says it can fly for 27 hours, at up to 220 kilometers per hour, and is operational between 18,000 and 25,000 feet.

"The fact that a relatively light and inexpensive drone could not only evade but actively search out and destroy modern surface-to-air missile and electronic warfare systems, while suffering little losses in return, has rightfully garnered worldwide attention," said Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans, of the specialist ORYX blog. — AFP

"He said, 'she's a lot better now—it was very mild,'" admin worker Janice Jacom, 64, told reporters afterwards. She described the illness as "very worrying as the queen is getting on a bit but I think she's absolutely wonderful". Charles contracted COVID in early 2020 as the pandemic struck, and tested positive again on February 10 this year, two days after he last met his mother. His second wife, Camilla, was confirmed to have the virus on February 14.

The queen was forced to slow down on medical advice after spending a night in hospital following unspecified tests in October last year and cancelled a string of engagements. — AFP

President Biden warns 'dictator'...

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apartments their private jets." "We are coming for your ill-begotten gains," he promised.

"And tonight I am announcing that we will join our allies in closing off American air space to all Russian flights—further isolating Russia and adding an additional squeeze on their economy." Earlier Biden had spoken on the phone to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who accused Moscow of "state terrorism" over the bombardment

Local

Kuwait renews support for Ukraine sovereignty

Kuwait stresses diplomacy as the only recourse

KUWAIT/NEW YORK: The Kuwaiti Cabinet on Tuesday held an extraordinary meeting to follow up on the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine military confrontation on all levels to ensure the country's security and provision of all necessary needs to citizens and expats. The Cabinet members, led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, listened to a presentation by Foreign Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on the international developments politically. The minister stressed Kuwait's firm and principled stance rejecting the use of force or menacing to use it against countries. Kuwait is following, with great concern and regret, the deteriorating situations and growing tension in Ukraine, the minister said. The State of Kuwait underlined the importance of adhering to the principles of international law and the UN Charter that govern relations amongst states, based on respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and the principles of good neighborliness, and resolving disputes peacefully.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting on Tuesday. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Representative to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during an Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Tuesday.

Kuwait asserted the necessity of respecting Ukraine's independence and affirmed its full support to all international efforts aimed at de-escalation, self-restraint, settling international disputes by peaceful means, and taking necessary measures to protect civilians and ensure their safety. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser said. He further explained measures taken by the Foreign Ministry to follow up the crisis and take necessary measures to mitigate any possible effects in this regard. Meanwhile, the Cabinet listened to a presentation by Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Abdulwahab Al-Rashid on the measures made by the ministry and Kuwait Investment Authority to assess the effects of the Russia-Ukraine crisis on Kuwait and the measures taken to alleviate its repercussions. Moreover, the ministers listened to a clarification by Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahd Al-Shariaan on the efforts exerted to face this crisis and its challenges to ensure the provision and stability of prices of all basic food supplies and the strategic stock in Kuwait.

Russia-Ukraine war affected traveling to some destinations

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The political situation in Europe has affected travelling to some destinations from Kuwait during this past national holiday season, which also witnessed varying price ranges for flights to some popular destinations. "We had many reservations to Russia that were canceled due to the present situation," a travel agent told Kuwait Times. "Also, few tickets to Poland and Romania were canceled. On the other hand, there is no demand to Ukraine."

Meanwhile, the price of some airlines' tickets hiked to triple from the regular range during the national holidays. The ticket to Turkey for instance reached over KD 250. On the other hand, tickets to some destinations, such as the Philippines, dropped to almost their regular prices before the pandemic.

According to different local travel agencies, travelling is getting back to normal, but it is still yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. "If I compare the bookings in February 2022 to February 2019, the rate reached about 70 percent. After lifting most of the health precautions especially allowing unvaccinated Kuwaiti citizens to travel, and the opening of many destinations that were closed to tourists has helped refresh the travel sector," Hani from Viano travel agency told Kuwait Times.

"The price of tickets hiked by about 300 percent for some popular destinations during these holidays. The most popular destinations are Turkey and Dubai, as those are suitable for short holidays. On the other hand, some destinations such as the United States is only popular in summer, as people travel there to spend at least a month or more," he added.

KD 250 to Istanbul

Mohammed from To Go Travel agreed that travelling during these holidays is becoming essential, which affected the price of tickets. "The price of a ticket to Istanbul reached over KD 250 last week. Turkey, Dubai, and London are the most popular destinations. Also, Egypt and Jordan were popular during this period. For ski and winter sports, Switzerland and Turkey are the most popular," he said.

"Some popular destinations such as Sarajevo are not in demand now, especially that Kuwait Airways is not operating direct flight now," Mohammed said while

Threat to peace
In New York, Kuwait's Representative to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi stressed the need of respect for the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. In his address to the Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Tuesday on the conflict in Ukraine, he urged immediate halt to the bloodshed, noting that diplomacy is the only recourse. The UNGA session is discussing Ukraine crisis after the UN Security Council failed to shoulder its responsibility for addressing a serious threat to



Cabinet mulls Ukraine crisis repercussions

peace and security not only in Europe by the entire world as well, Ambassador Otaibi noted. The multi-polar world order, based on respect for the international law and the UN Charter, undergoes critical and delicate conditions that brought to the test the UN ability to defend its founding objectives laid down 76 years ago, he reminded. The escalating hostilities resulted in serious tragedies, including scores of casualties among civilian population and extensive material damage, which require from all of us to stand in unison against the conflict and work for activating the mechanisms of peaceful settlement, he urged. Welcoming

the Ukrainian-Russian talks, held yesterday in Belarus, the Kuwaiti envoy voiced hope for holding more rounds of talks with a view to reaching a peaceful solution.

Ambassador Otaibi stressed Kuwait's commitment to the principles of the international law and the UN Charter, noting that these principles materialized the concept of collective security. Kuwait staunchly rejects the use of, and the threat to use, force as a means of settling disputes among different countries, he said, noting that the UN Charter provides he said, noting that the UN Charter provides the necessary legal parameters for governing the international relations. He voiced profound concern over the deteriorating situation in Ukraine, reiterating the call for commitment to the provisions of the International Humanitarian Law, the human rights and the UNSC resolutions relating to protection of civilian lives and infrastructure. He reminded the warring parties of the need of greater political will to address problem pursuant to the UNSC Resolution 2474, unanimously adopted in 2019 on persons reported missing during armed conflict. Ambassador Otaibi renewed Kuwait's support to the efforts of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as well as the UN and regional organizations to deescalate the conflict and ensure civilians' access to humanitarian aid. — KUNA

Kuwait urges nationals to leave Ukraine

KUWAIT: The Foreign Ministry has urged Kuwaitis in Ukraine to leave the country owing to the escalating and worsening situation there. The ministry encouraged nationals seeking to leave the war-ravaged country to contact it or one of the Kuwaiti embassies in Ukraine's neighboring countries on the following phone numbers: the ministry +965/22225540 - +965/22225541; the embassy in Romania: +40725922222 - +40746151512; the embassy in Hungary: +36308980000 - +36301670000; the embassy in Poland: +48795542647 - +48664555444; and the embassy in Slovakia: +421908732868 - +421918953442. — KUNA

comparing changes to popular destinations before and after the pandemic. "Also, Thailand, which is very popular for tourists from Kuwait, was closed for a long time due to the pandemic, but they opened a few months back. Malaysia, which is also a favorite destination especially for families, is still closed for tourists," Mohammed further said.

But while prices for several destinations increased during the national holiday season, prices of some tickets are dropping. "The crazy prices of tickets to destinations where mostly domestic labor are flying such as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Philippines are getting to normal levels. For instance, the price of ticket to the Philippines reached over KD 700 during the pandemic. Now, the price ranges between KD 250-280," stressed Haidar from Al-Madar travel agency.

"In general, I think that traveling is still not back to normal levels as they were before the pandemic. I assume it has improved compared to last year by around 60 percent. The prices of tickets sold during these holidays increased by 15-20 percent for some destinations, while it hiked by over 100 percent for the most popular destinations such as Dubai and London," he pointed out.

Four billion travelers

Yesterday, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) issued a report on travelers. This report expects overall traveler numbers to reach 4 billion in 2024 (counting multi-sector connecting trips as one passenger), exceeding pre-COVID-19 levels (103 percent of the 2019 total).

Expectations for the shape of the near-term recovery have shifted slightly, reflecting the evolution of government-imposed travel restrictions in some markets. The overall picture presented in the latest update to IATA's long-term forecast, however, is unchanged from what was expected in November, prior to the Omicron variant.

"The trajectory for the recovery in passenger numbers from COVID-19 was not changed by the Omicron variant. People want to travel. And when travel restrictions are lifted, they return to the skies. There is still a long way to go to reach a normal state of affairs, but the forecast for the evolution in passenger numbers gives good reason to be optimistic," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General.

The February update to the long-term forecast includes the following highlights: In 2021, overall traveler numbers were 47 percent of 2019 levels. This is expected to improve to 83 percent in 2022, 94 percent in 2023, 103 percent in 2024 and 111 percent in 2025. In 2021, international traveler numbers were 27 percent of 2019 levels. This is expected to improve to 69 percent in 2022, 82 percent in 2023, 92 percent in 2024 and 101 percent in 2025.

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Department continues
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KUWAIT: As Kuwait saw development after its independence on all levels, the scientific field in the country had a prominent boost to follow up on the international standards, especially in the weather forecast field. Weather forecast plays a big role in the daily lives of people, making the Kuwait Meteorological Department of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation one of the most important bodies in the country, supervisor of telecommunication and information in the department, Engineer Salah Al-Ansari said yesterday. The department was established before Kuwait's independence in 1953. The first meteorological station was launched in July of the same year in Shuwaikh, followed by another in Al-Omariya the year after and Kuwait Airport's station in 1957, said Ansari. The department's contact with the audience was through weather forecast in the radio, until 1972 when the first TV weather forecast came out, he noted.

Meanwhile, he underlined the important information the department provides to Kuwait Airport to facilitate flights movement, as well as to other sectors like traffic, coast guard, media and environmental and agricultural bodies. As part of its efforts to follow the international development in the forecast field, the department executed a big project in 2004, that involved setting 27 weather stations spread across lands, islands and the sea, he said. This made weather forecast available to everyone through mobile phones and the department's website, Ansari added. The department is set to execute a second-generation automatic stations project, adding eight to ten more stations to the country, with a totally new forecasting system. — KUNA

Kuwaiti cultural
foundation holds
forum on just peace

VALETTA: The World Forum for Culture of Peace, organized by the Kuwait Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation, is due to kick off today. Sponsored and attended by Maltese President George Vella, the forum, themed "leadership for just peace," will see three sessions, the foundation's secretary general Abdulrahman Khaled Al-Babtain said yesterday. The forum is held at a time the world is in dire need for peace and co-existence among nations, he said, noting that elite figures will lecture during the event about various topics such as role of leaders, international organizations, parliamentarians and NGOs.

The Maltese president will kick off the forum with a keynote speech, he said, adding that the opening session will witness an address by the Kuwaiti parliament speaker Marzouq Ali-Ghanem, the foundation chairman, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid (a videotaped statement). Regarding the forum's sessions, Al-Babtain said the first session would be headed by the Maltese president, adding that the lecturers during it would be Albanian President Ilir Meta, the President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu and the former Croatian president Stjepan Mesic. One of the key topics during this session would be means of launching an international platform for leading just peace, an aspired mechanism to avert strife and mediation in emergency situations.

The second session, Babtain said, will include lectures by President of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Regional Representative of the UN Refugee Affairs Commission Khaled Khalifa, ISESCO Director General Salem Al-Malek, representative of the Arab League Mohammad Al-Shafee and rector of Malta University Dr Alfred Vella. Subjects to be examined at the session would include setting priorities for culture of just peace. The third session would be chaired by Maltese parliament speaker Dr Anglu Farrugia, and also addressed by the Kuwaiti parliament speaker, his counterpart of the Maldives, deputy parliamentary speaker of Estonia, member of the advisers' council of Morocco Abdul Salam Labar and a member of the European Parliament. Participants in the third session will talk about parliaments' role for just peace leadership. The final session will be addressed by Babtain and the Maltese president. — KUNA



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain



Kites flown in Bnaider

KUWAIT: Kites of the Al-Farsi Kite Team were flown in Bnaider, some 70 kilometers south of Kuwait City in Kuwait on Tuesday. The Farsi family from Kuwait is known to own the world's largest kites ever flown. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat





Philippines marks 'Ash Wednesday'

US issues Hong Kong 'travel alert' over COVID rules, child separations

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BOGOTA: A man collects food for the Food Bank at the Corabastos market in Bogota. While the Colombian government fumes over being listed as a 'hunger hotspot' by UN agencies, single mother of nine Heidy Garzon worries where her family's next meal will come from. — AFP

Scrounging for food in 'hunger hotspot'

Colombian government fumes over being listed as a 'hunger hotspot'

BOGOTA: While the Colombian government fumes over being listed as a "hunger hotspot" by UN agencies, Heidy Garzon—a single mother of nine—worries where her family's next meal will come from. "We don't know what we're going to eat tonight," Garzon told AFP in a shantytown neighborhood of Ciudad Bolivar in the south of Bogota, two toddlers in diapers clinging to her legs. Garzon, 38, and her kids live in a ramshackle shanty with six beds to a single clay-floored room in the poorest, most violent part of Ciudad Bolivar.

Most days, they are lucky to eat two meals a day. On the day AFP visited, the family of 10 breakfasted on a few eggs, some chocolate and corn patties called arepas. They also shared a mango given to them by a shopkeeper. "Hunger is terri-

ble," Garzon said, adding it is "terrible to feel hungry and not be able to do anything" about it. Last month, a report by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program stated that "7.3 million Colombians are food insecure and in need of food assistance in 2022."

The list of 20 "hunger hotspots" also included Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. In Colombia, the UN agencies blamed "a combination of political instability, economic challenges and the ongoing impact of the regional migratory crisis amplified by internal displacement." Colombia took umbrage at its inclusion on the list, for which it said there was a lack of "factual support, methodological definition and clarity." The government in Bogota demanded that the "hunger

hotspot" designation be removed.

Begging, the last resort

Garzon, who said she was not aware of the diplomatic debacle, claimed not to have received any government help since coronavirus handouts stopped a few months ago. She lives off odd jobs as a cleaner of homes or at construction sites, earning about 20,000 pesos (five dollars) a day, from which she has to subtract her transportation fees. None of her children go to school. There is not enough money for that. Oftentimes, begging is the family's only hope. "Sometimes we are given something, sometimes not... so we return home hungry."

"It is hard to get up every day and say: 'Well, what are we going to eat today?' (...). Sometimes I feel powerless, not having

anything and hearing the children saying they are hungry," said Garzon, fighting back tears. According to the Colombian Association of Food Banks (ABACO), about 21 million of Colombia's 50 million inhabitants live in poverty, with a monthly income of less than 331,000 pesos (about \$84). This is not enough to buy even half a basic basket of food essentials. Some 16 million people eat only two meals a day, and about five million—including half a million children—suffer chronic malnutrition.

'Whole country is affected'

The government of President Ivan Duque points to social programs that benefited 10.3 million households during the peak of the pandemic, as well as plans to boost food production and basic incomes. It insists it has "done everything

(possible) to ensure that no one suffers from hunger in Colombia." For Garzon and others, it is not enough. Despite economic growth of more than 10 percent last year, the peso lost 16 percent of its value against the US dollar in 2021, and food inflation is biting hard.

In one year, the price of chicken and fruit increased by more than 25 percent, that of potatoes more than doubled and oil costs almost 50 percent more. "The reality is that for many people today, eating three times a day is a luxury," said Daniel Saldarriaga Molina, who heads the Bogota food bank agency. "The whole country is affected. It is not just a problem of areas that are remote, isolated or impacted by violence... It is close to us, in the big cities, here in Bogota," he said. — AFP

On land, sea climate change causing 'irreversible' losses

PARIS: Climate change has already caused "irreversible losses" for Nature, UN experts have said, warning that if emissions are not cut quickly, warming could trigger chain reactions with potentially catastrophic effects for all species, including humans. All forms of life on Earth are linked together by a vast web of causes and consequences, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in a new report on the impacts of global warming published this week.

Those effects are severe and wide ranging across the world's natural habitats. "Climate change has caused substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses, in terrestrial, freshwater and coastal and open marine ecosystems," the IPCC says in its key Summary for Policymakers. And "unsustainable development" is only increasing the vulnerability to danger.

Many natural systems have already reached or are close to the limit of their ability to cope with the effects of a warming planet. The oceans have absorbed huge quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as emissions have grown, but this has come at the cost of changing the water chemistry—ocean acidification—that harms sea life.

Warming is also linked to an increasing number of powerful marine heatwaves that drive harmful algal blooms, kill fish and cause coral bleaching. Coral reefs are home to at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants. But battered by repeated marine heatwaves, the

world's shallow water corals are "unlikely to last the century", the IPCC said, if global warming continues without a dramatic reduction in emissions.

Forests, tropical or boreal, are also particularly threatened by rising temperatures, drought and fire. Mortality increases of 20 percent have been recorded for trees in some areas. At four degrees Celsius of warming, the IPCC report said, half of the Amazon could reach a "tipping point", becoming a savannah and starting to release its vast store of CO2, further accelerating warming.

At just 2C, the world's permafrost could begin to thaw, releasing immense quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas much more powerful over the short term than CO2. While the Paris agreement goal is to limit warming at 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, current international plans and pledges would see temperatures rise up to 2.7C.

The Earth is already believed to be entering its sixth mass extinction, driven by humanity's overconsumption and comprehensive destruction of species and habitats. And global warming is increasingly adding to that threat, with two species—the Golden Toad of Costa Rica and the Australian rodent Bramble Cays Melomys—recognised as extinct because of climate change, the IPCC said. A best case scenario is that nine percent of all the world's species will likely be "at high risk" of extinction with 1.5C of warming, the IPCC said. At 4C the most pessimistic scenario is 39 percent imperiled. — AFP

In Cameroon's arid north, climate stress boosts ethnic strife

MAROUA: Their homes are a scattering of huts made of branches and dry leaves that seem to almost dissolve into the arid landscape. A group of men sit on a rug, conversing in the shade of a tree, while women perching on stones under the scorching Sahel sun prepare a meal with the few ingredients they have to hand, as children play nearby. These are some of the 4,000 ethnic Arabs in a makeshift camp at Bogo in Cameroon's Far North region. They fled after violence erupted near Kousseri, a river town about 100 kilometers from Lake Chad.

The fighting flared in August, then again in December, pitting Choa Arab herders against Mousgoum fishermen in a fight over access to water, a precious but dwindling resource in this region. The Mousgoum dig pools to capture water and keep fish—a practice that often causes friction with Arab herders seeking water points for cattle, but which this time spiraled out of control. At least 67 people died and hundreds were injured, the town's cattle market was destroyed and around 100,000 people fled.

Many crossed into neighboring Chad or headed towards Maroua, the Far North's capital, lying more than 800 kilometers northeast of the capital Yaounde. Mahamat Sale, 60, is the leader of the group in Bogo, who say they walked some 175 kilometers (110 miles) to reach a place they consider safe. They have lost everything. "We prefer to stay here rather than go back," said Sale. "Here, we are tolerated. Over there, the Mousgoums consider us to be invaders."

Rising temperatures and scarcer, more



MAROUA: A refugee woman holds a pole she will use to build a shelter at the Bogo refugee camp in Maroua. Thousands of people have taken refuge in neighboring Chad, and near Maroua, the capital of the Far North. — AFP

unpredictable rainfall are acknowledged factors in inflaming ancestral tensions in the Lake Chad area. In a 2019 report, the Europe-based think tank Adelphi warned of "a feedback loop"—a vicious circle, in non-technical speech—between climate change and conflict dynamics. Climate stress increases pressure on communities, which undermines their ability to cope. This in turn makes those communities more vulnerable to climate impacts and heightens competition for resources.

Armel Sambo, a professor of history at the University of Maroua, said "When the economic situation deteriorates, people fall back on their ethnicity, religion and identity issues," inflaming the risk of violence. "Historically, the Mousgoums are the natives and the Arabs are nomadic herders, regarded as people who come along and occupy the land as intruders." Lake Chad is an expanse of shallow water and swamps that at one time was the size of Lake Erie, extending its shores to four countries - Cameroon, Chad,

Niger and Nigeria.

But it has lost more than 90 percent of its surface area in six decades, reduced from 26,000 square kilometers in 1963 to less than 1,500 square kilometers today. Increased irrigation and human demand for freshwater, along with less rainfall, have driven the shrinkage. The lake basin and its countless islets have also become the main haven for jihadist fighters from Nigeria's Boko Haram and its dissident branch, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), but the Kousseri area has thus far been spared from their attacks.

At a village near Kousseri, Mahamat Djidda Mahamat, a 20-year-old resident, said the situation had calmed down after last year's clashes. "I don't know if it's over. I lost my father, my house, loved ones... I just want to live in peace," he said, adding that he avoided the Arabs. "People are going home. We have secured the area," said Bakari Midjiyawa, the governor of the Far North region. — AFP

International

Human trafficking, parenthood, plastic surgery: Chinese parliament proposals

Delegates make dozens of suggestions to solve various social ills

BEIJING: China's Communist Party leadership is set to meet in Beijing this week to rubber-stamp legislation and approve the national budget, in an annual gathering that sets the country's direction for the upcoming year. Previous legislation imposed by delegates at the National People's Congress (NPC) has included a draconian national security law on Hong Kong and reversals in the one-child policy. At the same time, delegates make dozens of suggestions to solve various social ills—few of which make it onto the actual voting agenda. Here are some of this year's proposals:

Human trafficking

A viral video of a woman chained in a shack by her husband sparked national outrage earlier this year and prompted debate about the widespread practice of human trafficking in rural China. Provincial authorities found that the woman, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia, had been taken from her rural home and sold several times. Fan Yun, an NPC representative, proposes an amendment to the criminal law that would punish buyers and traffickers equally—buyers currently face a maximum sentence of only three years in prison versus 10 years for traffickers. The case has also highlighted a lack of mental health services in China, prompting NPC representative Sun Bin to call for a system that offers treatment and free drugs to rural patients. Bride trafficking has been largely fuelled by a gender imbalance, caused by years of a draconian one-child policy and a preference for boys.

Parenthood

New fathers should get at least a month of paid paternity leave compared to the current norm of around 15

days in major cities, NPC representative Jiang Shengnan believes. China's birth rate plummeted to a record low last year, prompting concerns that a looming demographic crisis could deepen economic growth fears. Most major Chinese cities offer women around 150 days of paid maternity leave but "parenting is the responsibility of both husband and wife," she told the state-run China Women's News. Maternity leave was expanded last year after China announced its three-child policy—but the vast gap between fathers and mothers has left women vulnerable to workplace discrimination and the burden of care duties still falls mostly on women. Many young couples say it is too expensive to have more than one child.

Cosmetic surgery

China's appetite for surgery has exploded over the past decade, with everything from nose reconstructions to subtle "lunchtime facelifts" marketed to consumers eager to get a leg up in a fiercely competitive society. But fear is growing that it may be too easy for anyone to go under the knife. One story pushed by state media this year was a young student who started getting cosmetic surgery with her mother's permission when she was underage and now claims to have had more than 100 procedures. NPC representative Wang Jiajuan proposes banning minors from receiving non-medically essential plastic surgery, and that laws should be tightened to require children's guardians to be physically present when signing off on procedures, according to state media.

Gig workers

Food delivery workers should have their workdays capped at eight hours, and China's all-powerful delivery



BEIJING: People walk outside a shopping mall in Beijing. — AFP

apps should be fined if they fail to provide social security for their drivers, NPC delegate Zhu Lieyu proposes. Many drivers are migrant workers who work for long hours on dangerous city streets. Food delivery giants like Meituan have faced regulatory scrutiny as authorities target what they call monopolistic behavior, as well as a lack of legal protections and benefits for delivery drivers. But social media users have been sceptical of Zhu's proposal, with many pointing out that shorter hours could mean a pay cut for drivers.

'Troublemakers'

Zhu Zhengfu, a representative of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—the largely ceremonial body—proposes abolishing the crime of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". He has warned its vagueness leaves it open to "selective enforcement" by authorities. But Zhu's proposal is unlikely to reach the Chinese parliament as the crime is frequently used by the government to lock up dissidents and activists—precisely because of its wide interpretation.—AFP

Nigeria and Ghana evacuate citizens as Ukraine war rages

ACCRA: A first group of Ghanaian students evacuated from Ukraine arrived home on Tuesday as African governments stepped up efforts to extract stranded citizens following the Russian invasion. Nigeria plans to start using chartered planes to evacuate hundreds of its citizens from Poland, Romania and Hungary, where they have fled the conflict.

More than 660,000 people have fled Ukraine while around one million people are internally displaced, the United Nations said on Tuesday. Nigeria's government and the African Union (AU) on Monday condemned reports that Africans had been mistreated and in some cases denied the right to cross Ukraine's borders to safety. Looking cheerful after finally reaching the capital Accra, the first group of Ghanaian students said they wanted to get back together with their families after the difficult journey.

Ghanaian officials said the 17 students were the first batch of over 500 students expected to be brought home. They arrived on commercial flights paid by the government. "I was afraid for my life, that is why I decided to leave. Some cities were being bombed close to my place and I spoke to my parents who asked that I should leave," Priscilla Adjai, one of the students, told AFP in the capital Accra. "It has not been easy but thank God we managed to move out and have finally made it to Ghana."

Fellow student, Esther Edze, said her group had been helped by the Church of Pentecost to leave Ukraine and meet up with Ghanaian diplomats on the other side of the border. "It's not an experience I would wish for anyone," Edze said. Foreign Minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey said 527 Ghanaians had crossed the Ukrainian border to various European countries and would soon be evacuated if they wanted. Ukraine hosts around 16,000 African students, and many of their countries have embassies in Moscow or



PRZEMYSL: Chani, a student from Nigeria and other refugees from Ukraine are seen in temporary accommodation in a sports hall in Przemysl, in eastern Poland. — AFP

other cities but not Kyiv, which complicates the situation. Liubov Abravitova, Ukraine's ambassador to South Africa, told AFP.

'Not moving an inch'

Nigeria's minister of foreign affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, said there were plans to start evacuating more than 1,500 Nigerians from countries neighboring Ukraine from yesterday. There are about 5,600 Nigerian students in Ukraine and maybe a total of 8,000 Nigerian citizens in the country, the minister said. He said he had spoken to Ukrainian and Polish officials to get assurances that Nigerians would not be stopped from crossing the border. African Union leaders on Monday voiced concern at the reports of mistreatment of Africans trying to flee the conflict, saying such conduct would be "shockingly racist". Poland's ambassador to Nigeria had earlier said all people crossing the frontier from Ukraine get equal treatment.

But some Africans and other foreigners at the Ukraine-Poland border said they were still struggling to get across. Several African students said they had been bypassed to allow Ukrainians to cross over the frontier first. "It is stuck, nobody is telling us anything. They call 20 people there to let them pass, but we are still there, we are not moving an inch," said Ghanaian student Richard Adjei Kusi at the Polish border.—AFP

Which courts can try cases?

Ukraine has applied to bring a case to the ICJ, which certainly will hear arguments over jurisdiction, said Gordon. National courts may also try cases related to the violation of international law, he added. Russia may also be brought before the European Court of Human Rights for human rights violations. The International Criminal Court is empowered to investigate war crimes committed by individuals on the territory of the Ukraine. Ukraine is not a member, but in 2014 accepted the jurisdiction of the Court. Russia, however withdrew from the ICC, so the court will only be able to reach Russians if they are arrested on the territory of a state that respects the jurisdiction of the court.

Can individuals be held accountable?

Yes. The ICC prosecutes individuals accused of the world's worst crimes including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Individuals could also be tried in national courts. However, not even the ICC can prosecute the crime of aggression—the attack of one state on another planned by a political or military leader—if that country did not ratify the court's Rome Statute, which neither Russia nor Ukraine has done. Sands however suggested setting up a dedicated international criminal tribunal focusing on Russian crimes of aggression in regards to Ukraine.

What happens next?

The Hague-based ICJ—which rules in disputes between countries—will first hold public hearings on the genocide allegations in early March. "The hearings will be devoted to the request for the indication of provisional measures submitted by Ukraine," the court said on Tuesday. At the ICC, should its judges agree the court has jurisdiction and evidence in support, an investigation could lead to chief prosecutor Khan issuing indictments and prosecution. However, the ICC process could be speeded up should a member state refer the case to the court, thereby bypassing the need to obtain the judges' permission.—AFP

Biden leads Congress in stirring message of solidarity with Ukraine

WASHINGTON: It was an address by a man who appears absolutely clear that his greatest strength is in bringing people together. As US President Joe Biden took his place at the front of the House of Representatives for his first State of the Union speech, his most pressing concern was to bring the chamber to its feet in a poignant gesture of solidarity with the people of Ukraine. "The Ukrainian ambassador to the United States is here tonight," the president said as he launched into the 60-minute address, acknowledging the guest of honor, diplomat Oksana Markarova.

"Let each of us here tonight in this chamber send an unmistakable signal to Ukraine and to the world. Please rise if you are able and show that, yes, we the United States of America stand with the Ukrainian people." Tears in her eyes, Markarova struggled to compose herself in her spot alongside First Lady Jill Biden as lawmakers packed into the chamber for the annual keynote clapped and cheered with one voice.

Sixty minutes later, the call for unity ended as it had begun, with the president seeking to galvanize "the only nation on Earth that has always turned every crisis we have faced into an opportunity." As Ukraine entered its seventh day under attack from Vladimir Putin's Russia, many of the lawmakers present echoed Biden's gesture, sporting the yellow and blue colors of the flag of America's embattled ally.

Biden was the ringmaster for numerous hearings of great import in that very building, a 19th century neo-classical shrine to Western liberal democracy at the east end of Washington's National Mall. As he ran for president in 2020, the Democrat would often wax lyrical about his days in the Senate, talking up his record as a breaker of barriers and a reacher across the aisle.

But the avuncular grin dropped away as Biden assumed the role he is less known for: policeman,

enforcer, the autocrat's worst nightmare. "We are joining with our European allies to find and seize their yachts, their luxury apartments, their private jets," he said of Russia's corrupt billionaires. "We are coming for your ill-begotten gains," he warned them, earning a rare round of approving claps from the Republican benches.

Together

The rare show of togetherness over the Ukraine crisis may have left less cynical Congress watchers hopeful for a more unified, productive relationship between Democrats and Republicans in the future. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Genuine bipartisanship is something of a holy grail in deeply divided Washington, of course, and the wing of the opposition party loyal to Donald Trump for the most part could only blink, unmoved.

There are still no shortage of conservatives in Washington—followers of the last White House occupant and more traditional establishment foreign policy hawks—who call Biden "weak" on foreign rivals like China and Russia. The administration needs to do much more, they argue, to secure US energy independence so that oil and gas-rich autocracies are unable to hold Americans to ransom.

Colorado congresswoman Lauren Boebert, an unrepentant carnival barker to her critics but a darling of the far-right, eschewed the Ukrainian colors to turn up in midnight black shawl emblazoned with the pro-fossil fuel message "drill baby drill." One of Biden's harshest critics on Tuesday though was not from the so-called MAGA caucus at all. Ukrainian-born US representative Victoria Spartz, who was embraced by many of her colleagues as she entered the chamber Tuesday night, had made a speech a few hours earlier that would have made for difficult listening in the Oval Office.

Describing the plight of her 95-year-old grandmother, pinned down under the Russian aerial bombardment in northern Ukraine, Spartz accused Biden of doing nothing to help. "It is not a war, it's a genocide because we have a crazy man that believes that he has the whole world hostage," she said of Putin. "And now that we have a president that talks about, talks about—and doesn't do things... Is he going to wait when millions die and then he's going to do more?"—AFP

Ukraine invasion: What are legal implications?

THE HAGUE: Kyiv has filed an application before the UN's top International Court of Justice at The Hague, accusing Russia of "planning acts of genocide" in Ukraine as the invasion reaches a sixth day. The ICJ said Tuesday it would hold genocide hearings on March 7 and 8 over the war in Ukraine, as fighting intensifies.

More than 660,000 people have already fled abroad, according to the UN refugee agency, which estimates that a million people are displaced within ex-Soviet Ukraine. At the International Criminal Court, also in The Hague, chief prosecutor Karim Khan has launched an investigation, saying: "There is a reasonable basis to believe that both alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed." Here are five key questions about Russia, Ukraine and international law:

Has Russia broken international law?

Yes. Russia has broken article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which forbids the use of force internationally, said Geoff Gordon, senior researcher at the Hague-based Asser Institute for International and European Law. "The use of Russian military force is not unfamiliar" in Ukraine, added British-based international law professor Philippe Sands. "One of the differences between before and today is that rules exist to protect us from such actions, reflected in the Charter of the United Nations, the closest thing we have to an international constitution," Sands wrote in the Financial Times. "It is the Charter's most significant commitments that Mr. Putin has shredded," said Sands.



LVIV: Evacuees gather by Red Cross tents set outside the railway station in western Ukrainian city of Lviv yesterday. — AFP

Kyiv civilians huddle in cellars as Russian forces attack

KYIV: As a street battle with invading Russian forces raged overhead, Kyiv resident Yulia Snitko spent the night covering in the basement of her apartment block praying for her unborn baby. Eight months pregnant and with her bulging belly showing through her clothes, she was terrified that each blast or volley of gunfire from an attack on a nearby military facility could send her into labor. "I'm trying to stay as calm as possible to not cause a premature birth," the 32-year-old told AFP on Saturday morning in the Soviet-era bomb shelter. "At night it was more than one hour of huge explosions, it was very stressful. When I realized

what was happening, I was trembling, totally shaking for five minutes." Around her, families huddled together on the cardboard boxes and camping mats they were using as makeshift beds. On the streets above it was a bright sunny day, but only a handful of civilians were brave enough to queue for emergency food supplies, as Kyiv has been transformed within days into a war zone. Tanks manoeuvred along the streets as the city, home to three million people, braced for an all-out assault by Russian forces pushing towards it.

The burnt-out wreckage of a Ukrainian military truck still smouldered in the middle of the grand Soviet-era Victory Avenue and soldiers cleared away debris. Nearby, a Ukrainian soldier commanded an elderly volunteer as he hastily dug a trench in preparation for fresh attacks. Several servicemen said Russian forces a few kilometers away had been firing barrages of rockets indiscriminately from their feared Grad systems. The sounds of explosions rumbled in the distance.—AFP

International

US issues Hong Kong 'travel alert' over COVID rules, child separations

Chinese city imposes controversial coronavirus isolation policies

HONG KONG: The United States warned citizens against travelling to Hong Kong yesterday, citing the risk of children being separated from parents as the Chinese city imposes controversial coronavirus isolation policies. The State Department upgraded Hong Kong to its highest "Do Not Travel" warning "due to COVID-19 related restrictions, including the risk of parents and children being separated".



'Do Not Travel' warning alert

"In some cases, children in Hong Kong who test positive have been separated from their parents and kept in isolation until they meet local hospital discharge requirements," the State Department added. The Asian 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. China has ordered local officials to stamp out the outbreak even as studies estimate as many as a quarter of the city's residents may have been infected in the current wave.

Authorities plan to test all 7.4 million residents later this month and are scrambling to build a network of isolation camps and temporary hospitals, with China's help, to house the infected. "It remains our policy objective to subject all confirmed people to isolation at places other than their places of accommodation so as not to infect others," city leader Carrie Lam wrote in a progress report this week. That has deepened anxieties about family separations in the months ahead and the warning by the United States is the first time the risk has been specifically cited in a travel advisory.

Spiraling infections

More than 280,000 infections have been recorded in the past two months, compared with just 12,000 for the rest of the pandemic while Hong Kong's death rate is currently four times that of Singapore. Yesterday saw a record official tally of 55,353 cases and 117 deaths, the first time the daily fatality rate has hit three figures. The real infection rate is believed to be far higher in part because residents are worried



HONG KONG: Funeral home staff members (top right) load a dead body into a vehicle next to people being treated at a makeshift area outside Caritas hospital in Hong Kong.— AFP

about coming forward. For two years Hong Kong kept infections largely at bay using a strict zero-COVID strategy, but an outbreak of the highly infectious Omicron variant has torn through the city since January.

The government was caught flat-footed, with few plans in place to deal with a mass outbreak despite the two-year breathing room afforded by the initial zero-COVID success. The city has since seen overflowing hospitals and morgues, shortages of medics and ambulances, panic buying and a frantic expansion of the city's spartan quarantine camp system. The vast majority of those dying are over 70 and unvaccinated after Hong Kong failed to raise its elderly vaccination rate despite ample supplies. Yesterday, officials said some 500 bodies would need to be stored temporarily in refrigerated truck containers.

UK, Australia fears

Departures by foreign residents have spiked while businesses have voiced growing frustration over the city's descent into further international isolation as well as repeated government policy u-turns. The outbreak has led to the imposition of the toughest restrictions yet, with more than a dozen types of businesses ordered to close and a ban on more than two people gathering in public. Hong Kong health authori-

ties have defended the policy of separating sick children from their uninfected parents, saying that rapidly filling hospital spaces should be reserved for patients. Diplomats from Britain and Australia have previously voiced concern about separations.

The United States, Britain and Australia are on a list of nine nations currently forbidden from flying to Hong Kong until late April because of their own coronavirus infections. Details are currently scant on how this month's mass testing will work and where the infected will be housed. About 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 less than two days' worth of new infections.

Lam yesterday said there will not be enough beds to isolate all infections but did not give further details. She also said there would be no "citywide lockdown" though some measures would be in place "limiting people from going out" during testing. The government has said it is still "refining" its testing plan and has urged residents not to panic, adding food supplies remain stable. Several local health experts have publicly called for mass testing to be delayed given infections are set to peak at some 180,000 a day later this month.— AFP

UAE is drawing global attention to the relationship between Iran and the Houthis

More than 120 countries condemned the Houthi drone and missile attacks on the UAE that took place in January and February of this year. The US has not designated the Houthi militia in Yemen as a terrorist organization, but a new resolution was introduced this week at the UN to designate the Houthis and sanction them. The Houthis meet the legal threshold for designation. The Biden administration removed the US designation on the bet that the gesture of goodwill would make the Houthis more amenable to a political settlement of the Yemen war. This bet failed and the Houthis further armed themselves with Iran's help.

Redesignation is a political question for Biden. The humanitarian aid community opposes designation because it makes it illegal to coordinate with the Houthis to deliver assistance. Designation would also make it illegal to provide arms to the Houthis. But designation does not grant the US military any new authorities. Any operation to target Houthi leaders would have to be approved by the President. The Houthis calculate that President Biden will not want to enter the war by approving direct action. Designation, therefore, would merely be a political statement supporting the UAE.

If Biden does not designate, the Houthis will be further emboldened to attack. The Emiratis will read a refusal to designate as an indicator of US apathy toward Gulf security and a betrayal of the partnership. To avoid emboldening the Houthis, or worsening the humanitarian situation, or alienating valuable partners, one option Biden has is to refrain from designation but approve frozen arms sales to the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

a desire for a new, "more inclusive" UN resolution that doesn't call out the Houthis or specify the return of the Hadi government. Russia's end state in Yemen has been to keep the US mired in a nasty internal political divide about whether to support our Gulf partners, and to ensure whatever government comes to power in Yemen is amenable to buying Russian weapons and allowing Russian use of ports and runways. But that end state was running headlong into their desire to strengthen security relationships with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, so Moscow was open to a new tack.



Even if a backchannel deal was reached between Abu Dhabi and Moscow before the Ukraine vote at the UN, it was a gamble for the UAE to trust Russia to uphold their end of the deal. This risk tolerance on the international stage illustrates the centrality of addressing the Houthi threat to Emirati interests. What is needed is a multilateral effort around ending Iran's support of militias acting against internationally recognized governments. This should not be difficult to build. World powers and nations in Iran's neighborhood are united in opposition to Iran's export of drones to groups like Hezbollah, militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen.

But the question governments should be asking is: Do we address just this manifestation of the problem, or do we address the root problem itself? Iran's missile and drone programs feed not only the Houthi weapons program but also those of Hezbollah, militias in Iraq, and likely other groups in the future. The thrust of international diplomacy should be:

- 1) Make it clear to the Houthis that they will be treated as international terrorists immediately if this persists, not only by UN process, but to include options by member nations that Houthi leaders will become legitimate military objectives for kinetic and covert operations by more than Coalition forces;
- 2) Disincentive the Iranian regime's use of missiles and drones as foreign policy tools. This could mean sanctioning members of the new government in Tehran who work on these programs (applying sanctions directly to the decision-makers and not broadly to the population). It could also mean clarifying that military options to remove production facilities are on the table.

Regardless of the outcome of nuclear talks in Vienna, Iran will continue to dedicate funding to their missile and drone programs if left unaddressed, and to share the results with militias. The export of these items is central to the value proposition Iran presents to the armed groups that carry out its foreign policy around the region. In addition, Iran believes it must develop delivery systems (missiles and rockets) in parallel with their nuclear program to maintain deterrence. A nuclear program without a delivery system is science. A nuclear program plus a delivery system is a weapon of mass destruction.

An analysis piece by **Reconnaissance Research**, written by **Kirsten Fontenrose**, President, **Red Six International Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council** and **Advisor at Reconnaissance Research**



Biden may want to place a choice before his political party. Which is a higher priority: delivering aid in Yemen or blocking arms sales to the UAE? He can grant them one of the two. Those who press him to grant both should be ready to accept accountability when the inevitable happens - continued, escalated attacks by the Houthis and other Iranian proxies against US partners and US troops, and the collapse of US influence in the Gulf.

Anyone who thinks this is hyperbole need only look at the vote this week on the UN Security Council draft resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In a move that surprised Washington, the UAE abstained. The UAE expected this favor to be returned on Yemen, and it was. Russia has blocked new UN action on Yemen since at least 2018, when the UK had the pen on a new resolution that would have placed an arms embargo on the Houthi organization.

The need for action like this became even more apparent in October of 2020 when the UN arms embargo on Iran expired, enabling advancements in Iranian weapons production that benefit the Houthis. Rotating into the UN Security Council this March at the helm, the UAE is using this role to draw global attention to the relationship between Iran and the Houthis. They are calling for action with resolution 2624 and needed Russia to back it or stay out of the way.

Recently Russia has expressed

Philippines marks 'Ash Wednesday'

MANILA: Thousands of Filipinos flocked to churches to observe Ash Wednesday, with Catholic priests and nuns daubing their foreheads with a cross for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Most COVID-19 restrictions were scrapped this week after a sharp drop in infections and increased vaccinations, allowing churches to pack their pews and physical contact to resume.

Devotees wearing masks began lining up outside Baclaran Church in Manila before dawn to receive the ash cross on their foreheads—a ritual that signals the beginning of Lent. Churches have in the past two years sprinkled it in people's hair due to anti-COVID measures. "I feel like I am in heaven," Lydia Smith, 76, told AFP outside the church where several thousand of the faithful stood in long queues waiting their turn. "I am really happy even if it's very crowded. It's like the joy of the church has returned."

The Philippines is overwhelmingly Catholic, with some 80 percent of its people said to be believers. Since early 2020 most devotees have been forced to follow church services online and major religious festivals have been curtailed or cancelled due to strict social-distancing rules. But Tuesday marked the beginning of the "new normal" in the national capital region and 38 other areas. Most restrictions have been removed, allowing places of worship, restaurants and public transport to operate at full capacity.

Local church officials gave the green light for the "imposition of ashes on the forehead" to resume yesterday, but sprinkling the powdery residue in hair was still allowed. "One of the tragedies of COVID-19 is it separated us," said Father Victorino Cueto, the rector of Baclaran Church. "When we put the ash on the forehead, it means that we are really reaching out to one another, in faith and in love." Hotel safety officer Radito Mendoza, 62, welcomed the resumption of the tradition. "I'm so happy that we are slowly going back to normal and those who want to go to church are now able to do so," he said.— AFP



TRIPOLI: Noor Al-Huda Abbas, a 59-year-old Lebanese woman whose daughter in law and granddaughter are held at the northeast Syrian camp of Al-Hol, shows a photo of her granddaughter on a phone during an interview.— AFP

Lebanese long for IS-linked relatives stuck in the camps

TRIPOLI: For three years, Umm Mohammed Iali has been longing to embrace her granddaughters stuck in Syria since her two sons died fighting for the Islamic State group there. Like thousands of other relatives of jihadist fighters, the three Lebanese girls and their mother are being indefinitely held in the northeast Syrian camp of Al-Hol. Sitting in her grandchildren's bedroom in her home in the city of Tripoli in northern Lebanon, tears stream down Umm Mohammed's face.

"I have been telling myself they will come back today, they will come back tomorrow—every day for the past three years," the 50-year-old said. "I even prepared the bedrooms for their return," she said, surrounded by heart-shaped pillows and star-speckled walls. Her oldest granddaughter is 10 and the youngest, born in Syria, is only four. The Ialis are among dozens of Lebanese families demanding Beirut repatriates their relatives stuck in overcrowded camps like Al-Hol.

Al-Hol shelters around 56,000 displaced people, including refugees from multiple nations, according to the United Nations. Most fled or surrendered during the dying days of IS's self-proclaimed "caliphate" in March 2019, and around half the camp residents are Iraqis. IS in 2014 seized large swathes of Iraq and Syria, ruling its territory brutally until its defeat by local forces backed by a US-led coalition. The IS jihadists continue to perpetrate violence in Al-Hol, and the UN has repeatedly warned of deteriorating security conditions there.

Living in 'misery'

Since the fall of IS, Syria's Kurds—who run a semi-autonomous administration in northeast Syria—and the UN have urged foreign countries to repatriate their jihadist-linked nationals. But this has only been done in dribs and drabs, as countries fear a backlash domestically, both in terms of the reaction of their citizens and the risk of future attacks on their soil.

Umm Mohammed's Sunni majority hometown, Tripoli, has long been a hotbed for jihadists fighting against regime forces in Syria's civil war. Hundreds of young Tripoli men have joined extremists and opposition groups there since the war began in 2011. Their wives and children often followed them. Mohammed Iali's widow Alaa, 30, is one of those women. Her husband was killed in 2019 during the battle to take IS's last bastion in Baghouz, Syria. Despite the defeat of the "caliphate" that year, the jihadists are believed to have recruited dozens of Lebanese men to join their ranks since last summer.

A security official has told AFP that "financial motives" are the main attraction for the youth of Tripoli, one of the poorest places in a country suffering a financial crisis that has left more than 80 percent of the population living in poverty. At least eight Tripoli men have been reported killed in Iraq since December. After fleeing Baghouz, Alaa was moved to a high-security annex at Al-Hol. "All I want is for this woman and her girls to come back," said Umm Mohammed, whose dream is to hold her granddaughters tightly. "I live only for them."

She told AFP that their tents in the camps fill with muddy rainwater every winter. "They live in misery, deprived of everything." Since Alaa arrived in Al-Hol her father, Khaled Androun, managed to meet with her and his granddaughters twice but could not secure their release.—AFP

Business

Oil tops \$113, equities sink on war fears

Traders keep a close eye on meeting of OPEC and other major producers

HONG KONG: Crude surged past \$113 a barrel yesterday and equities sank with investors growing increasingly fearful about the Ukraine war's impact on global energy supplies and the economic recovery. Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of his neighbour has sent world markets into a spiral over the past week, further fraying nerves on trading floors caused by runaway inflation and tighter central bank monetary policies.

The crisis has seen numerous countries hammer Moscow with a series of wide-ranging sanctions that have isolated Russia and threaten to crash its economy.

The measures have injected a huge amount of uncertainty into markets with supplies of crucial commodities including metals and grains soaring. The price of global staple wheat is sitting at a 14-year high-having risen 30 percent in the past month.

But the main source of unease on trading floors is crude, which has rocketed since Russia began preparing to invade. Yesterday Brent topped \$110 for the first time since 2014 and WTI followed suit hours later to hit a 2013 high. In afternoon Asian trade, Brent

rose as high as \$113.02 and WTI peaked at \$111.50.

Incoming sanctions have fuelled worries that exports will be cut off from Russia, the world's third-biggest producer of the commodity. The conflict in eastern Europe comes with prices already elevated owing to tight supplies and a strong recovery in global demand as economies reopen from pandemic-induced lockdowns.

Traders will be keeping a close eye on a meeting of OPEC and other major producers, including Russia, later in the day where they will discuss whether to ramp up output to temper the price rises, which are helping fan inflation.

In his State of the Union address, President Joe Biden said the United States would join a 30-country deal to release 60 million barrels to help temper the surge in prices, though analysts have warned such moves would likely only have a limited impact.

The oil price surge has compounded fears about inflation as it sits at a 40-year high in the United States and hurts Americans in the pocket even as the economy rebounds from the pandemic shock.

However, the Ukraine crisis has given the Fed another headache as it is forced to rethink its plans to hike interest rates to get consumer prices under control.

It had been widely expected to lift this month and then up to seven times more before the end of the year, but commentators say it will likely tone down its hawkishness for fear of damaging the recovery.

"The supply chain issues and inflationary pressures will be top of mind for many investors globally," Andy McCormick at T. Rowe Price said.

"These things will almost certainly complicate the already difficult task that central banks were facing trying to battle inflation." And Uma Pattarkine, of CenterSquare Investment Management, told Bloomberg Television: "The market was looking at anywhere up to seven rate hikes this year-I think it will be closer to maybe the three or four we were anticipating at the very beginning of this conversation."

Fed boss Jerome Powell's two days of congressional testimony will be closely watched this week for an idea about the bank's thinking.

Wall Street and European markets



LOS ANGELES: Gas prices reach over \$5.00 a gallon at a petrol station in Los Angeles, California. Stock markets mostly rose and oil prices held relatively steady as economic sanctions imposed on Moscow over the Russia-Ukraine crisis were deemed less harsh than expected. — AFP

tumbled Tuesday and the losses largely flowed through to Asia, which had enjoyed two days of relative calm though the selling was not as severe. Tokyo, Hong Kong, Mumbai and Manila lost

more than one percent, while there were also losses in Shanghai, Singapore, Taipei, Jakarta, Bangkok and Wellington. However, Sydney and Seoul eked out marginal gains. — AFP

Could Russia get round sanctions with cryptocurrency?

LONDON: Cryptocurrency purchases in rubles are at a record high following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, raising questions about whether piling into the likes of bitcoin can help Moscow get around sanctions.

Why crypto is attracting Russians?

The United States and Western allies have sought to cripple Russia's banking sector and currency with a barrage of sanctions. They include cutting selected Russian banks from the SWIFT messaging system, rendering them isolated from the rest of the world.

SWIFT's system allows banks to communicate rapidly and securely about transactions-cutting Russia off is aimed at preventing it trading with most of the world. Western measures that prohibit transactions with Russia's central bank have also helped plunge the country's economy into turmoil.

The ruble is down 27 percent against the dollar since the start of the year and is trading at more than 100 rubles per US unit, its weakest level on record. Russians are consequently flocking to cryptocurrencies that operate on a decentralised network and therefore are not directly affected by sanctions.

Crypto data-provider Kaiko has reported record-high purchasing volumes of bitcoin in rubles since last week's invasion. Another type of digital currency to have benefitted hugely from Russia's assault on its neighbour is tether, a "stablecoin" that is seen as less volatile than cryptocurrencies since it is pegged to the dollar. "What we saw... looking at tether (is) the average trade size has increased" in Russia, Clara Medalie, head of research at Kaiko, told AFP. "However it's still relatively low, which shows an interest split between institutional and retail buyers."

Is crypto a long-term solution against sanctions?

Governments can, if they wish, order shopping platforms to place restrictions on purchases made using cryptocurrencies as a way of blocking attempts to get round sanctions. Ukraine's deputy prime minister Mykhailo Fedorov, who is also minister of the country's digital transformation, demanded via Twitter that crypto platforms block Russian accounts, a request reportedly being considered by US authorities.

Analysis group Chainalysis said in a statement that it was "optimistic that the cryptocurrency industry can counter attempts by Russian actors to evade sanctions". It pointed out that blockchains, or the registers of transactions made by digital currencies, allow Western governments to identify violations.

At the same time, North Korea and Iran have succeeded in getting round sanctions thanks to cryptocurrencies. North Korea has earned billions of dollars thanks to cyber attacks, while Iran has used low-cost energy to mine bitcoin, according to Caroline Malcolm of Chainalysis.

However, using crypto to sell key Russian export commodities wheat, oil and gas is unlikely, with one veteran broker stressing that trading volumes of bitcoin and its rivals remain insufficient to support large-scale trades.

Crypto reactions to invasion?

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrency prices have jumped since the invasion but not simply because of Russian investment. The Ukrainian government since Saturday has received \$17.1 million worth of crypto following a call for donations, according to analysts Elliptic.

"We didn't get to choose the time or manner of our little industry becoming geopolitically critical overnight, but it is upon us," tweeted Nic Carter, partner at crypto fund Castle Island. But Medalie cautioned that the "ruble is not a large cryptomarket. There is not a lot of influence on the rest of the market", she said. — AFP

DHL suspends deliveries to Russia, Belarus

FRANKFURT: German logistics giant DHL announced yesterday it was stopping deliveries to Russia and Belarus, joining a growing list of Western businesses to cease operations in the countries after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The "inbound services to Russia and Belarus have been suspended", DHL said in a statement, adding that it was "not accepting shipments to those countries until further notice".

DHL, one of the world's largest logistics groups, also closed its operation and offices in Ukraine until further notice to protect the "safety of our employees", it said. An increasing number of Western companies have broken off ties with Russia, which is the target of sanctions.

German logistics group DB Schenker announced the suspension of some services in Russia on Tuesday. Air freight deliveries to and from Europe were stopped after a number of Western countries blocked Russian planes from their airspace, DB Schenker said, while overland services continued with delays.

DB Schenker also suspended all services to and from the Ukraine. The Swiss logistics group Kuehne+Nagel on Tuesday similarly suspended all import shipments "with immediate effect and pending further notice" with the exception of medical and humanitarian deliveries.

Kuehne+Nagel likewise halted its operations in the Ukraine. The world's biggest shipping companies on Tuesday also announced they were holding off on non-essential deliveries to Russia. Danish shipping giant Maersk, Switzerland-based MSC and France's CMA CGM all announced that they would no longer take bookings for goods from Russia and were suspending most deliveries.

Meanwhile, US credit card giants Visa, Mastercard and American Express said they were



LEIPZIG, Germany: File photo shows employees of German logistics company DHL unloading an aircraft at the company's Leipzig hub, eastern Germany. — AFP

blocking Russian banks from their payment networks following international sanctions in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. "As a result of sanction orders, we have blocked multiple financial institutions from the Mastercard payment network," Mastercard Chief Executive Michael Miebach said in a statement released Monday night.

"We will continue to work with regulators in the days ahead to abide fully by our compliance obligations as they evolve," Visa said on its website that it is "taking prompt action to ensure compliance with applicable sanctions, and is prepared to comply with additional sanctions that may be implemented."

While American Express said its business in Russia was "small," it stressed that "since the beginning of this crisis, we have been complying with US and international sanctions." Amex CEO Stephen Squeri said that "has resulted in us halting

relationships with impacted bank partners in Russia, and we will continue to comply with all relevant laws as the situation evolves."

The statements follow moves by western governments to sanction Russian banks and Russian nationals as the United States, the European Union and other powers seek to isolate the country and punish its economy.

The steps taken by the credit card firms prevent these entities and individuals from accessing their platforms. Mastercard also said it is working to guard against cyberattacks, "the threat of which is heightened significantly in the present environment," Miebach said.

"American Express is taking all necessary steps to detect, prevent, and respond to any malicious activity through our layered defenses," said Squeri for his part. — AFP

Aramco shares hit record high

RIYADH: Saudi energy giant Aramco's shares rose to a record high yesterday amid a surge in global oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Aramco's stock was trading at 42.9 Saudi riyals (\$11.4) in Riyadh, according to the Saudi Tadawul market website.

The Gulf kingdom-the world's top crude exporter-has remained the firm's majority shareholder since a December 11, 2019 listing. Aramco had priced its landmark initial public offering at 32 riyals (\$8.53) per share and it soared the maximum limit to 35.2 riyals on its market debut.

Crude surged past \$113 a barrel yesterday with investors growing increasingly fearful about the Ukraine war's impact on global energy supplies. The conflict in eastern Europe comes with prices already elevated owing to tight supplies and a strong

recovery in global demand as economies reopen from pandemic-induced lockdowns.

Traders will be keeping a close eye on a meeting of OPEC and other major producers, including Russia, later in the day where they will discuss whether to ramp up output to temper the price rises, which are helping fan inflation.

Saudi Arabia confirmed its commitment to the OPEC+ agreement with Russia Sunday, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman made the comments during a conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron that also covered the situation in Ukraine and its impact on the energy markets, SPA said.

"In this regard, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince affirmed the kingdom's keenness on the stability and



DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia: File photo shows Saudi energy giant Aramco's.

balance of oil markets and the kingdom's commitment to the OPEC+ agreement," the agency added. While Saudi Arabia is seen as the kingpin of

the original OPEC member states, Russia is the major player among the 10 other countries that make up OPEC+. — AFP

US finds Ericsson disclosures on Iraq graft 'insufficient'

STOCKHOLM, Sweden: Sweden's Ericsson said yesterday that US authorities have found its disclosures about an internal inquiry into its conduct in Iraq, including suspected bribes to the Islamic State group, "insufficient".

The news from the telecom equipment maker sent shares tumbling more than 10 percent as the Stockholm stock exchange opened.

The company's value had already taken a beating in recent weeks over the anticipated publication of a media investigation coordinated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

It revealed an internal Ericsson 2019 investigation that was never made public, identifying possible corruption over many years in the group's Iraqi operations, including links to

Islamic State. The revelations were published in the media on Sunday, but Ericsson had previously released statements addressing the claims.

Ericsson had already paid one billion dollars to the US Department of Justice to close a case of corruption in five countries, as part of a "deferred prosecution agreement" (DPA).

The Stockholm-based company revealed last month that it had already handed over its internal investigation on Iraq to US authorities.

But the Department of Justice (DoJ) informed Ericsson on Tuesday "The disclosure made by the company prior to the DPA about its internal

investigation into conduct in Iraq in the period 2011 until 2019 was insufficient," the telecom giant said in a statement.

In addition, the DoJ determined the company had "breached the DPA" by failing to make further disclosures related to the investigation after the agreement was reached.

Ericsson said it was "in communication with the DoJ" about the case and looking to resolve the issue. "At this stage it is premature to predict the outcome of this matter," the company said. Since the revelations first came to light, Ericsson shares have lost nearly a third of their value. — AFP

Business

GCC Markets Monthly Report

GCC index remains elevated in Feb mainly backed by crude oil rally

KUWAIT: The geopolitical situation concerning Russia and Ukraine and the events that transpired on 24th February, 2022 affected markets across the globe resulting in a steep decline in valuations. The Russian benchmark plunged 45% during the day of the news and lost almost \$250bn only to recover partially towards the end of the day to close with a daily decline of 38.3%. Other prominent decliners on 24th February included Germany and India with declines of 4.8% and 4.7%, respectively, while the broader European benchmark dropped 3.9% during the day. The aggregate MSCI World Index declined for three consecutive weeks until last week and declined in 7 out of 8 previous weeks. However, the 2.6% recovery on 25th Feb led by hopes of talks between Russia and Ukraine almost fully offset the weekly decline. The reports of sanctions on Russia also sent Brent to \$100/b and traded at \$101/b at the close of the month.

GCC equity markets remained largely insulated from the global sell-off and increased volatility. The MIXGCC index declined marginally by 0.8% last week but gains during the previous weeks led to a monthly gain of 4.2% during February 2022. All the GCC markets were in the green during the month, barring Oman which declined for the second consecutive month by 1.5%.

The sector performance chart for the GCC markets showed the Energy sector leading with a gain of 8.3% followed by Hotels, Restaurant & Leisure and Capital Goods indices with gains of 5.4% and 4.9%, respectively. Banks were next with a gain of 4.4%. On the decliner's side, the Consumer Goods & Apparel index topped sliding by 12.0% followed by Pharma and F&B indices with declines of 4.6% and 1.6%, respectively.

GCC Stock Markets Performance

Kuwaiti equity market was up for the second consecutive month during February 2022. However, unlike the previous month when large-cap stocks outperformed, the gains during February 2022 was mainly led by mid-cap and small-cap stocks with slightly better monthly performance. This was seen in the Main Market stocks with the Main 50 Index recording a gain of 4.1% outperforming the Premier Market index that recorded a gain of 3.8%. The broader Main Market index reported a gain of 4.0% resulting in a 3.9% monthly gain for the All Share Index. In terms of YTD-2022 performance, the broader Kuwait All Share index was up 8.4% with the Main 50 Index up 8.0% vs 8.9% gains for the Premier Market Index. The month also saw Jazeera Airways added to Premier Market index bringing the total number of companies listed in the Premier Market to 26.

The monthly sector performance chart was topped by the Telecom index with a gain of 10.9% led by 51.7% gain in shares of STC Kuwait that came after the company announced 60 fils per share dividends and a 100% bonus shares. A 16.3% gain in shares of Ooredoo Kuwait and 3.5% gain in shares of Zain also supported the surge in the Telecom index. The Consumer Services Index was next with a gain of 7.6% followed by Industrials and Insurance indices with gains of 6.8% and 5.6%, respectively. Gains in the Consumer Services index was led by a sector-wide gains with only a few small cap stocks seeing declines during the month. Shares of Jazeera Airways and



Kuwait Hotels reported double-digit gains. Jazeera Airways reported a net profit of KD 7.1m for FY-21 against a loss KD 26.4m for FY-20 supported by increase in operating revenue. The airline also said it aims to increase its fleet to 60 aircrafts by 2025. Within the banking sector, merely two banks reported declines, while the remaining 8 banks reported growth led by the strong earnings growth. During the month, Kuwait's banking regulator gave a green light to the long awaited decision to allow Kuwaiti banks to pay semi-annual dividends. On the decliners side, the Technology index witnessed the biggest drop during the month at 8.7% led by an equivalent decline in its sole constituent, Automated Systems Co. followed by Oil & Gas and Utilities indices with declines of 5.0% and 1.3%, respectively.

Gulf Cable & Electrical was the best performing stock in Feb-2022 with a gain of 54.4% followed by STC Kuwait and PAPCO with gains of 51.7% and 50.8%, respectively. On the decliner's side, Hilal Cement topped with a decline of 27.0% followed by Gulf Petroleum Inv. and The Energy House with declines of 21.2% and 16.7%, respectively. Trading activity remained weak during the month owing to lesser number of trading days. Monthly volume of shares traded declined by 15.3% to 5.2bn shares while value traded saw a modest decline of 0.7% to reach KD 1.30bn. KFH once again topped the value traded chart at KD 122m followed by AUB Bahrain and NBK at KD 93.7m and KD 85.9m, respectively.

Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Stock Exchange continued to see new multi-year highs during February 2022 after witnessing a strong primary market activity since the start of the year. The benchmark TASI index closed the month at the highest level in 16.5 years at 12,590.3 points with a monthly gain of 2.6%. The gain in oil prices also supported the gains during the month that more than offset global geopolitical events concerning Russia and Ukraine. The monthly gains also pushed YTD-2022 returns for the benchmark at 11.6%, the highest in the GCC.

The monthly sector performance chart was almost equally split between gainers and losers. However, the gain in large-cap sectors pushed the aggregated exchange benchmark in the green. The Energy index reflected the gain in oil prices which is currently trading at over \$100/b. The index was up by 9.9% during the month, topping the monthly sector performance

chart for the exchange. Shares of Aramco were up for the third consecutive month with a double digit monthly gain of 11.4%.

Abu Dhabi

The FTSE ADX index was the second-best performing market in the GCC during February-2022 registering a 7.1% monthly growth to close at 9,319.4 points. In comparison, the exchange's market cap increased by 8.9% during the month to reach AED 1.7 trillion mainly due to the listing of Abu Dhabi Ports on the exchange during the month. In terms of sector performance, the Financial (Banks) index recorded an increase of 10.2%, the largest monthly gain among the indices, to reach 13,717.8 points driven mainly by Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank and Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank with share price gains of 20.1% and 27.5% respectively. The Telecom index followed witnessing a growth of 5.5% during February-2022 registering the second largest gain among the indices to close at 8,558.64 points. The Consumer Staples index was the only decliner during the month with a fall of 3.1%.

Gulf Medical Projects (GMP) topped the monthly gainers chart for February-2022 after its shares jumped 51.1% followed by Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank (ADIB) and International Holdings Company which witnessed gains of 27.5% and 23.6%, respectively.

Qatar

The Qatar Stock Exchange witnessed gains for the third consecutive month during February-2022 led by positive performance for most of the sectors. The QE 20 Index was up 3.6% during the month to close at 12,948.8 points. Monthly gains were broad-based as seen from the 3.6% gain also for the QE All Share Index. In terms of sectoral performance six out of the seven sector indices recorded monthly gains during the month. The Industrial Index was leading with a return of 8.1% during February-2022 driven by Investment Holding Group's 60.6% share price rise during the month. The Telecom Index was next as the second biggest index gainer registering 3.4% gains mainly led by 5.6% gain in share price of Ooredoo followed by the Banking and Finance index with a growth of 3.0%. The Insurance Index was the only index which witnessed a decline during February-2022 registering 2.3% fall after Qatar General Insurance and Qatar Insurance Co both witnessed a slide of 4.9% and 4.2% in share prices, respectively, during the month.

Investment Holding Group topped the gainers chart during the month with a gain of 60.6% followed by Inma Holding and Salam International with gains of 21.3% and 16.0%, respectively.

Bahrain

The Bahrain Bourse All Share Index recorded best monthly performance in the GCC during February-2022 registering a gain of 8.5% to close at 1,963.62 points. In terms of sectoral performance, the Materials index which only has one constituent company (Aluminum Bahrain) dominated the rest of the sectoral indices recording a 42.9% rise during February 2022 to close the month at 5,742.7 points. Aluminum Bahrain (ALBA) disclosed a BHD 451.9m (\$1.2bn) in net profits for the full year of 2021 as compared with a profit of BHD 9.7m (\$26m) in 2020. ALBA's growth in profit was mainly attributed to the robust rebound in global aluminum demand and strong market recovery and economic activity in key markets. The Financials and Real Estate indices also reported gains of 5.0% and 3.0%, respectively, whereas the Industrials index topped on the decliner's side with a decline of 3.4% during February-2022.

The monthly gainers chart was topped by Aluminum Bahrain which saw its share price grow 42.9% followed by Khaleej Commercial Bank and Ahli United Bank with gains of 30.2% and 11.5%, respectively. On the decliners table, Ithma Holding Company topped the table witnessing a 21.6% share fall followed by Inovest and Arab Banking Corp which recorded declines of 11.5% and 8.5% respectively.

Oman

Oman's MSX index was the only monthly decliner in the GCC market during February-2022. The benchmark declined for the second consecutive month during February 2022 registering a drop of 1.5% to close the month at 4,055.42 points. In terms of sectoral performance both the Financial and Industrial indices recorded declines during the month at 1.7% and 1.3%, respectively. On the other hand, the services index showed a gain of 2.6% to close the month at 1,643.9 points.

In terms of company performance, Al Hassan Engineering Company topped the monthly gainers table recording 77.8% increase in share prices. Sharqiyah Desalination Company and Muscat Desalination Company followed witnessing 39.0% and 32.6% increases in their respective share prices during the month. On the decliners chart, National Aluminum Products Company lead the way with 28.3% fall in share prices during the month followed by Asaffa Food Company and Sharqiyah Investment Holding Co which registered 16% and 12% declines, respectively.

Monthly trading activity on the exchange witnessed significant improvement as compared to last month. Total volume of shares traded during February-2022 was up 39.8% to reach 504.8m shares as compared to 341.8m shares during January 2022. On the other hand, monthly value traded also witnessed a rise of 47.7% to reach OMR 87.7m as compared to OMR 62.8m during January 2022, indicating relatively higher trades in large-cap stocks on the exchange.

S Lanka runs out of fuel as dollar crisis worsens

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's public transport was crippled yesterday as buses ran out of diesel, officials said as the country's foreign exchange crisis worsened with no dollars to import fuel. The Private Bus Owners' Association said they were able to operate only about a quarter of their fleet of 20,000 vehicles, while drivers reported queuing for seven hours to top up fuel.

"I could not run the bus for two days because there was no diesel," said 51-year-old bus driver Sarath. "I have been in the diesel queue for seven-and-a-half hours." Many commuters were seen using their own motorcycles and small cars yesterday after bus operators warned of drastically scaled back schedules.

One of Sri Lanka's biggest fuel suppliers, Lanka IOC, put up prices by as much as 12 percent on Saturday while the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) said it too asked the government to allow it to raise prices. CPC sources said yesterday they had supplies only for four more days. "We have also reduced the issue of diesel to gas stations and asked pumps to try and ration supplies," one said.

Taxi driver Thushara, 36, said he was in a queue for six hours to get petrol for his three-wheeler. "Why can't (President)



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: People stand in a queue to buy diesel fuel oil at a Ceylon Petroleum Corporation fuel station in Colombo yesterday. — AFP

Gotabaya (Rajapaksa) consider the suffering of the people?" Thushara told AFP as he reached the front of the line. "Can't he understand the suffering? Just come out and see. Why are you allowing people to suffer like this?"

The transport shutdown came as seven-and-a-half hour electricity blackouts also went into effect, the longest scheduled power rationing in over a quarter of a century. The Public Utilities Commission (PUCSL) said the cuts were brought on due to the shortage of foreign exchange to import fuel for electricity generators.

Hydro electricity reservoirs were also running low due to the current dry season. Under a new directive, all state institutions were also ordered Tuesday to switch off their air conditioners in the afternoon to save energy. Sri Lanka's tourism sector, a key foreign-exchange earner, collapsed in the wake of the

COVID-19 pandemic, and the government imposed a broad import ban in March 2020 to save foreign currency.

The country is now in the grip of an economic crisis, with widespread shortages, including food, medicines, automotive parts and cement, and supermarkets forced to ration staple foods including rice, sugar and milk powder. Official data showed the country's foreign currency reserves at a low of \$2.07 billion at the end of January, down 25 percent compared to the previous month and \$7.5 billion in November 2019 when President Rajapaksa took over.

Energy minister Udaya Gammanpila has described the oil shortage as the "worst economic crisis since independence" from Britain in 1948. The shortages pushed food inflation to 25 percent in January with overall inflation at 16.8 percent. — AFP

The reallocation from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) follows the \$280 million in ARTF funds disbursed last December, and is aimed at supporting the humanitarian response over the critical winter months.

The funds, to be delivered in the form of grants, aim "to support the delivery of essential basic services, protect vulnerable Afghans, help preserve human capital and key economic and social services and reduce the need for humanitarian assistance in the future," the Washington-based lender said in a statement.

The bank suspended its aid to Kabul late last August after the hardline Islamist

Taliban swept back into power. ARTF is a multi-donor fund that coordinates international aid to improve the lives of millions of Afghans. It is administered by the World Bank on behalf of donor partners.

Until the Taliban took over, the ARTF was the largest source of development funding for Afghanistan, financing up to 30 percent of the government's budget. Because the World Bank is unable to provide money directly to the Taliban regime — which is not recognized by the international community — it has redirected the funds to organizations like UN children's agency UNICEF in response to the humanitarian crisis. — AFP

WB announces \$1bn in aid for Afghanistan

WASHINGTON: The World Bank (WB) on Tuesday announced more than \$1 billion in humanitarian aid for Afghanistan, stating the money will go to UN agencies and international NGOs while remaining "outside the control" of the country's Taliban rulers.

Ooredoo picks SAP for digital transformation of ERP solutions



KUWAIT: Ooredoo group announced the selection of SAP as its partner to enable a complete digital business transformation and consolidation of all its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions across the majority of its ten operating companies.

SAP - the world's largest provider of enterprise application software - will provide multiple solutions to facilitate complete digitalisation, a key strategic goal for Ooredoo, as well as consolidation of all its ERP solutions to a centralised cloud platform.

The partnership will ensure Ooredoo has the appropriate infrastructure to enhance the experience of its customers, employees, and suppliers through an integrated end-to-end processes and systems, as well as increased automation and optimisation. SAP's proposal to Ooredoo is an intelligent suite of integrated applications that enable agile, end-to-end business processes to help Ooredoo manage all aspects of its organisation, from the employee, customer and supplier experience to its products, finances and IT.

The RISE suite of applications, which will enable Ooredoo to enjoy large-scale strategic business benefits, includes S/4 HANA, SAP's integrated ERP software, as well as SAP Ariba, its procurement and supply chain solutions platform. SAP success factors is

its next generation human capital management solution, while SAP Business Technology Platform brings together intelligent enterprise applications with database and data management, analytics, integration and intelligent technologies such as robotic process automation (RPA).

Aziz Aluthman Fakhro, Managing Director and CEO, Ooredoo Group, said: "As part of our corporate strategy to transform our business to accelerate growth, we actively seek to establish and develop partnerships with world-leading providers such as SAP. This partnership ensures we have access to state-of-the-art technology and innovation that will support us as we drive progress towards achievement of our strategic goals, and best serve both our customers and stakeholders. We look forward to a long, mutually beneficial partnership with SAP."

Christian Klein, CEO and member of the Executive Board, SAP SE, said: "We are proud to be a key enabler in Ooredoo's digital transformation journey. Our holistic and customer-centric approach will help Ooredoo simplify and optimise its landscape, enabling the company to achieve its goals and respond to future opportunities with even greater agility and speed."

The partnership was announced at Mobile World Congress 2022, being held in Barcelona, Spain this week.



Jodi Hoover (right), Digital Resources Manager at Enoch Pratt Library, and Nadine Seiler unload Black Lives Matter signs recuperated from the White House fence at the Pratt Library in Baltimore, Maryland. — AFP Photos



Inside view of the Enoch Pratt Library where signs recuperated from the White House fence following the Black Lives Matter protests during the Trump Administration are scanned in Baltimore.



Jodi Hoover, Digital Resources Manager at Enoch Pratt Library supervises the scanning process of signs recuperated from the White House fence following the Black Lives Matter protests during the Trump Administration in Baltimore.

‘History will remember your voice’: Meet women preserving Black Lives Matter art

When thousands of protesters descended on Washington in the summer of 2020, many brought with them hand-written posters reading “Black Lives Matter,” “Resist”—hallmark phrases of the historic outpouring of frustration over America’s slow-walking progress on racial equality. Nearly two years later, Nadine Seiler is still working to preserve these pieces of history. Donning a pink hat and a Wonder Woman necklace, the 56-year-old activist loads her car on a cold February day with more than 300 posters and banners and heads to the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, Maryland. There, the pieces will be scanned and digitized—a meticulous process she repeats every six weeks.

Protesters in 2020 had attached the signs to a temporary fence around the White House, which officials had hastily erected in June to keep out a mass of protesters who, like millions around the country and the world, gathered to express their outrage over the killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The 10-foot (3-meter) high metal barriers quickly became a rallying point for the US capital’s Black Lives Matter movement as well as an open-air memorial—with Nadine as its accidental curator.

Memorial guards

“I would see the items fall to the ground or people pulling them out, so I decided along with other people to just neaten up the sidewalk and put the stuff back on the fence,” Seiler told AFP. For nearly a year, she voluntarily repaired the memorial: taping signs back together, reattaching photos of victims of police violence, and retracing anti-Trump slogans that the rain had washed away. Seiler also regularly struggled with Trump supporters and other members of conservative groups who would come tear down the activists’ artwork.

She said a particularly devastating day



Signs are placed on a fence at Lafayette Square near the White House, during ongoing protests against police brutality and racism, in Washington, DC.

was October 26, 2020, when “anti-Black Lives Matter” people” came to Washington for the confirmation hearing of Trump’s Supreme Court nominee, Amy Coney Barrett. “They came to the fence and they destroyed it,” Seiler recounted. “They destroyed almost everything, except probably 10 items.” Along with a handful of other volunteers, Seiler then decided to watch over the memorial day and night, camping out in the nearby square which the city’s Democratic mayor had renamed “Black Lives Matter Plaza.”

“People felt compelled to come to DC to put their stories on this fence and I felt compelled to protect their voices,” she said. Unemployed and devoting all her time to guarding the memorial, Seiler explains that during that time she struggled to pay her mortgage and almost lost her home in Waldorf, Maryland, near Washington. “If we hadn’t been there, the whole thing would have fallen apart because it wasn’t built to be a permanent structure,” said Karen Irwin, 46, an activist from New York who also volunteered to protect the memorial.

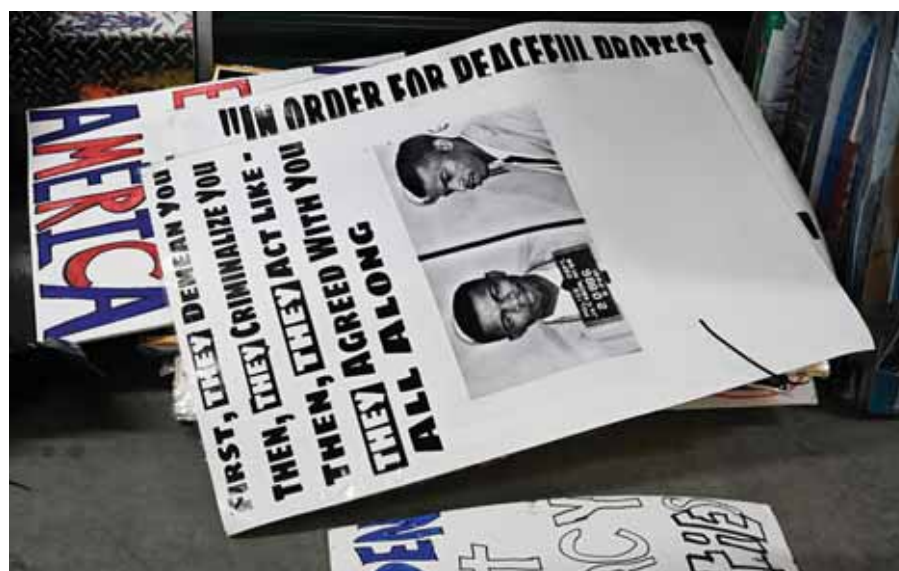
‘Capture the feelings’

Across the United States, other initia-

tives have sprung up to preserve pieces from the historic social movement. In Minneapolis, George Floyd’s cousin, Paris Stevens, co-founded the “George Floyd Global Memorial” in October 2020 to safeguard the different “offerings” and artwork placed at the intersection where he was killed.

“We have over 3,000 art pieces: bill-

boards, letters, different pieces of art murals,” Stevens told AFP. “It’s really important to make sure that we are telling our story the way that we want to tell the story,” she said. Advised by an archivist, Seiler had herself photographed and methodically collected more than a thousand pieces in January 2021, after the inauguration of Joe Biden and a few



months before the White House’s temporary fence was taken down.

At least 600 items have already been digitized by a laser scanner at the Enoch Pratt Library, which is collaborating on the project with Washington’s public library. “These items tend to be something that would be used for an afternoon or during a specific time of protests and then thrown away,” notes Jodi Hoover, the head of digital resources at Enoch Pratt. “To be able to capture the feelings, the things that people were thinking about at this particular time during an enormous social justice movement, is really amazing,” she adds. “It does feel like recording history.”

Once the digitalization is done, probably by this fall, Seiler and Irwin plan to donate their collection to different associations, museums, or interested businesses. “We want it seen,” says Seiler. She adds that they have already given some pieces to the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, the site of a deadly race riot in 1921 which just marked its 100th anniversary. “It’s important to prove to people that history will remember your voice,” insists Irwin. — AFP



Nadine Seiler speaks as she sorts through signs recuperated from the fence outside the White House following the Black Lives Matter protests in Washington, DC.

Music world shuns Russian maestro over Kremlin ties

One of Germany’s top orchestras fired Russian maestro and Kremlin loyalist, Valery Gergiev, as its chief conductor on Tuesday after he failed to denounce Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, capping a stunning fall from grace for the classical music superstar. “With immediate effect, there will be no further concerts by the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra under his direction,” Munich mayor Dieter Reiter said in a statement.

The dismissal is the latest blow for the 68-year-old, who is considered one of the world’s greatest conductors. But famously hard-working Gergiev, who clocks up an average of 275 concerts per year, has come under pressure from arts institutions around Europe since Russia attacked Ukraine last week, and has already been dropped from a slew of prestigious concerts.

As well as being the principal conductor of the German orchestra since 2015, Gergiev is perhaps best-known as the long-standing artistic director of the Mariinsky Theatre and the famous White Nights Festival in Saint Petersburg. Gergiev has not yet spoken publicly regarding Moscow’s offensive. But he has proven fiercely loyal to Russian President Vladimir Putin in the past, allying with him on the 2014 annexation of Crimea and a law aimed at stifling LGBT rights activists in Russia. Gergiev, who has known Putin for three decades, spoke of his admiration for the Russian leader in a 2018 interview with AFP.

He praised Putin for guaranteeing stability in Russia and restoring national

pride, saying the president’s popularity was something “the Western world has difficulty understanding”. The Munich orchestra had given Gergiev until Monday to take a stance against Moscow’s attack on Ukraine, but the deadline passed without a response from the conductor. “Valery Gergiev has not spoken out despite my request that he distance himself clearly and unequivocally from the brutal war of aggression that Putin is waging against Ukraine,” Reiter said.

‘Clear signal’

“A clear signal to the orchestra, its audience, the public and the city’s politicians would have been indispensable in order to be able to continue working together. Since this did not happen, the only thing that remains is an immediate separation,” he said. Gergiev had in recent days already been dropped from upcoming concerts at the renowned Philharmonie concert hall in Paris and New York’s Carnegie Hall, where he was due to lead the Vienna Philharmonic.

The Edinburgh International Festival has also cut ties with him, as has Switzerland’s Verbier Festival, as well as his agent in Germany, Marcus Felsner. Gergiev was told last week he would be sacked from performances of Tchaikovsky’s opera “The Queen of Spades” in Milan’s Teatro alla Scala if he did not publicly condemn the war in Ukraine.

The mayor of Milan and president of La Scala, Giuseppe Sala, on Monday said Gergiev had “not responded” and was therefore unlikely to appear on the podium as scheduled on March 5. In New York, the General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, Peter Gelb, vowed that the world-famous opera house will “no longer engage with artists and institutions that support Putin or are supported by him,” without naming any specific names.

Gergiev’s hyperactivity, as well as winning him a global following, has drawn brickbats. After eight years at the head of the London Symphony Orchestra, The Guardian newspaper in 2015 accused him of spreading “his considerable talent far too thinly, so that routine and sometimes under-prepared performances have been far too frequent.” In the interview with AFP, Gergiev shrugged off the remarks. “I have been hearing that criticism for 20 years and that has not stopped me leading great Western orchestras,” he replied. — AFP



In this file photo, Russian conductor Valery Gergiev performs on stage with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra during the Summer Night Concert at Schoenbrunn Palace in Vienna. — AFP

Netflix enters deal to acquire Finland’s Next Games

Netflix said Wednesday it plans to buy Finnish developer Next Games for more than \$70 million, signaling the US streaming giant’s intent to expand into the video gaming industry. Next Games has been developing mobile games since 2013 based on popular television series such as “Stranger Things” and the “The Walking Dead”—both hits that air on Netflix.

“We are excited for Next Games to join Netflix as a core studio in a strategic region and key talent market, expanding our internal game studio capabilities,” Michael Verdu, vice president of games at Netflix, said in a statement. “While we’re just getting started in games, I am confident that together with Next Games we will be able to build a portfolio of world class games that will delight our members around the world.”

The deal will be financed in cash through the purchase of Next Games’ shares and has already been recommended by the gaming company’s board of directors, Netflix said. Next Games’ shares, listed on the Helsinki Stock Exchange, soared nearly 120 percent following the announcement. Next Games CEO Teemu Huuhtanen said in the statement that the firm has always been focused on becoming “the partner of choice for global entertainment businesses” to create gaming based on the world’s most popular entertainment franchises. “Joining forces with the world’s largest streaming service, Netflix, presents an opportunity for a logical and exciting continuation of our strategy to craft interactive experiences for the world to enjoy,” he said. — AFP

Sports

Rohit takes reins as India set for new era in Kohli's 100th Test

Win over Sri Lanka would be a perfect 'gift' for King Kohli

NEW DELHI: Rohit Sharma begins a new era as India's Test captain tomorrow when the two-match series against Sri Lanka begins, as predecessor Virat Kohli makes a landmark 100th appearance. Rohit is now in charge across all formats, succeeding Kohli who drove India up the world rankings but failed to lift any international silverware.

Rohit, 34, reasserted his white-ball leadership credentials with a 3-0 Twenty20 sweep of Sri Lanka on Sunday that gave India a record-equalling 12th straight win. Batsman Shreyas Iyer lauded the new captain for his hands-on approach with players ahead of the match in Mohali.

"He is amazing. He thinks from a player's point of view," Iyer told the Times of India newspaper. "He has got that mindset, where he connects to every individual and knows what he needs from support staff and coaches. I really respect him a lot."

'King Kohli'

The spotlight though will be on "King Kohli" who shocked fans when he quit as Test skipper following his 99th Test at the end of India's 2-1 series loss in South Africa in January. The star batsman, who stepped down as Twenty20 skipper last year and was then sacked as ODI leader, led India to great heights including a stay at the top of the Test rankings for over three years.

But Kohli's inability to win a global trophy for a cricket-obsessed India seemed to be his undoing as leader and Rohit was an obvious successor, having led Mumbai Indians to a record five IPL titles. At least fans will be allowed to see Kohli's milestone after the Punjab cricket association backtracked to allow crowds of up to 50 percent capacity in Mohali despite COVID-19 fears in the northern city.

India's new vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah, one of several possible younger successors to Rohit, said a win over Sri Lanka would be a perfect "gift" for Kohli. "It's a testimony of his hard work, of his dedication to play 100 Test matches for your country. So it's a great occasion," India's vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah told reporters.

He added that despite no longer being captain, and being short of runs in recent months, Kohli "will con-



MUMBAI, India: File photo shows India's captain Virat Kohli plays a shot during the third day of the second Test cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. — AFP

tribute a lot in the future as well".

India favourites

Iyer will be in contention for a place in the Test eleven after his three successive unbeaten half-centuries led India's T20 dominance in the Twenty20 series. Sri Lanka sit at the top of the ICC Test championship points table with a 2-0 series sweep of West Indies after depending on their spinners in Galle, but the slow bowlers will not find it easy against India's solid batting line-up.

India also possess a potent spin attack and Sri

Lanka's batsmen such as captain Dimuth Karunaratne and Dhananjaya de Silva will be challenged by Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja operating on their home turf.

"Dimuth Karunaratne is one of the best Test openers and he is going to be crucial up the order," Sri Lanka's cricketer-turned-commentator Russel Arnold was quoted as saying by cricket.com. "In the bowling department, they have Dushmantha Chameera, Lahiru Kumara, Lasith Embuldeniya and Suranga Lakmal. To win a Test match, you have to keep going for a longer period. I think this batch can do that." — AFP

Russia's participation at Paralympics under cloud of Ukraine invasion

BEIJING: Beijing's Winter Paralympics open tomorrow under the shadow of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, with questions remaining over whether athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus will be barred from participating in the Games. As the first city to host both Summer and Winter Games, the National Stadium—known as the Bird's Nest—will once again light up for an opening ceremony to welcome hundreds of athletes from all over the world.

Friday's celebrations could be muted, with the lead-up to the Games dogged by controversy as the world reacts with alarm to Russia invading Ukraine. That includes the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which on Monday urged sporting federations across the world to exclude athletes from Russia and Belarus, which had hosted troops before the invasion. But it remains up in the air if athletes from Russia—who will compete for the Russian Paralympic Committee (RPC) following the country's ban for state-sponsored doping—and Belarus will be barred from taking part in the Games.

The International Paralympic Committee will have a meeting later and a decision is expected by the evening. Much of the sports world has reacted with solidarity to Ukraine. FIFA kicked Russia out of the 2022 World Cup, while rugby's world governing body banned Russia and Belarus from all international rugby events "until further notice". Russian President Vladimir Putin, an accomplished judoka, was also suspended as honorary head of the International Judo Federation.

Ukraine team en route

With its civilian airspace closed, half a million refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries, and Russian troops closing in on Kyiv, getting Ukraine's Paralympians to Beijing was going to be a logistical issue. Committee president Andrew Parsons had said last week it would be a "mammoth challenge", declining to comment further for security reasons.

By late Tuesday, the country's National Sports Committee for the Disabled confirmed its full team of 20 athletes and nine guides were making their way to the Games. "I hope that tomorrow, March 2, we will be in Beijing," said Natalia Garach, communications manager for Ukraine's team. The small Eastern European country has punched above its weight in previous Paralympic Winter events, with frequent podium finishes in the biathlon and ski events. The delegation took home 22 medals in 2018 — including seven golds—gaining the sixth spot on the world tally.

For some team members, the emotional rollercoaster and disrupted focus will be a case of *deja vu*. During Russia's hosting of the Winter Paralympics in 2014, Ukrainian athletes had to grapple with Moscow's takeover of the Crimea peninsula.

Sporting action begins Saturday as more than 650 athletes from 49 countries compete in 78 events across six sports—ice hockey, snowboarding, biathlon, cross-country skiing, alpine skiing and wheelchair curling. Just like the Olympics last month, events will be held in a strict coronavirus bubble, and restrictions have canned public ticket sales—though handpicked spectators sitting socially distanced can watch live at some venues. During last month's Winter Olympics, Beijing celebrated a record nine gold medal haul—narrowly beating out the United States. China has consistently topped the medal tally at past Summer Paralympics.—AFP



RAWALPINDI, Pakistan: Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (L) and his Australian counterpart Pat Cummins bump beside Test series trophy prior to start of the practice at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. — AFP

Six of the best: Players to watch in Pak-Australia series

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will start their first Test series at home against Australia in 24 years in Rawalpindi on Friday under heavy security with the tourists on unfamiliar turf. AFP Sports looks at the players from each side to watch as the long-awaited and potentially fascinating three-Test battle unfolds.

AUSTRALIA Steve Smith

Started his career as a leg-spinning all-rounder against Pakistan at Lord's in 2010 before developing into one of the most complete batters in international cricket. His average of 59.87 is unsurpassed by any active Test player and he has proved his adaptability by scoring 1,200 runs in 13 Tests on slow, turning sub-Continent wickets.

Australia will look to Smith—who by his own lofty standards had a lean series against England with 244 runs at 30.50 and a top score of 93 — to anchor their batting against a formidable Pakistan attack on pitches alien to the tourists.

Nathan Lyon

Likely to be the key to winning matches on the slow and turning pitches of Pakistan. With 415 Test victims, Lyon is Australia's greatest off-spinner and as a slow bowler his tally for his country is only bettered by leg-spinner Shane Warne, who took 708 wickets.

Lyon, who has taken 95 wickets in 19 Tests in Asia, has a knack of understanding how pitches behave and subtly change over the course of a five-day match, having worked as a curator in his early days of the career.

Marnus Labuschagne

The world's top-ranked batsman shot to prominence when he replaced Steve Smith as concussion substitute in the 2019 Ashes Test at Lord's and scored

fifty. His 23 Tests have seen him score 2,220 runs at 56.92 with six hundreds. Labuschagne's maverick batting style puts him firmly in the same mould as teammate Smith who is the only active player in Tests with a higher average. His eccentricity and meticulous approach meant he spent the few weeks practising at his house on a home-made mat with aluminium strips taped to it, to try to replicate conditions he may face against Pakistan's spinners.

PAKISTAN

Shaheen Shah Afridi

Since making his Test debut as an 18-year-old three years ago, the tall left-arm's rise has been remarkable. He possesses a wicked inswinger to right-handers that blew arch-rivals India away in the Twenty20 World Cup last year.

Shaheen's red-ball record stands up to scrutiny too—he was the second highest wicket-taker in Tests last year with 47, just behind Ravi Ashwin's 54 for India. His 78 wickets in all international cricket in 2021 saw him win the ICC Player of the Year award.

Babar Azam

When the stylish Pakistan captain Azam plays one of his exquisite cover drives it is said that brings the entire stadium to a standstill. His superb timing and effortless shot-making have elevated him into the top 10 of the batting rankings in all three formats.

He is number one in 50-over and Twenty20 cricket and is now setting his sights on achieving the same in Tests having accumulated 416 in eight Tests last year, without reaching three figures. Australia will be aware, though, that his last Test century came at this week's venue in Rawalpindi against Bangladesh.

Sajid Khan

With an unusual action, Sajid has taken over the off-spinning duties from Bilal Asif who was Pakistan's match-winner against Australia in the 2018 series win in the UAE. Sajid appears to bowl off the wrong foot, which can be disconcerting for batsmen as he proved by taking 12 wickets against Bangladesh in Pakistan's last Test outing in December. Like all off-spinners, loves to operate out of the bowlers' rough outside the left-handers' off-stump, which could pose problems to Australia's lefty quartet of David Warner, Travis Head, Usman Khawaja and Alex Carey. — AFP

Swiss Wyss mulls to buy Chelsea

GENEVA, Switzerland: Hansjorg Wyss, one of Switzerland's richest men, said yesterday he had been offered the chance to buy Chelsea, with the English Premier League side's Russian owner Roman Abramovich under growing scrutiny. Wyss, 86 and founder of the medical device manufacturing firm Synthes, told the Swiss newspaper Blick that he had been sounded out on Tuesday, alongside three other people.

Abramovich revealed Saturday that he plans to place his ownership of the European champions into the "stewardship and care" of the Chelsea Foundation's trustees. Abramovich has not been named on a growing British sanctions list targeting Russian banks, businesses and pro-Kremlin tycoons.

But British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been pressed on why Abramovich has not been cited, given his familiarity with Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Abramovich is among Putin's closest advisers and friends," Wyss told Blick.

"Like all the other oligarchs, he is panicked. Abramovich is currently trying to sell all his villas in England. He also wants to get rid of Chelsea quickly. Along with three other people, I received an offer on Tuesday to buy Chelsea from Abramovich.

"I have to wait four or five days. Abramovich is asking too much right now. Chelsea owes him £2 billion. But Chelsea has no money. This means that those who buy Chelsea must compensate Abramovich.

"We do not yet know the exact sale price. I can very well imagine myself joining Chelsea with partners. First I have to look carefully at the conditions. But what I can already tell you: I certainly wouldn't do such a thing alone. If I buy Chelsea, it will be with a consortium of six to seven investors."

Contacted in London, Chelsea refused to comment, while a spokeswoman for Abramovich did not immediately respond. Johnson was asked in Warsaw on Tuesday why Abramovich has not been personally sanctioned by the British government, as several UK lawmakers have demanded. Johnson did not refer to the Chelsea owner directly in his answer, but said Britain would be "tightening the economic noose" further around the Russian regime. — AFP

Ukraine's Svitolina downs Russia's Potapova at Monterrey WTA

MONTERREY, Mexico: Ukrainian top seed Elina Svitolina blasted aside Anastasia Potapova at the WTA Monterrey tournament on Tuesday a day after threatening to boycott the game against her Russian opponent.

Svitolina said on Monday she would not play against players from Russian or Belarus—unless they were competing under a neutral banner—as a protest against Russia's invasion of her homeland. However the prospect of Svitolina boycotting her first round game was erased earlier Tuesday when the ATP and WTA issued a statement effectively granting her wish.

That left world number 15 Svitolina free to swat aside 20-year-old Potapova, ranked 81 in the world, with ease in a 6-2, 6-1 win. Svitolina, who played in a yellow top and blue skirt, the colors of the Ukrainian flag, thumped her chest repeatedly after wrapping up the win before shaking hands with Potapova.

"It's a very special atmosphere each time I play here, and especially today, it's a very special match and moment for me," Svitolina said. "I'm in a very sad mood, but I'm happy that I'm here playing tennis." "I was just focused from the beginning. I was on a mission for my country." Svitolina is donating the entirety of her earnings in Monterrey to the Ukrainian military. "It's a very special event, all the prize money I earn here is going to the Ukrainian army, so thank you so much for the support," she said. — AFP



Elina Svitolina



PETERBOROUGH, United Kingdom: Manchester City's Dutch defender Nathan Ake (R) fights for the ball with Peterborough United's English striker Ricky-Jade Jones during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Peterborough United and Manchester City at the Weston Homes Stadium, in Peterborough. — AFP

Middlesbrough shock Spurs

Manchester City ease into FA Cup quarters

LONDON: Middlesbrough produced another FA Cup shock to extend Tottenham's long wait for silverware with a 1-0 win after extra time at the Riverside on Tuesday, while Manchester City eased into the last eight with a 2-0 victory at Peterborough.

Boro knocked out Manchester United at Old Trafford in the fourth round and the Championship side were worthy winners to condemn Spurs to another trophy-less season. Not since a League Cup win in 2008 have Tottenham lifted a trophy and another hugely disappointing defeat poses further questions over the future of manager Antonio Conte.

The Italian only took charge in November, but has already hinted he could walk away after a run of four defeats in the past six Premier League games. "We have to give our best for the rest of the season then we will

see what is our position and the evaluation of our season," said Conte. "It is early to say something about this." Teenager Josh Coburn came off the bench to score the only goal with a thumping finish across Hugo Lloris in the 107th minute. "In between the win at Manchester United and here we got turned over at Barnsley. Football is a ridiculous game," said Boro manager Chris Wilder.

"The supporters gave us the energy to produce a top performance." Harry Kane did have the ball in the net for Tottenham in the second half only to be flagged offside. But the England captain may also be again considering his future as he waits to win the first major honour of his career. Middlesbrough were by far the brighter side in extra time and got their reward when Coburn rifled across Lloris from Crooks' through ball.

Zinchenko leads City

Earlier, Oleksandr Zinchenko captained City as classy finishes from Riyad Mahrez and Jack Grealish sent the English champions through. Ukrainian international Zinchenko took the armband in his first appearance since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Fernandinho had initially been listed as City skipper for the tie, but the Brazilian, who signed from Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk, offered the role to Zinchenko in a show of solidarity. "It's not an easy period for Oleks, his family, his country, but playing football is the best for him at the moment," said City boss Pep Guardiola. Zinchenko and Peterborough captain Frankie Kent held a Ukrainian flag together as they led the teams out at the start of the match. Once the action got underway, Guardiola's men took time to make the breakthrough against a side sitting bottom of the

Championship. Mahrez took his tally for the season to an impressive 19 goals in just 32 appearances as the Algerian cleverly guided the ball into the far corner from a narrow angle on the hour mark. Grealish has had a far less productive season since his £100 million (\$134 million) move from Aston Villa. But he marked his return from injury with a sublime touch to control Phil Foden's long through ball before slotting past Steven Benda for his fourth City goal. "While we were on the coach on the way to the game, I was sat next to Phil and we were scrolling through videos of (Lionel) Messi," said Grealish. "After scoring he came up to me and said it was just like we were watching." Crystal Palace also booked their place in the quarter-finals with a 2-1 win over Stoke. Cheikhou Kouyate and Jairo Riedewald struck for the Eagles either side of Josh Tymon's equaliser. — AFP

Doncic sparks Mavs as Lakers slump continues

LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic scored 25 points as the Dallas Mavericks sent the Los Angeles Lakers spinning to a third straight defeat on Tuesday.

Doncic sparked a fourth-quarter fightback for Dallas, transforming a six-point deficit with just over seven minutes remaining into a five-point lead to help set up a 109-104 Mavs win at the Crypto.com Arena.

It was another frustrating outing for LeBron James and the Lakers, who had battled back from a 21-point first-half deficit to take the lead after outscoring Dallas 31-14 in the third quarter. Doncic was backed by point guard Jalen Brunson with 22 points while Dorian Finney-Smith added 16. The Mavericks improved to 37-25 to remain in fifth place in the Western Conference standings. James led the scoring for the Lakers with 26 points, 12 rebounds and five assists while veteran Carmelo Anthony added 20 for the home side.

The loss saw the Lakers fall to 27-34 in the conference standings. In Minneapolis, Karl-Anthony Towns scored 39 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves trounced a depleted Golden State Warriors 129-114.

Towns shot 14 of 22 from the field and grabbed nine rebounds while D'Angelo Russell added 22 points and Malik Beasley 20 from the bench at the Target Center. "Just trying to come out here and lead by performance, and do what I can," Towns said after the win. The Warriors were led by Stephen Curry's 34 points, but struggled to overcome the absence of Draymond Green. Klay Thompson and Andre Iguodala. Minnesota improved to 34-29 with the win while the Warriors remain second in the Western Conference standings on 43-19, trailing leaders Phoenix by 6.5 games.

"We were really short-handed obviously, but we've just got to keep going," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "We're going to be fine long-term. I'm excited about our team and where we can go. But we've just got to weather this storm." In Boston, Jayson Tatum's 33-point display helped the Celtics to a 107-98 victory over the Atlanta Hawks. Derrick White and Grant Williams had 18 each off the bench as the Celtics overturned a 17-point second-quarter deficit to claim the win. In Toronto, the Raptors staged a fourth-quarter rally to send Brooklyn stumbling to a 109-108 defeat. The Raptors outscored the Nets 28-19 in the fourth quarter to claim victory after having trailed by 10 points at the end of the third.

Gary Trent Jr. led a balanced offensive performance from Toronto with 24 points. All five starters made double digits, with Scottie Barnes and Pascal Siakam adding 18 points each. "I'm really proud that we just hung in there and stayed with it when it was kind of tough," Toronto coach Nick Nurse said. — AFP

Vardy back with a bang as Leicester win over Burnley

BURNLEY: Leicester dented Burnley's bid to avoid relegation from the Premier League as Jamie Vardy returned from injury to inspire a 2-0 win at Turf Moor on Tuesday. Brendan Rodgers' side stole the points with two goals in the last eight minutes as Vardy set up James Maddison and then netted himself.

Burnley remain in the relegation zone, one point below Everton, after their three-game unbeaten run came to an end in painful fashion. A win or draw would have taken Burnley out of the bottom three for the first time since November. But instead they will have to get over a gut punch of a defeat that keeps their top-flight status in severe peril.

"We weren't as good as we have been, particularly in the first half. Without being terrible, we just let soft things against us, didn't play with enough tempo," Burnley boss Sean Dyche said. For Leicester, it was a welcome first league win in six matches since they beat Liverpool on December 28.

"It has been a long time coming. It's tough getting a big injury. To come back and to be involved in both goals and get the win, it's very good," Vardy said after his first goal since December. Rodgers added: "He's a real catalyst. He makes runs and presses and is normally in the right areas to score. To have that quality and mentality back will help us."

Leicester were first to threaten when Youri Tielemans stole possession from Dwight McNeil and tried his luck with a long-range blast that cleared the bar. Ricardo Pereira was much closer with a snap-shot from just inside the area that forced a fine save from Burnley goalkeeper Nick Pope. With Burnley defender Ben Mee forced off with an injury before the interval, the hosts were vulnerable and Pope had to come to their rescue again. Leicester forward Harvey Barnes cut inside and unleashed a powerful strike, but Pope was able to palm it away at full stretch. Connor Roberts drew a good stop from Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel early in the second half. Comet was inches away from breaking the deadlock when he prodded just wide from McNeil's pass. Vardy came off the bench for Leicester in the 72nd minute as the striker made his first appearance since suffering a hamstring injury in December. —AFP



LONDON: Promoter Frank Warren (C) jokes with World Boxing Council (WBC) heavyweight title holder Britain's Tyson Fury as they joke at his missing competitor, during a press conference at Wembley Stadium in west London. — AFP

Fury says he will retire after Whyte heavyweight fight

LONDON: Tyson Fury says he will retire after next month's defence of his WBC title against fellow British heavyweight Dillian Whyte in London, stating he has "nothing to prove". The unbeaten two-time world champion was expected to face the winner of Anthony Joshua's rematch with Oleksandr Usyk, the holder of the WBA, IBF and WBO belts, in a unification bout should he beat Whyte.

But after Tuesday's news conference to promote the fight on April 23 at Wembley Stadium, Fury, who has hinted at walking away from boxing before, said he would be "fully retired after the fight".

"What I want to do after boxing is chill on a beach, drink pina colodas, drive Ferraris and live on boats and that's it," said the 33-year-old. "That's what I'll do." When asked if he harboured ambitions of challenging Joshua or Usyk, he reaffirmed that he would be retiring "100 percent".

"(I'm a) two-time undisputed champion, 150 million in the bank, nothing to prove to nobody," said the self-styled "Gypsy King". Fury accused Whyte of "showing the white flag" in the press conference after the challenger failed to attend the event at Wembley. —AFP



LOS ANGELES: Russell Westbrook #0 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the ball during the game against the Dallas Mavericks at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California. — AFP